I. INTRO:
   A. You remember *Custer’s Last Stand* a.k.a. the *Battle of Little Big Horn*. Well, this is *Saul’s Last Stand* & it had about the same disastrous ending.
   B. Read text: (13) With these stark & mournful words, the book of 1st Samuel ends & the curtain closes on the life of Israel’s 1st & most tragic king.
   C. Saul’s sand in his hourglass just ran out!
      1. According to legend King Arthur was chosen by pulling a sword from a stone; but according to Scripture the Lord had directed His prophet as well as his people in their selection of Saul.
      2. While David repented in the ashes of Ziklag & strengthened himself in the Lord; Saul stood in his own strength against the Philistines.
      3. While David consulted the Lord through the ephod of Abiathar the priest; Saul consulted a spiritist in Endor.
      4. While David pursued the Amalekites, rescuing his family & restoring his faith; Saul went down in defeat to the Philistines, losing his family, his kingdom, & his life.
      5. In a vulnerable moment before David, Saul uttered what has come to be his epitaph, “Behold, I have played the fool!” (26:21b)
   D. Outline: Death; Disgrace; & Devotion.

II. SAUL’S LAST STAND!
   A. DEATH! (1-6)
   B. At the time David’s troops were fighting the Amalekites, the Philistines attacked Saul & the Israelites S/W of the Sea of Galilee on Mount Gilboa.
   C. What was Saul’s essential sin that led to Saul’s foolishness? Self-will!
      1. Saul was called to theocratic kingship - He was never meant to have a kingship of absolute power. [theo/God - kratia/power, rule]
      2. It was never intended that the last word should be with him.
      3. He was to be the human & visible vice-regent of Israel’s Divine & invisible King, Jehovah.
4. Saul could only truly rule the subjects beneath him to the extent in which he obeyed the supreme King above him.\(^1\)
   a) And like a rotting tree collapsing on itself, his self-centeredness & self-will ended in self-destruction.

5. What a reminder for us from Saul’s life. We are God’s property! - He has made us kings & queens over our own personalities w/their gifts & powers & possibilities; but our rule is meant to be theocratic, not an independent, self-directed monarchy! (J. Sidlow Baxter)
   a) How have you been ruling your life? (i.e. monarchy) [or, enjoying a theocracy w/ God as the head?]
   b) What opportunities, endowments, or advantages has God given you? And what can you do to stay on God’s course?

D. Perhaps the saddest part of the scene is what Saul didn’t say - even in his final moments he still didn’t call out to God, still didn’t repent, still didn’t reconcile.

   1. He faced death as he faced life: w/ his eyes desperately fixed on his circumstances & himself.

E. (4,5) Suicide - we’ll come back to this.

F. (6) Saul’s sins cost him his life - but not his only!
   1. How many innocent people died that day because of the consequence of his sin? - His armorbearer, his 3 sons, so many soldiers.
   2. We must never think that we live or die only to ourselves.

G. DISGRACE! (7-10)

H. (7) The Philistines had successfully taken command of several strategic inland trade centers (they had been confined to the coastal plains, since the times of the Judges)
   1. So for them...it was a sweet victory! - Not only did it increase their wealth & power, but in their thinking, it demonstrated the supremacy of their gods.

I. DEVOTION! (11-13)

J. Back in ch.11, Saul started his career by helping the men of Jabesh Gilead.
   1. He had won the heart of the nation 40 yrs ago & mobilized an Israelite army.
   2. “But now,” said Alfred Edersheim, “now it was night; & the headless bodies of Saul & his sons, deserted by all, swung in the wind on the walls of Bethshan, amid the hoarse music of vultures & jackals.”

\(^1\) J. Sidlow Baxter, Explore the Book, 6 vols. in 1, vol.2, pg.60
3. So, the men of Jabesh Gilead pay their final tribute to the one who rescued them. (plus fasted 7 days in honor of him also!)  
   a) And in an ironic twist...his story comes full circle as the men of Jabesh Gilead now “rescue” him! - How far Saul had fallen!

K. All the valiant men - traveled 15-20 miles at night, crossed the Jordan river, went through enemy territory, then turned around with the bodies & did it again.

L. They secretly removed the remains of the royal family. Gave them a dignified burial.
   1. Sometimes ministry is messy! Unfastening bloody mutilated bodies from the wall. Carrying their stiffened, decaying bodies 15-20 miles home. Sometimes ministry is messy!
   2. David will later honor them for their feat. (2 Sam.2:4-7)

M. Burned their bodies - to remove the mutilated & decayed flesh & left the bones for burial.

N. Lets talk about cremation.
   1. Often the question comes up, is it ok to be cremated?
   2. Since the bible is silent on the issue of cremation preferences in taking care of loved one’s remains should be respected. Certainly, cremation will not hinder God from giving a person a glorified body on the day of resurrection.
       a) If I had to argue for it: I would say what about a house fire where bodies are burnt? What about someone who dies at sea & the body is never reclaimed? What is the difference between a body decomposing over 60 years or 60 minutes?
       b) Either way, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive will be caught up together w/them.
       c) How God decides to raise people up, I don’t know...but, if we only need one cell of our DNA from someone’s body to tell us who someone is...I’m sure He has it all figured out!
   3. Historically, the Jews didn’t practice cremation. It was important for them to bury their bones “in the land”. (i.e. for the resurrection sake)

O. In 2nd Samuel, the curtain will rise again, eventually revealing a new & hopeful day, as Israel awakens to her wise shepherd-king, David.

P. Suicide:

Q. [2007 stats for the U.S.] Number of emergency department visits for self-inflicted injury, (i.e. suicide attempts) 472,000. That’s almost 2 every minute.
1. Intentional Self-harm (or, actual successful suicides) that year, 34,598. (top 3 ways: Firearm, Suffocating, Poisoning).

2. In 2008, 8.3 million adults (18+) had serious thoughts of suicide.

3. At least 20% are youths between ages 15-24. (#3 killer among these youths; #2 among college students)

4. There are more suicides during April & the Christmas season.

5. Social scientists have noted that a front-page suicide story will generate even more suicides.²

R. For some the topic of suicide might simply be academic; to others it hits too close to home.

1. Maybe someone you loved saw it as a solution; or maybe thoughts of suicide creep into your mind when life’s pain seems too much to bear.

2. God has instilled in each of us a strong instinct to live.
   a) But sometimes, when a deep sense of failure or loneliness or despair sets in, this desire to live is overcome by an even stronger desire to die.

S. Suicide is a very complex act, so we had better leave the analysis to God!

1. The bible doesn’t say much about suicide. It records 7 in Scripture:
   Abimelech (Judges 9:54 thrust me thru; actually death by armorbearer); Samson; Saul;
   Saul’s armorbearer; Ahithophel; Zimri (King burnt his house down upon him); & Judas.
   a) Except for Judas nothing is said about their destiny. Judas went to perdition, not because he committed suicide, but because he did not trust Jesus Christ.

2. Theologians have debated for centuries whether suicides can go to heaven.
   a) It is my belief that personal salvation is a completed transaction & the way a person dies cannot rob him of eternal life.
   b) I am not giving license to suicide. I am not approving suicide.
   c) It would be dangerous for a believer to bank their eternity on, what I already pointed out, is something the bible doesn’t say much about. That would be foolish.
   d) Am am saying, since suicide is a very complex act, we had better leave the analysis to God.

3. Growing up, one of my best friends Steve, took his life in the Crystal Cathedral, 2 years ago this very week. [knelt in front of the cross, pulled a 22 pistol & shot himself]
   a) Death by choice is the hardest death to deal with.

² Warren Wiersbe & David Wiersbe, Comforting the Bereaved, pg.93.
b) At his memorial I said 2 things: “Do not judge or condemn Steve; that's God's responsibility.” - “Do not judge Steve’s life, by his last hour; that's only a tiny % of his entire life.”

c) His struggles: mental difficulties; guilt from past; shame; torturous voices 24 hours a day. I used Saul as an example of one who choose suicide, instead of torture.

(1) I believe Steve did the same. Didn’t make it right. Suicide is a very complex act, we had better leave the analysis to God.

T. Warning signs to help alert you to the suicidal person’s cries for help. (Chuck Swindoll)

1. If someone is talking about suicide; if they have an obsession w/death or heaven; if they have a sudden change in personality; if they have a deep depression, with symptoms ranging from severe despondency to loss of enjoyment in daily activities; if they have physical symptoms: sleeplessness, loss of appetite, decreased sex drive, drastic weight loss, chronic exhaustion; if they have a crisis situation: death of a loved one, failure at school, loss of a job, marital or home problems,a chronic or terminal illness; if they have an unprompted preparations for death that may include giving away prized possessions or discussing last wishes w/friends & family.

U. This morning, if you’ve been struggling with not wanting to live, you must be freaking out thinking, who told him? - That’s the H.S. at work...knowing what you needed to hear this morning. And He whispers, & now uses a bull horn...CHOOSE LIFE!

1. Deut.30:19 Therefore choose life that both you & your descendants may live.

V. You might ask, why should I value my life? Here’s 3 reasons/truths!

1. Life is a gift from God to be cherished. [God breathed life into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life]

2. The One who gives life, is the only one w/authority to take it. [1 Sam.2:6 The Lord kills & makes alive; He brings down to the grave & brings up]

3. The Scripture prohibits murder, which includes self murder. [Though shalt not murder]

a) CHOOSE LIFE!

3 Chuck Swindoll, David. Pg.93