



## "Finishing the Race"

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
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*1 Samuel 30-31*

Saul and David had now had a long and sordid relationship. Yet all the while they traveled this life, they walked not the same path, but rather parallel roads that

moved further and further apart as their lives marched onward to the inevitable end that we all face.

In these last two chapters of 1st Samuel, we find as they finish this historical record, one will finish his life in shame, and the other will finish this chapter in HIS life with integrity and honor. Each either winning or losing according to the life investment that they made ...succumbing to the 'dog that the fed the most' during their lifetimes. But please note the obvious: *everyone ends*. Our involvement in such is merely to decide *how* we will end!

Achish of the Philistines had sent David home, as the rest of the Philistines wouldn't fight alongside him against his own people. They were worried as to his ultimate allegiances, and rightfully so! David...having returned now back home again, finds his world totally destroyed. The Amalekites had come while he was gone and burned down everyone's houses, stolen all their possessions, and kidnapped their wives and children. It was not a good day for David and his men. During our lifetimes, we each experience such moments of devastation! Be it a sudden death, an accident, a catastrophic illness, a financial emergency, or some other situation out of our control. These kind of things come to us all, and says much as to who and what we are. It is very real part of life! David was having one of those moments...

It is in these moments of crisis, that we truly prove who and what we are. Where and to whom do we reach out for comfort in those moments? For David, verse six tells us he "*took strength from the Lord*." Throughout his life, no matter the situation David found himself in, one thing was for sure, the buck always stopped with God. For David, there was never any escape from his Lord. Jehovah always got the last word in David's life.

So David not only sought comfort from God, he also sought direction. It was clear that he intended to obey whatever God asked him to do. Anyone can go to God to make them feel good... and we often do! But it's quite something else, to seek direction with the full intent to obey God's council to remedy a situation, no matter how hard or painful it might be. We all want to feel good, as long as God does all the work to make things right. David went to God and asked him what to do. David received his marching orders, and off he went to obey. Off he went to do what God told him to do.

Once David began to move in obedience, God began to move in the supernatural. Having 'conveniently' found the Egyptian in the wilderness, God used him to assist David in conquering the Amalekites. David was seriously outgunned and outnumbered, and yet God was on his side, and victory was his. When will we learn, that such is always the case with our God?

David would end this scene like a superhero, cape fluttering in the wind! Rescuing wives and children, re-acquiring their possessions, and crushing the enemy, David would indeed finish this chapter well! The superhero could have stated that "my work here is done" and headed on back to Ziklag for a much needed vacation. But David wasn't done yet. David had defended his *own* turf, and now would move to defend the turf of others also.

During the chase after the Amalekites, 200 of the warriors became too tired to continue, and had to stand down. No mystery there, for all the men had pushed themselves hard. Even the original journey back to Ziklag was long and hard, and now they were "double-timing" it to catch up with the Amalekites. Thus some would not be able to continue, while 400 of the men went on to conquer the Amalekites. The 200 remained back beside the Besor Brook and waited for the story to play out.

Once the battle was over, the 400 who had fought first hand were naturally reluctant to share the bounty with those who had remained on the other side of a Besor Brook. However, David would have no part of such a withholding. For David they all were one body of believers...they were *all* one family! So David threw down. Everyone would receive equal share, whether they fought or not. For as David put it, someone had to stay and guard the equipment, while the others fought. And those who stayed, were just as important as those who fought.

This is a story that we here at JFB have taken to a heart in the organization of our church fellowship. Whenever a team goes out... whether it be out to the overseas Mission Field, or on a missional project here at home, we're all in this together. We share the cost, we share the bounty. We try to do everything we can to include everyone as much as possible in every endeavor this church involves itself in. That being said, that fact is not meant to give you a long leash...an excuse to sit in the pew and do nothing! As we are all called to serve, and be a part of a local body of Christ. But we all cannot always 'go out.' We all cannot always get on a plane and fly overseas. So we take turns, and share in all aspects of the fight and the blessing!

Please note however, that David did not share the bounty with strangers along the road. The spoils were shared with those who were part of his greater family. For all 600 had already **proven** in the past to be of one body; *loyal and participatory*. The reward, the prize, was therefore reserved for his crew. I would liken such to our Covenant Body here at JFB. You are the ones who have proven your faithfulness, your commitment, and your loyalty. You may not fight in every battle, but you have proven that you are a fighter, and you fight with us! You have proven that you are willing to sacrifice, as **well as** take. So you therefore share in the greater bounty of this fellowship. Thus there are some things like missions trips, retreats, certain gatherings and fellowships, which are reserved for just you. Why? Because it is essential to have special communion, with especially like-minded servants of God!

David went even further, by sending some of the bounty to all those who supported him in battle ...even from a great distance. May we never forget that seldom is any battle for God won solely on our own. From Genesis to Revelation we see the Lord use brothers and sisters to come alongside and assist us in our fight. This is God's design for the Christian realm. This is the way to victory. This is how this church operates! Because we believe that absolutely!

On the contrary, we see Saul come to the end of his life, essentially alone. In his effort to even yet save face, Saul would attempt to take his own life, to hide his shame from the public. His armor bearer seems to be the only person around, and he would not help execute Saul. So Saul would fall on his own sword, in attempt to appear to have died gloriously in battle. *Live alone, die alone!*

Alone and still clinging to his pride, Saul's race would herein come prematurely to an end. How many times did Saul have a chance to get out? How many second chances did he have? How many opportunities for personal redemption did he squander away? But here it ends. It was inevitable. It was a foregone conclusion. For this is where rebellion always ends! When we go it alone, God will allow us to go alone. First Peter 2 verse 8 says "*They stumble, ...because they disobey the Word, as they were destined to do.*" None of us will beat the odds. None of us will win such a race.

And to make matters worse, there is a caveat to this story which sadly is the final legacy of King Saul.

**READ - 2 Samuel 1:1-16, then 1 Samuel 15:1-23**

The very thing that plagued Saul from the beginning, would be his undoing. 25 years before, God had called upon Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekite people. And even though Saul began the task, he failed to finish what he began. He failed to finish the race. He was just a little bit disobedient. He cheated just a little bit. And that 'little' sin of disobedience would be his eventual demise.

It's not that he ignored God, but rather he wanted to obey God in his own way. He wanted to dictate the parameters of his obedience. He wanted to control the actual manifest...the nuances of his obedience. He not only failed in the *what*, but more so in the *how*. He thought *mostly obedience* was the same as obedience. He thought God was like men...in that "close was close enough". That a "feeble attempt" was as good as success. How is it that we think we can cheat God and win?

What a contrast has been presented in the relationship between David and Saul throughout the book of 1 Samuel. Both would begin the race, but only one would finish well. We know that the man David was not a perfect man. He would live his life as we all will live ours: *with successes and failures*. But such did not disqualify him from the *people* of God nor the *service* of God's kingdom!

The difference between David and Saul, was *repentance*. David knew how to practice it, and apparently Saul did not. Remember, repentance is more than being sorry. It is a change of course. It is a change in practice. I'm not saying everything would come up roses for David. Even *he* made some mistakes of which there was no coming back. One was the combination of adultery and murder. *That* sin would cost him the life of his son! For some sins, we carry the scars of for our whole lifetimes. But the love of God will have been redeemed. Our place in his arms restored. So often, our usefulness in servanthood renewed.

In the book of Joel, God would speak concerning his people Israel. The prophecy would concern the return of His people to Him after a long absence. In chapter two of Joel, we read "*Be glad then, you children of Zion, And rejoice in the LORD your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you—The former rain, And the latter rain in the first month. The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, The crawling locust, The consuming locust, And the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, And praise the name of the LORD your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; And My people shall never be put to shame.*" (Joel 2:23-26)

Such restoration will prophetically come on the heels of repentance. Israel will fall to her knees before the living God, and will once again be restored to her special place of favor before the Almighty. And since God is the same "yesterday, today, and forever" we can take hold of such a promise and make it our own. Or we can hold our ground and expect an end similar to that of Saul. For such is always the end of rebellion!

I had seen so many people in the past few years end exactly as they began in this church. Their primary sin or sins that they first carried into this fellowship, ultimately was their undoing in the end. For some it was the sin of sex, for others the consumption of alcohol or drugs. For others it was the idolatry of men or women... the need to have a mate...the all consuming need to have the affirmation of marriage. Still others it was the issue of pride and position: the desire to have power over others. There were issues of uncontrolled anger, struggles with bitterness, fantasies, laziness, financial mismanagement and lying. It really didn't matter what the issue was that they came here with. God is not daunted by any certain sin! But when it's not dealt with, it will only fester and one day finally erupt, and that will be our end.

It keeps happening over and over. It cares little about position and status. It doesn't care who you are: the losses have been as great in the ministerial community as any other! Each individual was given numerous occasions to set down their sin: to repent and leave it behind. But sadly, it seemed as if in every case, the individual failed to see the issue as a danger. It was handled with passivity. It was dealt with as a light issue. It was rarely seen as actual sin! Like Saul with the Amalekites, *back at the beginning of first Samuel*, we often think we've done the job, when in fact the issue remains alive to come back to take us down another day.

The losses have been many. The heartbreak has been great. Such has taken them out of their church community, out of their calling before God, out of the evangelistic mission, and for some out of their very life. No one yet has survived it. No one has gone on to flourish.

Warren Wiersbe says the following concerning 2 Samuel chapter 1: "*Saul began his career **standing** (1 Sam. 10:23), but he closed his career **falling** (vv. 4, 10, 12, 19, 25, 27): "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Natural abilities and great opportunities do not guarantee success. Saul was head and shoulders above everybody else, but he was not heart and soul yielded to God. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus."*"

**"...he was not heart and soul yielded to God."**

And there lies the heart of the problem. He was not **completely** yielded to God! This is the problem so often with us also. This is what causes our demise too! We participate in the kingdom of God...sometimes for years, and yet our hearts and souls are not yielded completely to Christ. Jesus may have been our **Savior**, but we have failed to allow him to be our Lord.

Saul's story has but one chance yet to have a redemptive attribute. And that is **if you hear it**. The legacy of those who have gone on before us ...only to crash and burn, ...has but one redeeming value: if we see it for what it is and heed the warning. We must acknowledge that we will not be the guy who beats the odds. We must acknowledge that we are not outside of the reach of this story. We will not be the exception.

Will we humble ourselves and allow God to redeem the days? Or will the sin we carry, eventually be our end?