

## 1 Samuel 13:15b-14:23 - A Model of Faithfulness

It is easy in 1 Samuel to find principles for leadership throughout the book. It's also easy to find dangers to avoid as a leader. Certainly those things can flow down to us as just generic principles, which are valid and good to follow.

But here we have a situation that's probably a little closer to home. Not that we're out killing a bunch of Philistines. But that we have kind of an average guy who is faithful to the Lord and because he is faithful he has an incredible impact for the Lord.

And while we've seen Jonathan's name mentioned before, it's really here where we are more formally introduced to Jonathan, the son of king Saul. We saw Jonathan's work briefly last week as he destroyed a Philistine outpost. He does it again here, but really with just he and his armor bearer.

We will come to really love Jonathan throughout the book of 1 Samuel. He is almost the polar opposite of his father, Saul. He is reasonable and godly and faithful. He will also become the best friend of king David before David ever officially reigns on the throne of Israel. Jonathan will save David's life and will be to him a very dear friend. In fact, we read in **18:1**: "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." He will also be the brother-in-law to David. David's first wife is Michal, who is Jonathan's sister - so there is also a family connection that they will have together.

But what we need to understand is that Jonathan never had center stage. He was the king's son and he was a great warrior so he was prominent in Israel. But he never became king. And he knew he would never be king. And he was never jealous about that. He understood very clearly the place that God had given him in life and rejoiced in the place that God had given him.

And the thing I want us to keep in mind as we look at this section is that you don't have to be some great leader to have an amazing impact for the Kingdom of God. You don't have to be a leader or have amazing skills at all for God to use you to encourage the people. God will often bless small acts of faithfulness from average people.

Too often I think we are prone to set popular people up on pedestals as examples of who we should be like and imitate and follow. These are Christian superstars and heroes. Amazing singers or preachers or book writers. Or maybe it's a famous athlete or actor who becomes a believer and we look to them as our standard and we look to them as having the greatest influence for the gospel.

And that's all well and good, but God very much prizes those who take a background role. God prizes those who are never number 1 or 2 or even 10, but who faithfully carry out their duties.

Jesus says: He who is faithful with little is faithful with what? Much. (**Luke 16:10**). Just because we have a smaller role to play in the Kingdom doesn't mean we should be less faithful. It means we should be more. One day what we have done will be rewarded based on what we did with what God gave us.

So what can we learn about faithfulness from this section? I think we can learn several things.

### 1) True faithfulness Isn't Daunted By Difficulty:

If you're in Jonathan or Saul's position, the outlook in Israel is pretty bleak. We saw last week that there were something like 3,000 Philistine chariots - like tanks - , 6,000 horsemen, and tens of thousands of soldiers. They were camped 5 miles north of Jerusalem. That would be like a massive army camped in downtown Deer Park from where we are here. And the army had basically shut down all means of any coming to help Saul and his army. **Read 17-18**

Without making it too complicated what he's saying is all the roads have been shut down by the Philistine army. Again, it'd be like a foreign army in Deer Park shutting down 395 north, Highway 2, Denison-Chatteroy and any other access to our location. They were massively outnumbered and no one could get through to ask for help from the other Israelites and no help could come even if they got the message.

Saul's forces also basically had no worthy weapons. **Read 19-23**

Israel was so oppressed by the Philistines they didn't have any weapons and couldn't make any weapons. All anyone - except for Saul and Jonathan - had were farm tools. And even those had to be sharpened by the Philistines for a steep price.

As one commentator said "...the entire Israelite arsenal [was] weapons made of wood and stone—arrows, slings, javelins, clubs, knives, and the like. Israel's weapons could certainly be deadly, but they were inferior to those made of bronze and iron, the strategic metal of that day." Bergen, R. D. *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 7, p. 154)

That's the setting for Jonathan's little victory here. The outlook was incredibly bleak. It was absolutely hopeless.

That's how life can often feel to us. A lot of times in life we come up against situations where it feels overwhelming. Where there seems to be no possible way to keep going, we don't even know why we might try. What's the point? And attempt we make to help the situation seems useless. We just live out our days in misery.

But here's the deal: true faithfulness isn't daunted by circumstances. True faithfulness sticks to the course no matter how bleak the outlook.

That doesn't mean we disregard the circumstances. You've met people who walk around giddy over their really, really bad situation. It's almost like they have a disconnect between reality and faithfulness. That's not what the Bible calls us to.

Nor does the Bible call us to do foolish things when we have a bad circumstance. Sometimes we can think "Well, my situation is already bad, I'm going to do something foolish."

This happens all the time around this time of year. People are already struggling financially, living paycheck to paycheck, just sort of drowning. And then Christmas rolls around and they're like "Well, I'm never getting out of this crushing debt anyway, might as well go spend a bunch of money and have some fun." No, that's sinful foolishness.

What we are called to as believers is to recognize that when we are in difficult, sometimes impossible, situations that our circumstances we're in aren't the final verdict. That there is a God in heaven who cares for us and loves and gives us grace to keep going.

How do we know we have the grace to keep going? We're still here! We're still drawing breath. We still have the same saving grace God gave us the day we were saved, and we have the same enabling grace - the grace to walk forward in obedience - that we had the day we were saved. When we say "I can't go forward anymore" really what we are saying is "I refuse to go forward."

I've been reading through a modern english version of *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. It's an allegory of the Christian life and it's really good. It's about a man named Christian who is on the journey from his own town The City of Destruction, who enters the narrow gate and goes down the straight and narrow path. And it's a tale of the Christian life and what we have to deal with and how we, like Christian, overcome many of these troubles on our way to glory. It an amazing book.

Christian's life is filled with trials that are familiar to anyone who has been a believer for any amount of time. There's one trial in particular early on where he wants to stay at a castle called Beautiful. And there's a path that leads to the castle door. So he starts walking down the path to the castle door when he sees 2 lions, one on either side of the path. They are chained, but the chains are long, and Christian is filled fear. He's not sure he can go on.

And the doorkeeper yells out to him from the other side of the lions, "Is your strength so small? Do not fear the lions, for they are chained, and are placed there as a trial of faith, and to discover those who have none. Stay in the middle of the path and no harm shall come to you"

And that's exactly what Christian does. In the middle of the greatest trial he's ever faced, the way through was to stick precisely to middle of the path. Not an inch to right, not an inch to the left.

Bunyan reminds us what the whole Bible tells us: that when the trials are the greatest - when the situation is the most overwhelming - that's when we need to be most holy, most cautious to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

If we do that, we have nothing to fear in any trial.

## 2) True faithfulness Doesn't Forget the Mission 5-6

What is Saul doing? He's hiding just like the rest of the other Israelites. Saul has been initially rejected as king. His family will have no dynasty that will continue to rule once he's gone.

Saul is hanging out with his priest Ahijah. And we're given a little genealogy in **Vs. 3** that basically tells us Ahijah was the great grandson of Eli the priest. Why does that matter? Because Eli and his whole family line was rejected from the priesthood back in chapter 2 (**2:27-36**). We have a rejected king, with his rejected priest hiding from the enemy.

And although Saul was rejected by God he was still king. He was still to be fighting for the country. That's why God put him in that position.

But here we see the rise of Jonathan, and how he is faithful to continue the mission God has given he and his father to defeat the Philistines.

He's going to make a strike on a Philistine garrison. He doesn't tell his father. We don't know if he was disobeying his father, or if he simply didn't tell him because he would be rebuked. All we know is he went on his own. The war was still going, he's a soldier and there's battle to do.

And he takes his armor bearer. In ancient times an armor bearer was basically a sidekick you took into battle with you. He would often carry most of the gear, but more than that when there was a battle going on against a lot of opponents, the main warrior's job was simply to wound the enemy and the armor bearer would come behind and kill the wounded. The armor bearer also helped defend the main warrior in the heat of battle.

So Jonathan takes his armor bearer with him and is going to try to make a raid on this garrison. This little military outpost. The outpost itself is very difficult to get to. We might think it's funny that they name the rocks around the outpost, but they are aptly named. **Read 4**

In the Hebrew, Bozez is "slippery" and Seneh is "thorny." The idea is that the outpost they are trying to attack is extremely difficult to get to. But they set out to take the garrison. They are on mission. They have one job to do: to defeat the Philistines.

Sometimes I think we can get so overwhelmed in life that we forget that there are only really a few things God has called us to do. There might be a lot of good things to do, a lot of good opportunities, a lot of entertaining things. But Jesus gels down the entire Christian life - all that we are responsible for to God - in 2 simple commands. Love God and what? Love neighbor.

Sports are good, I like sports, but that can distract us. Vacation and recreation is good, I like them both, but they can distract us. Hobbies are good, movies can be good, travel can be good, gardening and yard work can be good, But they're only good if we are fulfilling loving God and loving neighbor.

By the way, loving your neighbor includes your spouse and children and parents and family and literal neighbors. It's so easy to fill our life with stuff and be distracted that we forget the mission God has given us in life. Faithfulness remembers our true mission here even when it doesn't seem like the mission will succeed.

### 3) True Faithfulness Doesn't Presume Upon the Lord 6-7

Here's what I love about this little section: Jonathan has this humble "with God all things are possible" attitude. He doesn't say that his faithfulness *will* result in some kind of victory or that God will do anything great. There are people who almost demand that God must bless their efforts.

I've known some well-meaning brothers and sisters in the Lord who make a plan to do some big thing where they think a lot of people will get saved or a lot believers will come and be blessed and then they find some OT promise to Israel and they "claim that promise as theirs" and so God *has* to deliver. And then they don't know what to do when it doesn't happen.

What they've done is assume a promise to someone else always applies to them.

Jonathan here is very humble. "It may be" that the Lord will work for us. But you know what? It may be that he doesn't. And Jonathan's okay with that.

Because I'm usually pretty optimistic sometimes I confuse optimism with faith. Optimism and faith are not the same thing. I like what one guy said, "...there were no grounds for optimism [here.] The circumstances did not stimulate optimism. But this is not optimism. It is faith. Some people are naturally optimistic—they don't know any better. *But faith can arise even when no reason for optimism exists.*" (Davis, D. R. *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (p. 143).

This is genuine faith. Not optimism, not presumption. But a healthy reminder that God can do anything if he so chooses.

Related to that:

### 4) True Faithfulness Looks for Doors of Opportunity 8-11

So faith looks for open doors of opportunity. I used to not like that phrase "open doors;" I always thought it was an overused cliché. That is until I realized it is a favorite expression of the apostle Paul who was moved by the Holy Spirit to say it over and over again. It just means a God-given opportunity for something. That's what Jonathan was actively looking for here: an opportunity.

Now, just a caution in this situation: a lot of times we over-read what's going on in the text. It's easy to think that since Jonathan came up with a scenario that seems a little implausible that maybe we could do the same thing. All of a sudden we're making up crazy scenarios where God may or may not act and we take that as a sign. We shouldn't do that. We look for opportunities but we don't put the Lord to the test.

As much as Jonathan played out this scenario, we need to realize that it wasn't all that ridiculous in nature. This wasn't a million-to-one chance that God would work in this way. They knew the situation. In **Vs. 11** he says "Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves." Remember that the term "Hebrews" in this section usually refers to mercenary fighters. These were people of Hebrew decent but who didn't fight for Israel. They fought for money. They Philistines couldn't tell the difference unless they talked with them. So Jonathan and his armor bearer could just play along until they got an opportunity to pounce on them.

So this was not some outlandish idea, this was actually a very plausible strategy to gain easy access into the garrison that was guarded and difficult to get to.

Sometimes in life we really would like for God to give us miraculous signs to tell us what to do or to do some great thing. Most of the time though, if we're just patient and observant, God gives us a lot more opportunities to serve in faithfulness than we might think.

## 5) True Faithfulness Makes the Most of the Opportunities God Gives Us **12-14**

This is really related to the last, but it's important. If God gives you the opportunity to serve in a way and you take that opportunity, make the most of it!

Jonathan doesn't waste this opportunity. He doesn't spend a lot of time chatting with the Philistines before getting down to business and slaughtering the garrison. He takes out 20 guys who are stationed in about half an acre - that's a little smaller than the church property here.

Now, I'm not suggesting you go and make raids on people in Steven's county slashing them to bits. Israel was commanded by God to take the Promised Land by military force because the people who lived in the land were incredibly wicked. As Christians, we don't have that command.

But what we can do, like Jonathan, is capitalize on the opportunities that God gives us to bring him glory. That's what the Parable of the Talents is all about. God has given every one of us a skill, an ability to serve him in some way, for his Kingdom - go do it.

If you have some kind of ministry that you are involved in: music, kids, helping a people in your neighborhood, talking with co-workers about Jesus, be faithful with those opportunities. If you've asked for God to give you something, make sure you're all in before you ask for more or transition to something else.

## 6) True Faithfulness - no matter how small - Is Noticed by Everyone **15-23**

If you think about Jonathan's initial attack in the larger context, there's a sense in which it's not a massive victory. The Philistines had 3,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, tens of thousands of troops - as many as the sand on the seashore. The 3,000 troops that Saul had gathered between him and Jonathan had mostly abandoned him. They were down to 600 men. And here Jonathan and his armor-bearer kill 20 guys. That's good and all but that's not much of a dent in the enemy.

But the result is bigger than what we initially see. The first result is that the Philistines see this and are thrown into absolute panic. Some of the translations say a "Panic sent by God" and that's very likely the source of the panic. Even their raiders - their strong men - are quaking. It seems as though half of the Philistines are running away and the ones that are staying are slaughtering each other. **Read 20**

So the Philistines have taken notice and are destroying themselves.

Second, Saul and his men - the 600 that were still with him - took notice. **Read 19-20**

They were hiding out thinking about playing the same failed "bring the ark to battle" game that the Israelites played back in chapter 4 when the Philistines stole the Ark. They see this and are rallied back into battle.

The Hebrew mercenaries that were actually fighting for the Philistines see this and switch sides. **Read 21**

Throughout the last couple of chapters we've seen this group called the "Hebrews" that is different than the Israelites. They're called Hebrews because they are the same ethnicity, but they aren't formally part of the Israel. They are wanderers and mercenaries - people who will take money to fight for whoever pays them.

Here, they don't care anymore about payment, they've abandoned the Philistines and are now fighting for Saul and Jonathan. There's no discussion of payment, so they're not mercenaries for Saul. They may have been worried that Saul would kill them like the Philistines but either way they see what's going on and switch sides.

So the enemy Philistines have noticed, Saul's discouraged troops have noticed, the disloyal Hebrew mercenaries have noticed, and also the cowardly Israelites who had runaway have noticed. **Read 22**

Everyone is returning to the battle! Jonathan's faithfulness is noticed. Maybe it's not even seen directly by most of these people, but it's felt and known.

This is something we have to remind ourselves over and over again. True faithfulness is noticed, whether we know it or not.

**1 Tim. 6:25:** So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.

**Matt. 5:16:** Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to you Father who is in heaven.

People will see our good works of faithfulness. Unbelievers see it; some of whom will come to faith because of our good example. Others who will revile us because we are faithful to Jesus.

It's noticed by other Christians, who see us or hear about us doing things for the Kingdom and take courage and desire to serve in a similar way. One of the ways I am often encouraged is by reading Christian biographies. Learning about the lives of people who have been with the Lord for many years. They didn't know books would be written about them and that some middle age guy in Washington state would derive encouragement from their life. But that's happened.

It's noticed by angels and demons. There's a whole spiritual realm that longs to look into the salvation that we have. The Bible seems to make it clear that there are angels that worship alongside of us Sunday mornings. They bow down to the same Christ we bow down to. They see our faithfulness.

Ultimately you know who sees our faithfulness? God. God sees our faithfulness and gets glory from our faithfulness. He knows and takes note.

And, yes, because Jonathan was faithful God worked a huge victory in his situation. And many times that will happen in our lives. God will bless us when we take small steps of faithfulness.

But not always. Not always will our faithfulness be rewarded with instant victory or answered prayer or people praising us for what we've done or God dropping some great blessing in our lap. That's the lie of the prosperity gospel. Do good, be faithful and God will bless us almost instantly. No he won't. Have you ever had seasons where you have been doing everything in your power to be faithful and it seems like no cares, nothing changes, no one notices, not even God?

We want instant reward for faithfulness but Jesus doesn't promise us that. **Look over to Luke 17:7-10.** Sometimes we need to be reminded that our faithfulness is not some sort of favor we do for God. We don't get merit badges for faithfulness. Or brag about what we've done. Look at what Jesus says our attitude toward serving him in every way is. **Read 7-10**

Jonathan wasn't out doing a favor for God by attacking the Philistines. He was doing his duty. In the same way when we faithfully serve the Lord, it's not some favor we do for him. No, we are unworthy servants.

What God does with our faithfulness is up to him. Mom, if God chooses to use your example of faithfulness to save all your children, great. But he may not. Young man, if God chooses to use your faithful hard work to give you financial prosperity in life, great. But he may not. Young lady, if God chooses to use your commitment to purity before marriage to give you all kids you dream about, great. But what? He may not.

Our faithfulness is not a bargaining chip. It's not a favor to God. It's not a deal we make with God to get what we want.

Get this: Our faithfulness is our loving response to God for what he's done in making us his servants. And our faithfulness looks forward to a reward not necessarily in this life, but in the life to come.

And it's that reward and promise that keeps us going, keeps us humble, and keeps us faithful in this life.

**Pray**

