

42. The Book of 1Samuel—26:1-21

“What Will They Write on Your Tombstone?”

(4/3/16)

As many of you already know my mom passed away a couple of weeks ago.

One of the things the funeral home wanted her children to do was to choose an epitaph that would be written on her grave stone.

The dictionary defines an epitaph as: *“An inscription on or at a tomb or a grave in memory of the one buried there; a brief statement commemorating or epitomizing a deceased person or something past.”*

If you were asked to write your own epitaph—what would you write?

Remember this is a statement that, in just a few words, would sum up your life or express a thought or idea that you wanted to pass along to people who stopped to read your final words.

In essence this is a message from the grave—even as it says in Hebrews 11:4 of Abel’s righteous life that *“he being dead still speaks.”*

And so with that in mind—what would be the last message you’d want to communicate to others from the grave?

- Frank Sinatra—*"The best is yet to come."*
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—*"Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty I'm Free at Last."*
- Rodney Dangerfield—*"There goes the neighborhood."*
- Winston Churchill—*"I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter."*
- George Washington—*"**I am the Resurrection and the Life**; sayeth the Lord. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."*
- J.D. Jones, the great Welsh preacher—*"Simply to Thy cross I cling."*

Jim Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, asked his parents what they wanted on their tombstone—his dad replied, *"He loved the Lord"*; his mom, *"I told you I was sick!"*

Some favorite Christian epitaphs from the Bible are:

- *"To live is Christ; and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21)
- *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."* (2Timothy 4: 7)
- *"There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* (Revelation 21:4)

So once again let me ask you—what would you want your epitaph to say?

I'll tell you this, the one you definitely don't want written on your tombstone is the one that King Saul used to sum up his own life—*"I have sinned. I have played the fool and erred exceedingly"*.

We'll get to that in a minute—but first let's look at the passage.

This morning we are going to be studying 1Samuel 26—and in this chapter we see that, once again, Saul and his army are pursuing David to kill him.

I. David Proves His Innocence—v.1-16

1 Samuel 26:1-6 (NKJV)

¹ Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding in the hill of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon?" ² Then Saul arose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph. ³ And Saul encamped in the hill of Hachilah, which *is* opposite Jeshimon, by the road. But David stayed in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. ⁴ David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come. ⁵ So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the camp, with the people encamped all around him. ⁶ Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you."

Abner was Saul's captain and cousin chapter 14:50 tells us—Abishai was David's nephew.

I have to believe that the Lord put it into David's heart to do this seeing that we are also told—**"a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them."** (v.12)

I know David was a pretty daring guy by nature—but this seems over the top daring to the point of reckless endangerment if God wasn't in it.

The question is, “*Why would the Lord want David to do this?*”

And the answer would be to prove to Saul one last time his innocence in not wanting to do him any harm.

1 Samuel 26:7-9 (NKJV)

⁷ So David and Abishai came to the people by night; and there Saul lay sleeping within the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. And Abner and the people lay all around him. ⁸ Then Abishai said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not *have to strike* him a second time!" ⁹ And David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD'S anointed, and be guiltless?"

As we already saw in chapter 24—David had settled the matter in his heart and purposed that he would not take vengeance upon Saul because he was God’s anointed.

The fact that David didn’t have to take vengeance on *any* of his enemies—that it was God’s place to judge those who wrong us was something *he* knew God said through Moses in Deut. 32:35 and *we* know was repeated by Paul in Romans 12:19—“*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.*”

This lesson was reinforced in David’s mind by how *God* struck and killed Nabal—a man who set himself against David as an enemy.

And even though it would have been easy to assume David had been wrong for not killing Saul when he had the chance in the cave (chap.24) and that God was giving him a second chance to finish Saul off—David’s decision not to harm Saul was based on *principle* and not on *circumstances*.

David might not have been able to respect the man, but he did respect the office and the God who gave that office to Saul—and that was the principle that David was operating under when he said that he would not touch the Lord’s anointed.

One commentator warned with regard to this—

“Sometimes danger comes to us not only from unspiritual enemies like Saul, but from overzealous friends like Abishai. David knew Saul was still the anointed instrument in God’s hand to work in his own life. Therefore, he wisely refused Abishai’s offer to kill Saul.”

And so David simply turned the whole matter over to God to take vengeance on Saul—he believed that God would choose the time, the place and the circumstance of Saul’s death—

1 Samuel 26:10-16 (NKJV)

¹⁰ David said furthermore, "As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. ¹¹ The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that *are* by his head, and let us go." ¹² So David took the spear and the jug of water *by* Saul's head, and they got away; and no man saw *it* or knew *it* or awoke. For they *were* all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen on them. ¹³ Now David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off, a great distance *being* between them. ¹⁴ And David called out to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Do you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered and said, "Who *are* you, calling out to the king?" ¹⁵ So David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? And who *is* like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. ¹⁶ This thing that you have done *is* not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not guarded your master, the LORD'S anointed. And now see where the king's spear *is*, and the jug of water that *was* by his head."

Instead of taunting Saul (which would have been disrespectful), David taunts Saul’s captain and chief body guard Abner.

David is implying that he cared more for Saul’s life than Abner did.

This was David’s way of getting Saul’s attention without addressing him personally and embarrassing him for letting David steal his spear and water jug—which worked:

II. Saul Proclaims His Sinfulness—v. 17-21

1 Samuel 26:17-21 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Then Saul knew David's voice, and said, "Is that your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." ¹⁸ And he said, "Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand?" ¹⁹ Now therefore, please, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If the LORD has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering. But if *it is* the children of men, *may they be* cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out this day from sharing in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' ²⁰ So now, do not let my blood fall to the earth before the face of the LORD. For the king of Israel has come out to seek a flea, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains." ²¹ Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly."

As I've already said v.21 becomes Saul's epitaph spoken from his own mouth—I say this because it wasn't long after this that Saul died.

These are *not* the words that anyone should want to sum up their life—let's look at this statement by Saul:

"I have sinned..."

Now look, this is no big revelation—the Bible says "*all have sinned...*" (*Romans 3:23*)

Let's stop for a minute and talk about 'sin' and what the Bible says about it.

The word in the Greek literally means to "*miss the mark*."

It was actually an archery term for hitting the bull's eye on a target.

Romans 3:23 says that “*all have sinned (all have missed the mark).*”

Of course the next question is, “*What does the mark or the bull’s eye represent?*”

Well in Romans 3:23 Paul actually tells us when he said that all human beings have missed the mark and have “*fallen short of the glory of God.*”

You might be thinking—“*What is the glory of God?*”—are you ready?

The glory of God is sinless perfection—or in other words it is to perfectly keep the law of God.

In the O.T. God’s law contained 613 commandments—to break anyone of them was to miss the mark and to be guilty of sin.

But let’s not deal with all 613, let’s just limit ourselves to the ones we are most familiar with—*The Ten Commandments* (not the ten suggestions).

These commandments are like the wooden boards that make up the hull of a ship—it doesn’t matter if most of them are there—if only one is missing or broken that ship is going down.

The same is true for the person who tries to get to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments—

It doesn’t matter if they keep most of them—if any commandment is broken even once that person is sunk (condemned) as James said—

James 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

This is why Paul calls the law a curse—it's because it makes salvation dependent upon a person keeping all of it without fail.

In other words the law demands moral perfection from a person to gain access into heaven.

And yet when I ask people, *“If you were to die tonight would God let you into heaven?”*—they almost always tell me, “yes”.

And when I ask them to explain why they respond, *“Because I’m a good person. I know I’m not perfect, morally speaking, but I still think I’m good enough to get into heaven”*.

Listen to what God’s Word is saying—If you’re *not* morally perfect you’re *not good enough* to get into heaven!

And that’s why Jesus said to the rich young ruler (a very moral person)—“*no one is good but God*” because God defines “good” as moral perfection.

Fallen man defines goodness as simply being better than others—and since we can always find someone worse than we are to compare ourselves to—we think we’re good.

But they aren’t the standard—Jesus is the standard—and He’s perfect!

Which means there is no *“I think I’m good enough”* or *“I’m better than most...”* argument that will get a person into heaven.

It’s either sinless perfection or eternal rejection (hell).

“For all have sinned (missed the mark) and fall short of the glory of God (sinless perfection)” Rom.3:23—and “the wages of sin is death (eternal death in hell)” Rom.6:23a.

I can hear people shout back, *“No one can live a life of sinless perfection!”*

That’s not true—One Man did—His name is Jesus, and if we put our faith in Him He will put His righteousness to our account so that we can go to heaven through Him.

You see, all this has been the bad news, which has then prepared us to receive the good news—

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

²³ For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

So after Saul confessed that he had sinned—he then goes on to say—

“I have played the fool and erred exceedingly”

The Bible says, *“The fool has said in his heart ‘there is no God.’” (Ps.14:1)*

Now Saul didn’t say he *was* a fool (in the sense of being an unbeliever)—he said he *‘played the fool’*.

To *‘play the fool’* could be his way of confessing that, although he did believe in God—he lived his life as if there was no God.

In other words he “*did his own thing*”; he gave God lip service but lived in rebellion to His word.

There are many people who believe in God and yet live their lives, from day to day, as if He really doesn't exist.

Listen, in my mind the person who believes in God but then lives their life like there is no God is a bigger fool than the person who doesn't believe in God at all.

A person, like Saul, who lives their life this way is by definition one who “**plays the fool and errs exceedingly**”—or in other words lives like an unbeliever and making a colossal mistake.

The mistake is that just because you believe in God doesn't mean you're going to heaven when you die.

The Bible says that Satan and his demons believe in God but they're not going to heaven—why?

Because true saving faith is always rooted in obedience to what God has said in His Word.

The person who gives God lip service and says they believe in Him but then lives in rebellion to all He has said is deceiving themselves about really knowing Him and going to heaven.

Luke 6:46 (NKJV)

⁴⁶ "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?

Matthew 7:21 (NKJV)

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

1 John 2:3-5 (NKJV)

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

The opposite of “playing the fool” is to walk in wisdom.

The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is where all wisdom in life begins—and it goes on to say that the fear of the Lord is to hate evil.

Evil is anything that contradicts or goes against God’s moral standard.

In this morally bankrupt, tolerant, anything goes culture of ours—the only thing that people want to call evil—is ‘good’! (*good* as defined by God)

It doesn’t matter what people living in this fallen world consider to be good or evil—God will not judge people according *their* standard of right and wrong, He will judge them according to *His* standard of right and wrong—

John 12:48 (NKJV)

⁴⁸ He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

Let me close by saying this—everyone of us in this room, before we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, *played the fool and erred exceedingly*’.

We believed in God but lived like there was no God—the key word being *‘lived’* (past tense).

But once we became Christians everything changed—and now our testimony is *“I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see!”*

And that folks becomes the ‘epitaph’ on *our* grave stone—the final message of our lives to this world!

Listen, it doesn’t really matter how your life began or even how you’re living today when it comes to eternity—it only matters how your life ends.

It doesn’t matter this morning if you, like Saul, confess that your life up to this point has been all about sinning and playing the fool.

It only matters that, sometime before you die, you repent and turn control of your life over to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is all about saving sinners from hell which is why He came to the earth—*“to seek and save those who are lost”*—no matter how much sin they have lived in.

The Bible says that where sin abounds the grace of God to save abounds much more!

So let me ask you again—*“What will they write on your tombstone?”*

What will be the final words that sum up your life?—*“Here lies someone who was rich and famous?”* or *“Here lies a person who owned the biggest house or the fanciest car in town?”*

The only words that will matter when your life ends are: *“Here lies a person whose life started bad but ended good; Here lies a person who was lost but then was found; Here lies someone who lived in sin but died in grace.”*

What will they write on your tombstone?

Here's the secret—don't let them.

You do it yourself—you make sure right now how your story is going to end.

You make sure right now, by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, what the words will be that sum up your life after you're gone!

Don't end like Saul playing the fool and erring exceedingly—be wise and live for God obeying all He has said!