

Faith and Faithlessness

Text: 1 Samuel 14

Introduction: We are making our way through the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. This morning, we are on chapter 14. Go ahead and turn there in your Bible. Because chapter 14 is a long chapter, and I do want to read the whole chapter, we're going to go ahead and jump right in.

I like to read the entire text that I am preaching because we believe that the Bible is the Word of God. The text of Scripture is infinitely more significant than anything that I have to say about the text of Scripture.

(Read 1 Samuel 14...Pray)

1 Samuel 14 is about faith and faithlessness. At this point in 1 Samuel, the narrative is primarily about King Saul. But in chapter 14, a great deal of attention is given to his son Jonathan to show the contrast between faith and faithlessness.

So, let's consider together four contrasts between the faith of Jonathan and the faithlessness of Saul.

I. While faithless Saul hid in a cave, Jonathan attacked the Philistines in faith (1 Samuel 14:1-15).

A. You remember where we left off last week.

1. Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines at Gibeah (13:3).
2. This angered the Philistines, so they rose up against Israel in response (13:4-5).
3. Saul was supposed to wait for Samuel at Gilgal. But because Saul was scared, he got impatient and unlawfully offered the burnt offering himself (13:9).
4. He was promptly rebuked by Samuel and told that his kingdom would not continue (13:14).
5. And chapter 13 ended with the Philistines still ready to go into battle against Israel, but with Israel in no position to be able to adequately defend herself (13:22).

B. And as chapter 14 begins, the situation is the same.

1. Israel is in no position to defend herself. In fact, we see in verse 2 that Israel's warrior king is hiding in a pomegranate cave (vs. 2a).
 - a. Most translations say "pomegranate TREE."
 - b. I'll acknowledge that it WAS most likely a pomegranate TREE that Saul was under.
 - c. But it's more fun to imagine him hiding in a cave. It wouldn't be the first time he was found hiding at an important moment when his leadership was needed.
2. The text tells us that Saul had 600 men with him, but speaking in strictly human terms, that would be no match for the mighty Philistine army and their regiments of chariots and horsemen and multitudes of troops (vs. 2b).
3. Things don't look good for Israel at this point in the narrative.
4. To make matters worse, it appears that Saul is taking counsel from some pretty questionable folks (vs. 3).
 - a. We're told about a man named Ahijah who was wearing an ephod.
 - b. He was Ichabod's brother. You remember Ichabod, don't you, from chapter 4? His name meant "the glory has departed."
 - c. Ichabod was the son of Phinehas, who you'll also remember was a pretty rotten guy. While serving as priest under his father Eli, he and his brother Hophni introduced idolatry and sexual immorality into the Lord's house at Shiloh.
 - d. These details are not incidental to the narrative. They are intended to alert us to the faithlessness of King Saul.
5. Israel is in trouble. The Philistines have them right where they want them, and Israel's faithless king has no clue what to do about it.

C. Which makes the actions of Saul's son Jonathan stand out as an example of courageous faith.

1. The text says... (Read vs. 1)
2. Jonathan is not content to just sit around and allow Israel to remain at the mercy of the Philistines.
3. So, he said to his armor bearer, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few" (vs. 6).
 - a. In calling the Philistines "uncircumcised," he indicates that he sees this not simply as a battle between Israel and Philistia, but between the covenant people of God and the enemies of God.
 - b. You'll also notice that he says "maybe the LORD will work for us." Why does Jonathan say "MAYBE"? It's not because he doubts the ABILITY of the Lord. Because the very next words out of his mouth are "for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few."
 - c. He says "maybe the Lord will save us" because he doesn't know the PURPOSES of the Lord.
 - d. I want to suggest to us this morning that this is the right attitude for us to have as well. We do not always know the purposes of the Lord, but we should never doubt His ability.
 - e. He's the Lord! He can do anything! But we know from personal experience and from the biblical record that He doesn't always intervene in the way that we would want or think He should.
 - f. I think about my mom's battle with cancer. I have no doubt that the Lord is fully able to bring total healing to her body. So, I pray. I want the Lord to heal my mom. And I know that He can. But I don't know what His purposes for her are.

- g. This week I visited with our sister Alexis Makely. We have prayed and prayed and prayed for the Lord to heal her body. We've prayed because we know He can do it. But the truth is that Alexis is not likely long for this world. Her condition is deteriorating. Apart from a miracle from heaven, she will most likely be with the Lord very soon. And that's not because the Lord is unable to heal her. It's because we do not fully know or understand the purposes of God.
 - h. I think about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego here. They told Nebuchadnezzar, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18).
 - i. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had an unwavering trust in the sovereignty of God over all things. And that's the same kind of faith in our sovereign God that we see with Jonathan here in 1 Samuel 14.
 - j. And it's the same kind of faith that I want to urge you toward this morning. The Lord may or may not intervene in your life in the way that you desire. But be sure that He is able. And keep praying. Keep relying upon Him. Keep depending upon Him. He is able.
4. After Jonathan spoke these words of faith to his armor bearer, the armor bearer responded, "Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul" (vs. 7).
 - a. We all need a friend like that, don't we?
 - b. Not a friend who encourages us to just do whatever we want. I don't think that's what's happening here.

- c. **But a friend, who when our hearts are set on trusting and following the Lord, will walk with us through whatever may come our way.**
 - d. **Jonathan isn't asking his armor bearer to go with him to get an ice cream cone. He's asking him to go with him to the garrison of the mighty Philistines. This could get ugly. But Jonathan is confident in the Lord's power, and the armor bearer is committed to going with him.**
 - e. **Sometimes friends will try to talk you out of doing something you know the Lord is leading you to do. That's not the kind of friend you need. You need your friend to talk you out of things that are disobedient to the Lord. But when it comes to following the Lord, you and I need friends who will go with us no matter what difficulty that may bring.**
5. **We know that Jonathan is committed to following the will of the Lord because he comes up with a way to determine the Lord's will.**
- a. **He says, "We'll show ourselves to the Philistines, and if they invite us to come up, we'll know that the Lord is with us. If they tell us to wait, we'll know that it is not the Lord's will for us to do this" (vs. 8-10).**
 - b. **So, they showed themselves to the Philistines, and when the Philistines invited them to come up, they knew that it was the Lord's will (vs. 11-12).**
 - c. **Jonathan said, "Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel" (vs. 12). Notice Jonathan's humility. It is the LORD who has given them into the hand of ISRAEL. Not HIS hand. But ISRAEL's hand.**
 - d. **Goshen, there was no reason for Jonathan to trust that he and his armor-bearer could defeat these Philistines on their own. His trust and confidence was in the Lord.**
- e. **But of course, the Philistines weren't afraid of a couple of Hebrews. In fact, they derided them saying, "Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves" (vs. 11).**
 - f. **But when Jonathan and his armor bearer did come up against them for this initial strike, the Lord gave them the victory, and about twenty Philistines were killed (vs. 13-14).**
 - g. **The text says that "they fell before Jonathan" (vs. 13). This isn't super descriptive, but it seems clear that it was the Lord who caused them to fall before Jonathan.**
 - h. **The result was panic in the camp of the Philistines. The text says that the Lord even caused the earth to quake, which magnified the panic among the Philistines (vs. 15).**
6. **Remember, Saul was in hiding. He was supposed to lead God's people in victory over their enemies, but he was afraid of the Philistines.**
7. **Jonathan is the one who trusted the Lord, attacked the Philistines in faith, and won this initial victory over these enemies of God and His people.**

While faithless Saul hid in a cave, Jonathan attacked the Philistines in faith. Contrast #2...

II. **While faithless Saul feigned godliness, Jonathan's genuine faith brought the Lord's help (1 Samuel 14:16-23).**

A. **The narrative picks back up with Saul in verse 16.**

- 1. **Saul's watchmen could see that something was going on in the camp of the Philistines, but they didn't know what it was (vs. 16).**
- 2. **Saul assumed that someone from his camp had gone out against the Philistines. He said, "Count and see who has gone from us" (vs. 17a).**
- 3. **Of course, he was right. It was Jonathan and his armor-bearer (vs. 17b).**

4. So, Saul called for the ark. He said, “Bring the ark of God here” (vs. 18a). Calling for the ark certainly gets our attention because that’s what the people of Israel did back in chapter 4 when the ark was captured by the Philistines in battle.
5. At least one commentator suggests that it wasn’t actually the ark that Saul called for but the ephod. Either way, Saul is giving the appearance that he is seeking the Lord.
6. But when the Lord doesn’t answer him in time, Saul gives up. He said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand” (vs. 19).
7. And the text says... (Read vs. 20-22)
8. Saul gave the appearance that he was seeking the Lord. But when things got tough, Saul grew impatient just like before, and he took matters into his own hands.
9. But verse 23 says... (Read vs. 23)

B. Verse 23 leaves us asking, “Why?” Why did the Lord save Israel that day?

1. If her king was only giving the appearance of godliness but forsaking its power, why did the Lord save Israel?
2. It was because of Jonathan’s genuine faith. Jonathan’s genuine faith brought the Lord’s help.
3. There was **NO WAY** that the people of Israel should have won this battle. They were outnumbered by the Philistines. They were out-armed by the Philistines. And to be honest, the Philistines were also braver and more courageous than the people of Israel.
4. But Israel won the battle. Why? The Lord saved Israel that day. As Jonathan declared in faith in verse 6, “Nothing [could] hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few” (vs. 6).
5. I love the application questions Richard Phillips asks in his commentary on this passage: “Do we believe, as [Jonathan] believed, that circumstances do not determine outcomes when God is involved? Do we believe in the possibility of God’s acting in our circumstances: opening doors for evangelism, providing

resources for ministry, offering his might to give success where otherwise there would be only failure?” (Phillips, 216).

6. He goes on to say, “If we believe these things, then we will not sit in idle despondency as forces hostile to Christianity sweep our generation. We will not play the part of Saul in his inaction or in his pragmatic, unprincipled religion. Rather, if we are inspired by Jonathan’s faith, we will do as Jonathan did in offering ourselves to the Lord’s service, stepping forward into the scene of action, praying for the Lord to give openings and strength, and leaping into the opportunities that the Lord provides, confident of his grace to empower our efforts” (Phillips, 216).

While faithless Saul feigned godliness, Jonathan’s genuine faith brought the Lord’s help. Contrast #3...

III. While faithless Saul troubled the land, Jonathan’s faith worked a great salvation in Israel (1 Samuel 14:24-46).

- A. To understand what is happening here, it’s helpful if we talk a little bit about where the events of verses 24-30 fit in the chronology of chapter 14.
 1. The text tells us in verse 24 that “the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day” (vs. 24).
 2. This seems to look back to the situation just prior to verse 20.
 3. So, it’s not that “the LORD saved Israel” in verse 23, and then came the events surrounding Saul’s vow that we’re going to talk about here in a moment.
 4. No, it seems that the vow took place prior to the Israelites going into battle against the Philistines.
 5. So, we’re kind of backing up a little bit in the narrative. Such that verses 23 and 31 seem to be describing the same event: the defeat of the Philistines by the Israelites in the power of the Lord.

B. But this vow that Saul made shows us what we're talking about when we say that faithless Saul troubled the land.

- 1. Saul said, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies" (vs. 24b).**
- 2. You'll notice immediately that Saul is not concerned with the Lord's reputation. His concern is his own vengeance. So, he tries this strong-arm tactic to get the people to keep fighting until the Philistines are defeated.**
- 3. And in one sense, it works. The people didn't eat. They followed Saul's oath. Even when they went into the forest and there was honey readily available there, they didn't eat even a drop.**
- 4. Except for Jonathan. The text says... (Read vs. 27)**
- 5. Jonathan did what seemed reasonable. He was famished, so he ate. And the physical results were immediately apparent. His eyes became bright. This doesn't seem to indicate any kind of supernatural occurrence or special thing. Rather, Jonathan was faint because he hadn't eaten. And eating made him feel and look better. It was like those Snickers commercials.**
- 6. But then the people made Jonathan aware of his father's vow (vs. 28).**
- 7. Which Jonathan thought was stupid. Because it was stupid. Who wants to go into battle with a famished army?**
- 8. Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great" (vs. 29-30).**
- 9. Jonathan basically says that what they had accomplished was because of the Lord. But if they had not been famished, they could have accomplished a lot more.**

C. As we keep reading, we see that Israel's obedience to Saul's oath ultimately led to their disobedience to the Lord.

- 1. The people were so hungry after defeating the Philistines that they started eating the Philistine animals with the blood still in them (vs. 32-33).**
- 2. This was a problem because God had prohibited His people from eating meat with blood still in it (Lev. 7:26-27). But the people failed to consider God's Law as they rushed to satisfy their hunger caused by Saul's oath.**
- 3. When Saul found out, he tried to make things right by building an altar where animals could be slaughtered and eaten properly (vs. 33-35).**
- 4. Unfortunately, he fails to recognize how it was his unwise oath that led to the whole situation in the first place.**

D. Things are spiraling out of control for Saul.

- 1. We next read in verse 36 that Saul wants Israel to continue their assault on the Philistines.**
- 2. But first, after being encouraged to do so by the priest, he decides that maybe it's a good idea to consult the Lord first. However, the Lord "did not answer him that day" (vs. 37).**
- 3. Saul interprets that as a punishment from the Lord. But certainly, it's a punishment for someone else's sin. It can't be his sin! He's Saul! He's the king!**
- 4. So, he sets up this whole thing to determine who is at fault for God's silence (vs. 38-40).**
- 5. Ultimately, the lot falls on Jonathan (vs. 41-42).**
- 6. We know that Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." So, God is sovereign over the casting of the lot.**
- 7. But we do need to ask why the lot falls on Jonathan. Is it because Jonathan is actually guilty before the Lord? I don't think so. The text gives no indication of that being the case. I think the lot falls on Jonathan because the Lord is revealing the evil of Saul's heart.**
- 8. Saul is responsible for God's silence. Yet, he is so eager to blame someone else that he is even willing to kill his own son.**

9. Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done” (vs. 43s).
10. Jonathan kind of sarcastically responds, “I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die” (vs. 44).
11. And Saul is ready to have Jonathan put to death until the people step in and intervene. They said, “Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day” (vs. 45).
12. The implication is clear, isn’t it? Jonathan has worked with God. Saul has not. Jonathan has shown himself to be a man of faith. Saul has been faithless.
13. The text says, “So the people ransomed Jonathan, so he did not die” (vs. 45b).

Friends, while faithless Saul troubled the land, Jonathan’s faith worked a great salvation in Israel. And finally, contrast #4...

IV. Though faithless Saul fought against all his enemies on every side, it is Jonathan’s faith that points us to the one who is greater than he (1 Samuel 14:47-52).

A. Chapter 14 concludes with this summary of Saul’s reign as king.

1. As king, Saul fought against all his enemies on every side.
2. The text even says at the end of verse 47, “Wherever he turned he routed them.”
3. Verse 48 says, “He did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them.”
4. We’re given a brief genealogy in verses 49-51.
5. And then verse 52 says... (Read vs. 52)
6. I think the point is that Saul’s reign wasn’t all bad. There were some good things that happened under Saul as king. He was supposed to “save [Israel] from the hand of their surrounding enemies” (10:1). And in many ways, he did.

B. But Saul is not the one who is presented in chapters 13 and 14 as worthy of commendation.

1. That’s Jonathan. Saul’s son. Saul’s son who would never assume the throne of Israel because of his father’s sin.
2. Jonathan is the one who is presented in chapters 13 and 14 as a man of faith. A man worthy of commendation. A man worthy of emulation.
3. And in his faithfulness, Jonathan points us to the one who is greater than he.
4. See, in the story of the Bible, since the very beginning, we’ve been looking for one who is going to come and make all things right. The seed of the woman who will bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).
5. We had high hopes for Saul. He was Israel’s king! But we quickly learned that those hopes were misplaced.
6. We know that Jonathan can’t be the king who will make all things right. Because of his father’s sin, he never got a chance to become king.
7. Jonathan was faithful. But not faithful enough. Certainly not perfect.
8. 1 Samuel 14 leaves us still looking. Still looking for a king who will come and make all things right.
9. We who know our Bibles know that that king would not come for many years later.
10. But now He has come. And He will come again. He came the first time to live and die to pay for our sin. He’ll come again to take us to Himself. All of us who are in Him. All of us who have turned from our sin and placed our trust in Him. Our Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Our hope is not in Saul. Our hope is not in Jonathan. Our hope is in Christ.

May we learn from and follow the example of faithfulness that we see in Jonathan. But may our ultimate hope always be in Christ.