

Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we continue our sermon series titled, □ “Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift.” It is a study through the book of 1 Samuel.

Our text for today is □ 1 Samuel chapter 14:47-52. This passage provides a brief summary of a significant portion of Saul’s life. It is a kind of epitaph. Such life summaries are common in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly for leaders.¹

Contrary to what you might expect, these biblical life summaries are not always given at the end of a person’s life. Our text is a case in point. Saul’s summary is given here in chapter 14, but Saul doesn’t die until chapter 31.

These biblical summaries invite us to pause and consider the person whose life is being described.

They also invite us to consider what our life’s summary might be like. How would a historian describe our lives? What would our epitaph include? Or exclude?

You may recall that, to this point in our study of 1 Samuel, Saul has had his ups and downs.

- Through the prophet and priest named Samuel, God chose Saul to be the very first king of Israel.
- God transformed Saul, equipping him to serve as king.
- Saul was initially afraid to be the king and hid himself in some baggage at his inauguration.
- God worked through Saul to save Israel from the Ammonites.

¹ Arnold, Bill T. *1 & 2 Samuel, The NIV Application Commentary*. p. 209. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003, p. 210.

- When threatened by the Philistines, Saul disobeys God’s word and makes a rash vow that endangers his people and limits their victory. Nevertheless, Saul prevails over a vastly superior Philistine army.

The mini summary of Saul’s life begins in □ 1 Samuel 14:47, where it says,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:47 When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them.

The word □ “taken” is a translation of an original Hebrew word that means to capture or to seize or to take possession of. So, while Saul had formally been appointed king some two years earlier, it wasn’t until he defeated the Philistines that he truly seized his authority as king.²

The victory not only secured Saul’s kingship, it also demonstrated the Lord’s faithfulness to his people. Back in 1 Samuel 9:16, before Saul was ever appointed king, the Lord had spoken to Samuel saying that Saul would save the people of Israel from the Philistines.

Indeed, Saul fought against enemies on every side of Israel. Verse 47 lists them and they are shown on □ this map. To the west, Saul fought the Philistines. To the north, he fought the kings of Zobah. To the east, he fought the Ammonites and the Moabites. To the south, he fought the Edomites. Saul routed them all.

Verse □ 48 adds the Amalekites to the south in anticipation of the action that will be described later in chapter 15. It says,

² Omanson, Roger L., and John Ellington. *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 2001, p 305.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:48 And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them.

The term □ “valiantly” describes exceptional courage when facing danger in battle.³

Last week, against the Philistines, we saw that Saul had temporarily alienated his men by threatening to execute his own son, Jonathan for unwittingly violating Saul’s foolish vow. Nevertheless, Saul must have recovered from that and regained the allegiance of his army in effectively fighting against all these enemies on every side.

So, Saul’s epitaph emphasizes the fact that he was a valiant warrior. He was a man of courage in battle and an effective military leader. In this sense, Saul was the man the people of Israel wanted when they cried for a king. Back in □ 1 Samuel 8:19-20, the people had pleaded with Samuel,

ESV 1 Samuel 8:19 “. . . But there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

That’s precisely what Saul did: he fought Israel’s battles and was successful.⁴

So far, not a bad epitaph.

An interesting side bar to all this is that an archaeological excavation in 2002 uncovered significant remnants of the Edomites living to the

³ *The English-Hebrew Reverse Interlinear Old Testament English Standard Version* in Logos: the sense of “valiantly.”

⁴ Bergen, Robert D. *1, 2 Samuel*. Vol. 7. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996, p. 162.

south of Israel during Saul's reign.⁵ This is just a reminder of what I often take for granted. The Judeo-Christian faith is uniquely rooted in history not mythology.

Now we turn in our text to Saul's family in verses 49 through 51.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:49 Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger Michal.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:50 And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:51 Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.

Right about now, you're probably thinking, "I got lost in all those names; I need a diagram." Me, too. Here is Saul's family tree from this text. There is Saul in the middle. Around him are . . .

- his father, Kish;
- his grandfather, Abiel;
- his uncle, Ner;
- his cousin Abner;
- his wife Ahinoam;
- his father-in-law, Ahimaaz;
- his sons, Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua;
- and his daughters, Merab and Michal.

⁵ Longman, Tremper, III, and David E. Garland, eds. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel–2 Kings (Revised Edition)*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009, p. 152.

You may be wondering: Why does the biblical author bother giving the family tree when most of those mentioned do not play important roles in recorded biblical history?

I suspect the lineage is given, at least in part, to humanize Saul. He is a man with a family. And families are a part of one's legacy.

In contrast to some kings who will follow, Saul's family tree is relatively uncomplicated.⁶ For example, he doesn't have a multitude of wives like Solomon, which is commendable. And none of Saul's relatives stand out as evil. On the contrary, his first-born son Jonathan has already proved himself a hero in fighting against the Philistines. As for courage in battle, Jonathan is a chip off the old block.

Of course, as in all families, there is some dysfunction. Jonathan and his father have their conflicts. But by and large, Saul's family seems to be a positive part of his epitaph.

To this point, the summary of Saul's life presents a courageous, skillful military leader who has a simple, solid family. This sounds good. But the last verse in the summary gives us a hint that something is missing.

□ Verse 52 returns to Saul's military record, saying,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:52 There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.

The □ last part of the verse is simply saying that Saul instituted a kind of military draft where strong, valiant young men were conscripted into his army. Imagine Saul going to high school football games on Friday

⁶ Baldwin, Joyce G. *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 8. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988, p. 120.

nights to scout. He takes the best players for his army, not by recruiting, but by royal decree. Of course, they didn't have football back then; I made that up. But you get the idea.

This is a fulfillment of what Samuel predicted back when the Israelites were clamoring for a king. Samuel had warned them in 1 Samuel 8:11. It's not on the screen. Just listen to Samuel's warning.

ESV 1 Samuel 8:11 He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots.

Now, let's look at the □ first part of verse 52. It raises questions.

Like, why was there hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul's life? And why would this curious detail be placed at the end of the summary?

The reason for the ongoing conflict with the Philistines is that, as you may recall, Saul was less than completely victorious over the Philistines as recorded previously in chapters 13 and 14.

And what is the reason behind the reason? Why did Saul fail to completely neutralize the Philistines?

The short answer is that Saul chose to ignore God.

You may recall that, as the Philistines threatened, Saul disobeyed the word of God spoken through Samuel. Saul chose not to wait on God; instead, he took matters into his own hands.

Later, Saul failed to seek God's wisdom when he foolishly vowed that his men would not eat until they had subdued the Philistines. In doing

so, he needlessly weakened and alienated his men and limited their victory.

Remember, the prophet Samuel denounced Saul for his failure to obey the command of God, saying that Saul's reign will not continue. Back in □ 1 Samuel 13:14, Samuel says to Saul,

ESV 1 Samuel 13:14 "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

"A □ man after [God's] own heart" is a prophetic reference to David who will eventually succeed Saul as king of Israel. The clear inference is that Saul is **not** a man after God's own heart.

This invites us to look back once again at Saul's life summary and notice something that is conspicuous by its absence. □ What or who is missing? Anybody see what's missing?

God.

There is no mention of the Lord anywhere in Saul's epitaph. This becomes more obvious when you compare Saul's summary with the biblical life summaries of Samuel and David elsewhere in Scripture.

A summary of Samuel's life is presented in 1 Samuel 7:15-17. In verse □ 17, it says of Samuel's home in Ramah,

ESV 1 Samuel 7:17 . . . And he [Samuel] built there an altar to the LORD.

His home, the place where Samuel would always return, was a place of worship. Samuel made it so because he had a heart for God.

A summary of David's life is presented in 2 Samuel 8. Verse □ 11 speaks of the spoils of David's victories over his enemies. It says,

ESV 2 Samuel 8:11 These also [the spoils] King David dedicated to the LORD, together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued,

David surrendered his heart and his belongings to God. And David's relationship with the Lord was reciprocal. Verse □ 14 says,

ESV 2 Samuel 8:14 . . . And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went.

To be sure, David made some very poor choices in his life. In that way, he is pretty much like all of us. Flawed. Broken. A mess in some ways.

But David is a man after God's own heart.

Which goes to show that being a person after God's own heart is not defined by the absence of dirt, but by the presence of devotion.

So, both Samuel and David clearly have a heart for God.

But not Saul.

Saul is a courageous, skillful military leader who has a simple, solid family. That is good, as far as it goes. But the sad fact is Saul is not a man after God's own heart. Saul has a valiantly empty epitaph.

The big idea I draw from the text is this: □ Live so that the story of your life has God written all over it.

Like Saul, all of us will probably have some good things in our story. There are respectable parts that will likely make it into our eulogy.

But will the most important part be there? Will God be there? Or will he be missing? How will your story read?

Live so that the story of your life has God written all over it.

Fortunately, your story is not finished. Neither is mine. While you cannot change what has already happened, you can certainly change how your story ends.

It all gets back to seeking what Saul was missing: to be a person after God's own heart.

Chuck □ Swindoll is a pastor and author whom I have admired and benefited from for years. Shortly after I came to faith in Jesus as an 18-year-old, I would go visit my girlfriend, Cathy, who was attending Biola College in Whittier, California. And we would go listen to Chuck Swindoll preach at Fullerton Free Church. I was mesmerized.

On being a person after God's own heart, Swindoll says,

□ What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart? □ It means your life is in harmony with the Lord. What is important to Him is important to you. What burdens Him burdens you. □ When He says, "Go to the right," you go to the right. When He says, "Stop that in your life," you stop it. □ When He says, "This is wrong and I want you to change," you come to terms with it because you have a heart for God. . . .

□ *[God] is looking for men and women whose hearts are His— completely. That means there are no locked closets. Nothing’s been swept under the rugs. □ That means that when you do wrong, you admit it and come to terms with it. You long to please Him in your actions. You care deeply about the motivations behind your actions. □ God is not looking for magnificent specimens of humanity. □ He’s looking for deeply spiritual, genuinely humble, honest-to-the-core servants who have integrity.*⁷

Does that describe you? Does it describe who you want to be?

It brings us back to the big idea: □ Live so that the story of your life has God written all over it.

Saul’s life story had some good, but not God. Good without God is pitiful. Because it’s missing the most important part of life.

Last week, some younger members of our church family were poking fun at me because, while driving, I sometimes listen to something called a radio.

The presets on my radio include three Christians stations, one classical, two rock, and two country.

While listening to a country station recently, I heard a song by Tim McGraw called “Standing Room Only.” It’s a song about living in such a way that there’s standing room only at your funeral.

The lyrics espouse some wholesome values, such as don’t get upset over things that aren’t important. Pursue relationships. Forgive. Let go

⁷ Swindoll, Charles at <https://insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/becoming-a-man-or-a-woman-after-god's-own-heart>.

of grudges and regrets. Enjoy life. Be vulnerable. Don't be materialistic. Be somebody worth remembering.

This is good stuff. To live with the end in mind is good advice. And the tune is catchy.

But something is missing.

The first thing that's missing is an awareness that funeral attendance is a lousy indicator of a life well lived.

My dad is 94 years old. When he dies, there probably won't be standing room only at his funeral, not because there are so few people who know and respect him, but because most of those who know and respect him are already dead. They won't be attending.

In contrast, the 2011 funeral of North Korean dictator Kim Jong-IL was among the most well-attended in history, as was the funeral of pop artist Michael Jackson in 2009.⁸ Is it because they were paragons of virtue?

The second thing that's missing from the song is more important.

God is missing, just like in Saul's summary. Some good stuff in the song, but God is not mentioned once.

My intention is not to throw shade on Tim McGraw or the songwriters. That would be like kicking a puppy. Nor am I trying to wage some tight-butt moral crusade against this song. It's just a song. They can write it and sing it any way they want. And it's a popular song at that. So, they can laugh at my musings all the way to the bank.

⁸ <https://www.hutchisonfuneralhome.com/a-look-at-history-s-most-expensive-and-well-attended-funerals-across-the-world>

But I do think the song reflects a popular ethic that can be deceptive. It is the notion that good things are good enough and that the end game of life is the respect and applause of other people.

Good things are certainly good. And the respect and applause of other people has its place. But in the end, good things alone won't be good enough. And the opinion of other people won't count.

Ask Saul.

The most relevant picture of the end is not standing room only; it's standing you only, before God, to give an account.

Two questions are of utmost importance for you and me today because the answers to these two questions determine our eternal destiny.

First, have you believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life?

This is a crucially important question because no one can be good enough to earn their way to heaven. Good things alone are not good enough. We all fall short.

That is why Jesus, the Son of God came to die on a cross in our place and on our behalf in payment for our sins. And on the basis of that payment, he offers eternal life as a free gift to all who will simply believe in him for it. Eternal life includes forgiveness and adoption into God's forever family.

So, your eternal destiny and mine—forever with God or forever without him—turns on the question: Have you believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life?

Faith in Jesus is not complicated. Saving faith is trust or confidence that the Lord Jesus is your Savior from sin. It is a personal acceptance of the work of Jesus on the cross for you. It is taking God at his word and receiving by faith the free gift of salvation for yourself.

Being good enough has absolutely nothing to do with it. Because nobody is good enough. We are eternally saved through faith alone in Christ alone.

So, the first question is: Have you believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life?

If the answer is no, there are no more questions. End of story.

If the answer is yes, there is a second question.

This second question has nothing to do with whether or not you go to heaven. That has already been determined by your answer to the first question.

This second question has everything to do with your God-given assignment to bring life to others and the rewards you may receive for doing so when you get to heaven.

The second question is: To what extent are you a person after God's own heart?

Here are some other ways of wording the very same question. To what extent is your heart aligned with God's heart? To what extent are you following him? To what extent are you bringing the life of Jesus to your world? To what extent are you living so that the story of your life has God written all over it?

This second question should be important to us because, as revealed to us in Scripture, it is clearly important to God. And in the end, his is the only opinion that counts.

Live so that the story of your life has God written all over it.

We all need help with this, not only from God, but also from each other. To that end, we have developed a comprehensive plan for the new ministry year just starting this month. It is a menu of options for you to get involved at Moon Valley, not only to help align your own heart with God's, but also to help others to the same.

Hard copies of the plan are available at the Connect Counter. A digital copy is available on our website. Please grab one and get involved. We have a host of life groups starting soon. And most of the opportunities—be they life groups or studies or classes or breakfasts or some other small groups—they are always open such that you can drop in anytime, even after they have already started.

Make this the year when your life story has God written all over it.

Let's pray. Lord, help us to align our hearts with yours so that the story of our lives has you written all over it. Amen.