

King Saul and Self-Destructive People 03-17-19

Have you ever known someone who just could not stop from making bad decisions? Despite being warned and being aware, they seemed to almost seek the best way to bring calamity into their life. It is not a rare thing to see; indeed, in some ways, all people struggle with this. We refer to this characteristic as being self-destructive.

Saul is an important story in the Old Testament. It is the story of a man who had everything: looks, power, fame, and the blessing of God Himself. Yet his life ended in misery and suicide. What happened? It is the story of a self-destructive spiral, from the top all the way to the bottom. It is not unique in the Bible, but it is perhaps the best documented case, spanning an entire book.

Saul's story begins with blessings. 1 Samuel 9:2 tells us that Saul the Benjamite (the first king of Israel) was born with it all. He was the most handsome man in Israel, and he was the tallest of his people. As well, we find in verse 3 that he came from a family of noble warriors, mighty men of God. From birth he was blessed.

But this was not all. In 1 Samuel 10:6-7 we are told how Saul the Benjamite became God's man. He was given the Spirit of God to allow him to prophesy, and he was divinely promised success as king. In his work as king God blessed him over all others.

These blessings paid handsomely. The next chapters record Saul's victories over his enemies. 1 Samuel 14:47 says *"when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment"*. Saul was a winner who overcame enemies on all sides. He raised a national army and took it to the field for victory. Saul was a mighty warrior leader.

In addition to his blessings from God, Saul also enjoyed that rare gift of being loved by his people. 1 Samuel 11:15 tells how all of Israel rejoiced in his kingship. Saul the Benjamite was a beloved king. A rarity in the work of monarchy, he was king by the people's choice; Saul enjoyed the support of all the people.

King Saul the Benjamite had it all. Good looks and standing; God was with him in his kingship; the Spirit of God was in him; he had victory after victory, and enjoyed the support of all of the people. Yet his story is not one of success, but of self-destruction.

Saul's downward spiral begins when he is at the top. In 1 Samuel 13:11-13 (and again in 1 Samuel 15:15) Saul offered an unauthorized sacrifice. In both cases he blamed others; he blamed Samuel and the people. He was told this condemned his reign; first he was told *"Now your kingdom shall not endure"*, and on the second occasion *"The LORD has rejected you from being king"*.

Soon after we meet David. Saul failed to see David as a blessing to his kingdom; instead, he became unhinged with envy and moved into paranoia and fear (1 Samuel 18:6-12). He repeatedly attempted to kill David. As this violent relationship progresses, Saul becomes more and more paranoid, turning more and more evil. This peaks in 1 Samuel 22:17-22 when he ordered the murder of the priests and the city of the priests (Nob); every man, woman and child there, for what he perceived was their favor of David. Worse of all, when his people refused to do this, Saul used an Edomite, a Gentile, to do this thing.

At the end Saul lost everything. When he was facing his enemies he asked for the counsel of his dead spiritual leader Samuel, who from the grave told him he was soon to die. When wounded on the battlefield in 1 Samuel 31:4, Saul committed that final atrocity and took his own life.

Where did all of this begin? Proverbs 16:18 says "*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.*" Saul's self destruction began with his pride, moved to envy, then paranoia, then hatred, then murder, then suicide; total self-destruction. His path is important, because it is a path anyone can walk. We see it repeated in the Bible. Adam and Eve had paradise, and self-destructed for a piece of fruit. Esau lost it for a bowl of soup. David lost his family over a woman. Again and again we see men who had it all lose it all.

Why Are WE Self Destructive? First, in every case the fall began with the flesh. This is the deception of worldliness spoken of in Mark 4:19. More specifically, in 1 John 2:15-16 we are told that when one loves the things of the world, the love of God is absent. The world is manifested in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the sinful pride of life. Saul lost it to pride. Adam and Eve to all three; Esau to the lust of the eye; David to the lust of the flesh. .

Secondly. It is because we have an absence of contentment. Paul warns about self-destruction in I Timothy 6:6-11. He says that desire for more makes brings anyone to ruin; he says that those who do have "*pierced themselves with grief*".

There are things we need to do to avoid self-destruction. We need to avoid the flesh and walk in the spirit; when we are in the spirit, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh