

JONATHAN'S COURAGEOUS FAITH

1 Samuel 13:23-14:52

Key Verse: 14:6

Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

In this passage, Jonathan makes a bold decision of faith to attack the Philistines, knowing fully that his people were out-numbered and out-gunned by the enemy force. He believed that God would be on their side and save his people. On the other hand, his father, King Saul, shows how he became unfit to be a leader over Israel. From the sharp contrast between Jonathan and Saul, let us learn how we can fight a spiritual battle as men and women of faith and courage.

First, Jonathan's act of faith (1-14). As we learned last week, the battle of Micmash was triggered by Jonathan's attack on the Philistine outpost at Geba. The Philistines responded by assembling a huge army at Micmash just north of Geba. From the main camp there, they sent out raiding parties in three directions, east, west and north (13:27-28, 31). The Israelites were quaking with fear. King Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gebeah chilling under a pomegranate tree (2). With him were about 600 men and the priest. No one seemed to know what to do. The king, the priest and the 600 men were all in fear, as they watched the Philistine army marching around the area. They had no desire to fight the enemy. They had no courage. But there was one man who had the courage that came from his faith in God. He acted on his faith in this critical moment. It was Jonathan. Look at verse 1. *One day Jonathan son of Saul said to the young man bearing his armor, "Come, let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side." But he did not tell his father.* Jonathan had a secret plan which he did not tell his father. It was to go over to the enemy outpost on the other side. It was a daring and risky move.



Why didn't Jonathan tell his father about his plan? From what he did, we know that Jonathan trusted God that he would deliver his people from the hand of the Philistines if they depended on him (12). The problem was that his father the king didn't seem to share the faith. He knew what his father would say: "Young man, what do you know about war? This is a suicide mission. Don't be stupid." Jonathan didn't tell his father about his plan because he was determined to carry it out, relying only on God.

What obstacle did Jonathan have to overcome to reach the enemy outpost? Look at verses 4-5. *On each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez, and the other Seneh. One cliff stood to the north toward Micmash, the other to the south toward Geba.* Jonathan's plan was to go behind the enemy camp and mount a surprise attack on the enemy from the least expected spot. However, to get to the other side, they had to use the narrow pass between two cliffs. There were enemy soldiers looking down from the top of the cliff on the Micmash side. No large group of soldiers could go through the pass unnoticed. But because it was only two of them, they were able to reach to the other side.



As they made the dangerous trip, what did Jonathan say? Let us read verse 6. *Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."* Jonathan's faith was amazing. Even as he watched the menacing army of the Philistines, he believed that God could save his people from the enemy. Who is the Lord our God? He is the Creator of the universe. He parted the Red Sea so that his people could cross it as on dry land. Jonathan trusted in this God. Nothing could hinder the Lord from saving his people. Jonathan said, "whether by many or by few." The size of the army didn't matter to God. He could save his people using only a couple of men, if God was willing to act in their behalf. Jonathan called the Philistines the "uncircumcised fellows." King Saul and his men were quaking with fear, as they watched the raiding parties of the Philistine army. But Jonathan saw them as people who had no covenant relationship with God. We learn that we should view the people of this world with the eyes of faith in God rather than the eyes of envy. People of this world seem to prosper without God. They seem more powerful than God's people. They seem to have nice things and enjoy life while believers struggle to follow the ways of God. What we have seems so inadequate. We seem to have no chance to win a victory against this unbelieving world. This is because we see the world with our human eyes only. When we see it with the eyes of faith in God, as Jonathan did, we can also say, "Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

How did Jonathan's armor-bearer encourage him? *"Do all that you have in mind," his armor-bearer said. "Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul" (7).* Wow. Despite the situation, this man was not sarcastic or negative. He didn't say, "I don't know; I think we are hopelessly out-matched," or "Yeah, I will go with you on this suicide mission. Good luck to us." Instead, he said, "Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul." What wonderful words of encouragement! "I am with you heart and soul." Serving the work of God in this world is not an easy task. But as long as we have even one faithful coworker who is with us and says to us, "I am with you heart and soul," we don't have to feel lonely.

Jonathan was fully aware that the success of his mission depended on God. So he sought God's sign. How did he do this? *Jonathan said, "Come, then; we will cross over toward the men and let them see us. If they say to us, 'Wait there until we come to you,' we will stay where we are and not go up to them. But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the Lord has given them into our hands"* (8-10). Jonathan told his armor-bearer that they would first show themselves to the enemy. Now, exposing yourself to the enemy is not a smart military move, especially when you are out-numbered and out-gunned. But Jonathan went one step further. Of the two possible responses of the Philistine men that Jonathan mentioned, the second was much more likely. The Philistines were on top of the cliff. Of course, they wanted Jonathan to climb up to them. So we can see again that Jonathan was determined to attack the enemy by faith as long as God approved his plan.

What did the Philistines say when the two showed themselves before them? They said, "Look! The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in" (11). They shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson" (12). This was God's sign Jonathan was waiting for. He said to his companion, "Climb up after me; the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel" (12). Jonathan climbed up using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The two men army worked together as a team. They were together in heart and soul. They coworked together in God. When the Philistines fell before Jonathan, his armor-bearer followed behind him and killed them (13). In that first attack, Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some 20 men in an area of about half an acre (14). But it was just a beginning.



Second, the Lord rescues Israel (15-23). Look at verse 15. *Then panic struck the whole army--those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties--and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.* A panic struck the whole army of the Philistines. This panic was sent by God. The ground shook. It was a massive earthquake that rattled the entire army. The Philistines was quaking with fear this time. It was a complete turnaround. The Philistines in the camp and field and those in the outposts and raiding parties were all in panic. They were running in all directions. Their army was literally melting away before their eyes (16).

What can we learn from Jonathan and his armor-bearer about how to fight spiritual battles in our time? First and foremost, we must depend on God. Our God can give us victory when we trust him. It is not about how much resources we have or how capable we are. It is how much faith we have in God. We also must learn to cowork with other believers. We don't need a large army of people to win a battle, but we cannot do it alone. When we have coworkers who are with us heart and soul, we can overcome many difficult challenges we face.

While the king and all Israel were trembling with fear, Jonathan did not give in to the circumstances. His people were surrounded by the enemy forces. Jonathan was not a seasoned warrior with many battle experiences. He didn't even have the control of the 600 men army. But Jonathan did not sit around helplessly. He did a small thing that he could. He started a skirmish with the enemy in the little corner of the battlefield. We can always do small things by faith, such as campus visiting, morning prayers and 1:1 Bible studies, to wage our spiritual battle. God will surely give us victory!

Meanwhile, what was King Saul doing? While he and his men were chilling under the pomegranate tree, his lookouts noticed the amazing thing happening in the enemy camp. The army was melting away in all directions. Saul ordered a roll call to find out who caused the havoc. They found out it was Jonathan and his armor-bearer (17). Then what did the king do? Saul said to Ahijah the priest, "Bring the ark of God." (Why? Did he intend to use the ark of the Lord like the Israelites had done earlier? Didn't he remember they were soundly defeated by the Philistines, losing their 30,000 soldiers?) While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the enemy camp intensified (19). So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."¹ He told the priest, "Never mind." He was in a hurry to go out to the battlefield while the enemy was in chaos. He had no time to deal with God. He was ordering around the priest as if he were his servant. He had no respect for the servant of God. He had no respect for God. He didn't know it was God who was causing the panic.



So Saul and his men went out to the battlefield. But the battle had already been won by God. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their own swords (20). The Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines came over to the Israelites to join the battle with Saul and Jonathan (21). Those who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim also came out to join the battle in hot pursuit. Verse 23 says: *So the Lord rescued Israel that day, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven.*

Third, Jonathan versus Saul, son unlike his father (24-46). The battle of Micmash was initiated by Jonathan. God caused the panic among the Philistines whose army melted away in all directions. Saul and his men did only a mopping-up operation, chasing after the enemy soldiers who were running away. But there were also episodes that showed a sharp contrast between Saul and Jonathan.

¹ The priest used the two plates or stones (Urim and Thummim) that he carried in the pouch of his ephod to get a yes/no answer from God (Ex 38:30; Nu 27:12-21). Only the priest could use this to inquire of the Lord. Saul was rushing it so that he could go to battlefield in a hurry.

King Saul had his men bound under an oath, saying, “Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!” This was a stupid oath. You should not let your soldiers go hungry when they fight a battle. But more importantly, his motive was wrong. He said, “... before I have avenged myself on my enemies!” His words contained many “I”s. He was seeking his own avenge, his own glory. In contrast, Jonathan said, “Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few” (6). Saul was self-centered; Jonathan was God-centered.

Saul’s self-centered oath resulted in three problems. The soldiers were too hungry to fight. They were exhausted (31). It led them to sin before God (33). Overcome by hunger, they butchered sheep and cattle and ate the meat with blood still in it (32). God told his people not to eat meat with blood in it, because blood represents life and life belongs to God (Ge 9:4; Ac 15:27-29). In addition, Saul almost killed his son Jonathan who had eaten honey without realizing the king’s oath (42-44). This is how it happened. When God did not answer his inquiry about a night-time operation into the Philistine camp, Saul cast lot to find out who had sinned by breaking his oath. The lot fell on Jonathan, and he intended to kill his son. But the people objected and saved Jonathan. *The men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God’s help.” So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death* (45).

In many ways, Saul showed he had become unfit to be a leader over Israel. He had no personal relationship with his son. He made a foolish oath. He wasn’t considerate of his fighting men. He did not admit his own mistake and was willing to kill his son. Saving his face was more important than his son (44). Most of all, he had no respect for God and his servant. His problem was not of his personality trait but a spiritual one. He built an altar but only several years after his inauguration (35). During his kingship, Saul would seek the Lord, but only after he tried things on his own first. We must seek first God and his kingdom. On the other hand, Jonathan had the courage to attack the enemy because of his faith and trust in God. He did not calculate this and that. When he saw the wrong decision of his father, he spoke the truth. He was not a yes man for the king. *Jonathan said, “My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey. How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?”* (29-30). Jonathan did not try to make an excuse for his action. He admitted what he did, even though he had a valid excuse. *Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” So Jonathan told him, “I merely tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now must I die?”* (43).



Fourth, God uses Saul to protect his people (47-52). Look at verses 47-48. *After Saul had assumed rule over Israel, he fought against their enemies on every side:*

Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment on them. He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, delivering Israel from the hands of those who had plundered them. Why was Saul so successful even though he was not a man after God's own heart and even after he had disobeyed God's command? God had a purpose for Saul to deliver his people from the hand of their enemies. It might seem in human eyes that God was validating Saul's kingship against his own intention (13:13-14), but it was not. God was merely delaying Saul's demise for his own purpose. The victory of a person does not necessarily validate his righteousness before God. God uses men and women according to his own purpose to accomplish his will.

In today's passage, we learned that God saved his people when Jonathan acted on his faith. When he trusted in God, the Lord delivered them from the hand of the enemy, acting on his people's behalf. Faith is the victory! The other point we learned is that Jonathan coworked with his armor-bearer who said, "I am with you heart and soul." May God help us to fight our spiritual battle by faith in God and with a beautiful coworking relationship with others in Christ!