LIFE LESSONS FROM FAMOUS FAILURES (Pt. 7)
"Saul – He Had Everything and Became Nothing" (1 Sam. 8-31)

INTRO: Both *Denny McClain* (30 game winner) and *Pete Rose* (3000+ hits) had great starts in baseball careers. Both destined for Hall of Fame but ended up in Hall of Shame from gambling scandals. Like them, and so many, Saul, Israel's 1st King, began so well. He is one of the most striking and tragic figures in all the Bible. He had everything and became nothing. Let's look at his life and see what life lessons we can learn from this famous failure.

I. HIS EARLY PROMISE – THE EVERYTHING HE HAD (Chs. 8-12) – Few enjoyed greater possibility and opportunity than Saul.

A. *Striking physical superiority* – tall and handsome (9:1-2); None like him in Israel (10:24).

B. *Commendable character qualities* – hard working (9:3-4), modest (9:21), humble (10:22) compassionate to enemies (10:27; 11:13), courageous soldier (11:6,11), prays (14:41), worships (15:31), etc.

C. *Special equipment* to be king: selected by God (9:15-17; 11:6), presence of God (10:7), God's Spirit on him (10:10), personal prophet and priest is Samuel, special band of men for support (10:26), confidence of the people (11:12).

Summary – He had everything: looks, personality, charisma, leadership, following, etc. But his life became a shipwreck.

II. HIS GRADUAL DECLINE – THE NOTHING HE BECAME (Chs. 13-15).

A. (13:5-14) *Impatient Presumption* – God told Saul to wait for Samuel, the priest (10:8). Irreverently, he took priest's place and offered up pre-arranged sacrifices to God. He failed to trust God and wanted to impress the people (13:8). Samuel rebukes Saul, who confessed no wrong or regret, only gave excuses. It cost him his kingdom (13:14).

B. (14:24-46) *Rash Willfulness* – Saul imposes curse of death on anyone who ate food before battle (14:24). The men were too weak to battle (14:30). Saul's son, Jonathan, didn't know about the oath and ate. He was saved because of the people (14:45).

C. (15:1ff) *Blatant Rebellion* – God told Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites (15:2-3). He did not obey completely (15:7-9). Then, he lied about it and even tried to veil it as a righteous act (15:13-23). Later, he did confess and repent but he still lost his kingdom (15:24-31).

D. (28:1-18) *Occult Involvement* – God's presence withdrawn, Samuel now dead, Saul was desperate for a word from God. He visits witch at Endor to contact Samuel for guidance. Again, disobeyed God (Lev. 19:31).

Summary: Sad, gradual decline. In the end, he crashed and burned losing everything. He became nothing (31:1-10). A sad end to a life with such promise. V. Havner said . . .

III. LIFE LESSONS FROM SAUL'S FAILURES

A. *A good beginning doesn't promise a good ending*. He had everything, but became nothing. Natural abilities and spiritual gifts mean more with the power of God. Eccl. 4:8 . . .

B. *Always place character before reputation*. Saul was more concerned about his image before the people than his character before God. He built monuments to honor himself (15:12). In 42 yrs. as king, he only built God one altar (14:35). He cared more about what world thought of him than God (15:30).

C. *True success comes in complete obedience* (15:22). Saul was spiritual and obedient up-to-a-point. He wanted God's blessings w/o full obedience. With God 99% obedience is 100% disobedience. He was more concerned about other's disobedience than his own (14:39). He was quick to criticize and blame others but unwilling to face and judge his own sins. Always easier to be convicted of someone else's sins! He substituted saying for doing (15:13).

D. *Repentance is more important than explanation or excuses* (13:11-12; 15:15, 20-21; 28:15). Saul always had reason for not obeying God. He always thought he had a plan better than God's. Examples?

E. *Spiritual decline is gradual*. We don't fall all of a sudden. It is a gradual demise (impatience, pride, rebellion, occultism). Alarming how far down we'll go when we turn from God. If fail to build, we will fall over time. We must build our spiritual life (Jude 20).

F. *There are always consequences when we refuse to face our sins*. He lost it all (modesty, humility, Lord's blessings, best friend, kingdom, sons, own life). All because he wouldn't let God be Lord of his life. God's commentary on Saul's life (1 Chron. 10:13-14).

G. *When earthly leaders fail, God's plan doesn't fail with them* (16:1). Saul failed and died. God was still on the throne working.

CONC: Saul gave his own epitaph (26:21), "I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly." J. S. Baxter writes, "A man plays a fool when . . ." There's one other Saul in Bible. In NT, there's Saul of Tarsus, who was like OT Saul (proud, high-spirited, rebellious). "We are fools for Christ's sake" (1 Cor. 4:10). Whose fool are you? He did something about his failures. Both were fools, both lost their heads. Only one said at the end, "I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith." Whose fool are you? If your life ended today, would it end well?