

## **The End of Rebellion**

1Samuel 31:1-13

Joseph Barrow was born on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1914 in Chambers County Alabama.

His parents were both children of former slaves.

Sadly Joseph's father Munroe was committed to a mental institution in 1916 so he knew little of his biological father.

His mother remarried around 1920 and because of an incident Joseph had with the KKK, the family decided to relocate to Michigan in the Detroit area around 1926.

There he found work for a while with the Ford Motor Company, but it wouldn't be long until he began his professional career as a boxer.

When he was 17 years old he had his first amateur fight and when filling out the paper work put his first and middle names down leaving his last name off the sheet.

The paper read 'Joe Louis' the name most people know him by.

He had what many people consider to be the best heavy weight boxing career in the history of the sport.

He had a 66-3 record and held the heavy weight title for 12 straight years.

From 1939-1941 he defended his title 13 times which is an astounding number of defenses in such a short period of time.

Through the war years Louis enlisted and while he never saw combat did a number of important things to support the war effort.

His fights brought in a staggering amount of money for the time and so you would think he would have been set for life.

Unfortunately, he had entrusted his finances to a personal accountant of one of his managers who put Louis into a terrible spot with the IRS.

After they finished their investigation they determined that he owed the government more than \$500,000.

That is a huge sum of money even today let alone in the 1950s.

His debt forced him back into the ring, but his aging body could not keep up with the younger competitors and he took a beating from Rocky Marciano.

After that Louis bounced around doing exhibition events and working odd jobs, but was never able to get out from under the burden of the IRS.

He struggled with personal life challenges as well. He was married four times, became friends with a gangster, and struggled with addiction to name a few.

Thanks to the charity of friends he was able to keep a roof over his head, but for the most part died financially destitute.

Not the end you would expect from someone who had such a promising beginning.

It is a bit of a sad story to be sure and it is far from the only one. Many people throughout history have gone from a great beginning to a sad ending.

[That is certainly the case for the first king of Israel, a man named Saul. He started out great. He was good looking, tall, strong, and humble. God graciously gave him victory in battle and the whole nation was his. Sadly, that good beginning doesn't last. He goes against what God had told him to do and he persists in his rebellion for the better part of his more than forty years on the throne. This morning we come to the text that tells us about the end of his life in **1Samuel 31:1-13**. This is where his rebellion comes to an end. These verses have some important warnings for us about going our own way and doing our own thing and we would all do well to take these things to heart. First we can see this in verses one through three, that...]

**Point #1 – Rebelling against God makes it impossible to keep what you desire. (Verse 1-3)**

People have all kinds of reasons for ignoring or rejecting the LORD, but trying to hold on to those things for which you have exchanged the glory of your Maker is hopeless.

Ever since the time that Saul was told by the prophet Samuel that God was going to take the kingdom of Israel away from him, he had been strongly resisting that announcement.

He had fits of rage, he was gripped to the core of his being with fear, and he had acted out in sin on several occasions.

All of that was related to his desire to cling to the throne.

In the end all of his efforts prove useless (**Verses 1-3**).

As I read these verses I feel a great deal of empathy for this man.

I know that he is getting what he deserves on account of his stubbornness and pride, but I also know that the things that lead to this is Saul's life are sins that can easily entangle any one of us to one degree or another.

Just as the Bible says that the LORD takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather desires that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezekiel 33:11) we should do the same.

To say that warfare in the ancient world was a brutal affair would be an understatement and King Saul here gets a front row seat to see his army defeated.

Some run away and many others fall on the battlefield, which would have been tough to watch.

Beyond losing soldiers and servants it says here that his sons "Jonathan, Abinadab, and MalkiShua" are killed in the battle.

Jonathan is his oldest. His name means "Yahweh (that's is God's proper name) has given."

That is a great name, one that reflects this man's faith and courage.

Though he is a man of admirable qualities, he dies here.

Abinadab's name means "My father is noble" and his name may be a reflection of Saul's growing problem with pride.

Malkishua means "My king is wealth" which again seems to reflect Saul's focus on himself.

All three are taken from the king which means his family line will not hold the throne in the years to come.

*He loses his army, he loses three of his sons, and as the enemy closes in he is critically wounded and is about to die which obviously means in just a few moments he will no longer be king.*

So everything he tried to hang on to after the LORD told him he would lose the throne because of his rebellion is taken from him here.

[It is like trying to hold water in your hands. Have you ever tried to do that? You can do it for a short time to get a drink or throw water at someone but you can't keep it in your hands for long. No matter how tightly you try and hang on it drains away.]

That is how it is when you live in rebellion against God.

Whatever reason you may have for turning away from the LORD, whatever it is that you are trying to hold on to instead, no matter how tightly you try and hang on it will all slip away one way or another.

It is quite the opposite for those who have been born again by faith in Christ.

Any loss we may suffer in this life for Jesus' sake will only be temporary.

Eventually God's people inherit the whole of creation forever.

[If Saul had humbled himself and stepped down from the throne voluntarily he would have gained, but by trying to cling tightly to the throne in opposition to the LORD he ends up losing it all. That is incredibly sad, but it is not the only problem we see here with going against the LORD we also see in the king's final moments that...]

## **Point #2 – Rebelling against God feeds the delusion of self-determination. (Verse 4-6)**

When people persistently refuse to accept that the LORD rules over all things and that has the right to do so, they try to convince themselves that they are in control even when it makes no sense.

The sense of the end of verse three here is that Saul's injury from one or more arrows is a mortal wound.

Being in as many battles as he has been, he has probably seen these types of injuries in others and so it is safe to say he knows his end is near.

There is nowhere to go and he is about to be overrun by the enemy and this is what he says in **verse 4a**.

It is not exactly clear what he means by the term "abuse me".

It could be that he is thinking about some kind of torture they might put him through before he dies.

He might also be thinking of abusing his body in some way after he has died.

Because he talks about them "running him through" and then abusing him it seems more likely he is thinking about the second option.

So he has already been fatally wounded by the Philistines and once he is dead there is not a thing he can do about anything they do to him after that and yet despite the fact that he can do nothing about that he suggests a plan to control the situation.

The armour bearer responds in the **second part of verse 4**.

Why is the armour bearer afraid to strike Saul down? What seems to make the most sense is he has some sense of the fear of God and therefore refuses to raise his hand against the LORD's anointed.

When he refuses Saul's request this is what happens (**end of 4-6**).

That is a final act of self-determination in an utterly hopeless situation.

With death being certain he refuses in the last moments to acknowledge God's rights and the author and sustainer of life.

He refuses to put his life/death in God's hands but instead tries to exert his own authority over the moment.

It is a delusion of self-determination.

[Have you ever seen one of those rides at amusement parks where there are cars on tracks that go around a winding circuit? I'm a bit of a fan of those rides because they go pretty slow and there are no dramatic ups and downs. Anyone ever been on a ride like that? Do you know what they have in those cars? Steering wheels. Little kids, and maybe even some big kids, can grab hold of that steering wheel and pretend they are driving the car some might even believe they are driving the car, but no matter how much they turn the wheel the car follows the tracks.]

That is a good picture of what people are like who live in rebellion against the LORD.

You can try all you like to pretend like you are in charge or have control over your life but eventually you will run up against the reality that God is the One Who reigns over all things.

This is one of the reasons why Christians should be pro-life whether a human being has just been conceived in the womb or is in the final days of their time upon the earth.

People belong to God and we should act like it.

Now, I know people will make all kinds of arguments to justify both abortion and suicide, but if you really listen carefully to them what they all have in common is that human beings should be in charge, that human beings get to decide who lives and who dies apart from God's law.

It is people promoting the delusion that we can be in charge.

The reality is we can't. The reality is we will all come before the judgement seat of the almighty and give and accounting for our lives.

[Saul here is concerned here about the Philistines and what they are going to do. How much better it would have been for him to be concerned about the LORD instead? To rest in God's rule instead of fighting against it. Here is a third lesson for us this morning. This one is truly sobering. It is that...]

**Point #3 – Rebelling against God leads to the consequences God promised. (Verse 7-10).**

Just as surely as the physical laws of the universe produce results, so too do the moral laws that the LORD has established. Therefore, if we choose to ignore God's grace and persist in fighting against what He desires He will act against us like He has said.

*Verse 7 tells us about some people who were watching the battle.*

Saul's stubborn resistance to what the LORD was determined to do had terrible consequences for him, but also for the people of Israel as well.

From what we know of the spiritual condition of the Israelites during those days their sins also contributed to this tragedy, but the focus here is on Saul.

Because he was the king he would have had his own copy of God's law that he would have copied out for himself, so he would have been familiar with Deuteronomy 28.

In that chapter of God's word the people are told that if they listen they will find blessing and rest in the land that God gives them, but if they rebel they will find defeat at the hands of their enemies and if they persist they will lose the land.

While they don't lose the whole land here, they do lose some of it which is exactly what God said would happen.

Verses 8-10 zoom back in on Saul.

The Philistines clearly want more than just victory here, they want utter humiliation for the king who had defeated them so many times over the decades.

Notice, also, here that they put Saul's armor in the temple of one of their false gods.

They are thinking they won because their gods are better than Israel's God.

Not at all the case. The LORD taught them that lesson 40 years before this but they are far too locked into rebellion to remember that.

They don't win because of their idols, they win because God is doing what He said He would do if His people rebelled.

[As a parent I have nothing but empathy for a mom or a dad in a store dealing with the dreaded tantrum. Anybody ever witness one of those. I've seen them a few times and the ones that really stand out to me are the ones where the parent threatens the child with a consequence if they persist. The ones that really stand out to me are the ones where the child ends up with a chocolate bar instead of the consequence. Whenever I see that I think to myself, "You may have solved your immediate issue, but you are setting yourself up for real trouble in the future."]

God's not like that.

Oh it is true He is gracious beyond what we understand.

It is true that because of what He has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ through faith in Him we can be forgiven of every single act of rebellion and be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the heart of the one who believes.

That is wonderfully and gloriously true, but it is also true that God will deal with you according to your evil deeds if you ignore His salvation and persist in rebellion.

You may say, "What are you talking about I'm totally fine living however I want."

I say to you, don't mistake God's patience for complacency.

He will do what he says and you can count on that.

[That is what happens here to Saul and the consequences are much broader than just him. The people of Israel as a nation suffer loss. The only word that comes to mind to describe this is the word tragedy. News of these events travels and in the last few verses of this chapter we are told about how some people respond to the news. These people bring us all the way back to the beginning of Saul's reign over Israel and remind us of this fourth important lesson, that...]

**Point #4 – Starting well does NOT always keep a person from rebellion. (Verse 11-13)**

The scriptures place far more emphasis on the finish line of faith rather than the beginning. A good beginning is no guarantee of a good ending. Every Christian is called to relentless perseverance.

*Here is what we are told in verses 11-13.*

What motivated these guys to go and get the bodies of Saul and his sons?

Back in chapter 11 of this book we are told about something that happened at the beginning of Saul's reign as king.

A king of a group of people called the Ammonites, a man named Nahash, came and attacked the city of Jabesh Gilead.

The people of the city wanted to surrender and make a deal but the only one Nahash would accept was to gouge out the right eye of everybody in the city for the purpose of bringing disgrace upon "all Israel."

The citizens say they will agree to the terms if no one comes to help within seven days.

When the news made its way to Saul, the bible says the Spirit of God came upon him in power and he was able to raise a fighting force and go rescue the people from their humiliation.

It was an amazing beginning. One that was marked by humility and worship.

*These men certainly have that in mind as they bravely go to Beth Shan to put an end to Saul's humiliation and bury him and his sons.*

Do you see where they bury them? It says in verse 13 they are buried "under a tamarisk tree."

That is fairly ironic in my mind because the last time Saul is under a tamarisk tree is in chapter 22.

In that scene he is sitting with his officials and become extremely angry over the situation with David and in an effort to cling to the throne that the LORD had taken away he ends up ordering the deaths of the priests living in a city called Nob.

Not good to say the least and it doesn't any better from there.

He started out very well, but turns to rebellion against God.

[Jesus likens this to seed being planted in four different kinds of dirt. The first kind of dirt has the seed taken away quickly and no plant developed. The next two kinds have the plant grow up for a short time and then a little longer but the plants wither and die. The last type of dirt results in a plant that continues to grow. The planting of the seed is good and necessary. When a plant shoots up from the ground that is fantastic and exciting, but if it dies off all that excitement comes to nothing.]

Good beginnings are certainly important.

I love to see people make a profession of faith in Jesus.

I love to see people excited about God's word.

I love to see people obey the LORD and get baptized.

All of that is important and should cause us joy, but these things are the beginning.

Many times I have seen people fall away after a few weeks or months.

That is always sad but it is not devastating because the fact of the matter is the Bible's focus is on the finish line rather than the starting line.

Starting well does not always keep a person from rebellion.

Instead it is persevering by and in grace every day that keeps God's people from turning away from Him.

The application for us is fairly straight forward. Don't be complacent but instead we need to "work out our salvation in fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

The end of Saul's life is a sad one. Carl Keil says, "It is the end of an unhappy king."

It is a real tragedy because he started off so well, but finished so badly.

This is the end of his rebellion against the LORD and so it will be for everyone who persists in such things.

Do that and you won't be able to hold on to whatever it is you are trading the glory of God for.

Do that and you will feed the delusion that you are in charge.

Do that and you will experience the consequences of your rebellion.

Do that and it won't matter how you started you will finish poorly.

Instead the call of the gospel is to persevere in repentance and faith to the end.

Do that and you will be saved.

Do that and you will hear at the end of your journey, "Well done!" and enter into an eternal reward.

May God in His mercy keep us towards that end so that faithfulness rather than rebellion will be the mark of our lives to the eternal glory of God.