

Transcription of 19ID3319

1 Samuel 14:1-23

"Nothing Can Restrain the Lord"

June 26, 2019

Let's get our Bibles out. We should get goin' because we have communion as well tonight. 1 Samuel 14:1.

As we mentioned to you as we've been going through these books, narrative books - the historical books and the book of Acts - are meant to be learned by putting yourself in the story. God sometimes gives us great amounts of information for just a one- or two-day time; sometimes He skips fifty years. But we have what God gives us to learn from.

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel - fifty-five chapters - only cover 130 years of time, from about 1100 B.C. to 970, from the birth of Samuel until the death of King David.

But we are currently in this portion, having seen Samuel's coming - his sixty years of faithful service; very little impact it seemed to have on the nation - they were still in that judges period, not really walking with God though the LORD had great desires to bless them.

By the time we get to chapter 8, Samuel is an old man. He is in a position where he is old and not seeing very well. The people at that point, in chapter 8, come and ask him to have a king, and it offended God's man. He really didn't want to see them rejecting the LORD as a nation. The LORD assured Samuel that it wasn't him that was the one suffering, that the LORD had suffered at the hands of His people for generations - ever since He had brought them out of Egypt. And He said to Samuel, "Give them what they want, but tell them what it's going to cost them."

In chapters 9 and 10, Saul is chosen by great miracles that he would have had no trouble discerning that this was the LORD's call, that the promises of God and the intentions of God were clear, that Samuel's declarations to him were really the heart of God. He is privately anointed by Samuel (Saul is), and God chose him, His sure hand. And yet when Saul arrives home and his uncle says, "Where've you been?" he doesn't even share all of these things that God had done in his life to call him to be the king. When he was publicly brought forward to be coronated, he was in hiding. When he was finally prayed for and anointed, he went home; not to rule

but to farm and to raise livestock. And even when there was need, though he was surrounded by godly men, he didn't respond.

In chapters 11 and 12, we read about the battle called the battle of Jabesh. It is a place where God's Spirit fell upon Saul, and there is the one time that Saul responds; and he leads the people in a victory over the Ammonites, who were much stronger than the children of Israel were. The people, rather than praising the LORD, though, saw it as a confirmation that their desire to have a king like everyone else was the right call. And so they even began to threaten, "If you didn't want a king, man, you should be put to death. Look what our king has done for us." Samuel gathers the people together at Gilgal for a renewal service of a dedication to the LORD, and it's also kind of his retirement service. And he stands before the people, and he sets them straight, and he says, "Look, you're in victory today because God is for you. And if you'll walk with Him and obey Him, then you and the king will be fine. If you decide to put Him out of your life - to set Him aside - both you and your king won't survive." And Samuel, though he will show up in a couple of more chapters, pretty much disappears from the scene in many ways. But he talked to them in chapter 12 about where their strength lie - remember where your strength lies.

In chapter 13 - see how quickly we're getting here? - it is two years later, and Saul's rule has been for two years. He has gathered an army of three thousand - two thousand of which men he has hand-chosen are with him in a place called Michmash, just north of Jerusalem. A thousand are with his son, Jonathan, at Gibeah; it is a garrison of Philistines. And that was the perennial Israel enemy during this time that Jonathan felt led of the LORD to attack at Geba, a little town kind of in the middle of where he and his dad were; and he had a measure of success. The LORD blessed, as Jonathan was a man who walked with God, and we're going to see that, certainly, tonight. The attack brought a measure of success, and immediately Saul wanted the glory. He started to declare that this victory was all his. He hadn't even played a part in it. He actually called the people together to celebrate, if you will, at Gilgal, where they had made that commitment back to the LORD. And while he was celebrating, the Philistines, who were angry - not only with the attack of Jonathan but also at the braggadocio of Saul - began to gather again; but this time not with a small army but with an overwhelming force designed to retaliate. And so they came with thousands of horsemen and chariots and an innumerable army. Saul had been told by the prophet Samuel that if there was ever a time when he needed God's direction, he should wait and Samuel would come

as a priest to offer the sacrifice and seek God's direction. So Saul waited. He began to watch the people leave. They were afraid. They saw the enemy's intentions. Saul was not much of a leader in that regard. The people began to defect. We read, there, some began to hide in caves along the hillsides and in the countrysides; some actually crossed the Jordan into neighboring countries. Others defected to the enemy's side. And day after day, Saul was losing his army, losing his people. In fact, by the time we get to tonight, Saul's three thousand men have been reduced to six hundred. So, Saul waited for Samuel to come. He felt like Samuel didn't come quickly enough in that week. As a result, Saul sinned with an explanation, which is what we looked at last week. He took the place of a priest; he offered the sacrifices he shouldn't have offered. As he was in the midst of that, Samuel came and confronted him, and he began to just explain why he was doing exactly what God wouldn't want him to do. As a result, the judgment of God was that his dynasty as a king would not last; his son would not follow. The consequences of his actions were severe, but he was kind of left alone.

Well, tonight we come to chapter 14. We're going to look at the first twenty-three verses tonight. Saul is with the people, frightened. We read, as we finished last week, that Israel had no ability to work with iron so that all of the war implements were in the hands of the Philistines; and the Jews actually went to them to get their axes and farm equipment and tools sharpened. There were only two swords in the whole land of Israel: Saul had one, Jonathan had the other. And to make matters worse, this nation was out of touch with God and so was their king. Everything seemed hopeless. Annihilation seemed very possible. There didn't seem to be any way out. And, according to what we continue to read tonight, the people began to defect at an even higher rate. They just didn't stick around. Saul is sitting under a tree with his guys, immobilized; not a man of God, not a leader of the LORD or of His people, not someone to inspire anyone. He is dejected and kind of just out of touch, it seems, while his boy, Jonathan, is able to sneak off without notice to see if God might use him to deliver a nation. It would have been an amazing work of God. But Jonathan was a man of faith. And as such, he was willing to offer himself to the LORD if that's what God wanted to do. Israel had a supernatural God. To Jonathan, that was sufficient. "Let's see if God will work with me or not." And we've entitled the first couple of verses of this chapter, "Nothing Can Restrain the Lord." He is so different from his dad, who kind of just sits by and watches things go by. Here comes one man, and his armorbearer, who has a single eye of faith.

So tonight we want to look at the battle and its ramifications, and then next week we'll see some of the conclusions. But it's an important couple of chapters because these - chapters 14 and 15 - show you Saul in all of his color. By the time we get to chapter 16, God will say to Saul, after his second unwillingness to do His will, "I'm going to just set you aside. I've got another guy picked out." In chapter 16, we'll see David coming to the throne. And rather than three chapters of Saul, we'll get forty chapters of David and the life that he leads before the LORD.

So verse 1 of chapter 14, we read, "Now it happened one day that Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who bore his armor, 'Come, let us go over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side.' But he did not tell his father. And Saul was sitting in the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men." We gathered from last week that the front lines from where Saul was were about four miles away. Jonathan suggests to his armorbearer that they should go see the encampment of the enemy to see what is going on. His dad was lazy, not motivated. Remember, the people wanted a king, and they liked the way Saul looked. Their choice was a big, strong, tough, good-looking guy who was now completely checked out. His son, Jonathan, is a man of great faith, and he wants to see what the LORD will do with him. I love guys like this. Right? Who see beyond what your eyes can see to what God can do. The people had longed for a king like other nations to lead them into battle, into victory. Boy, they'd chosen the wrong guy! And even when God said to Saul, "I will use you to deliver My people," he really didn't want to be used. And so the only time we find Saul fighting is when there is honor to be found. He has a great lack of love for the LORD, he has a tremendous lack of concern for the people; no spiritual vision whatsoever, not seeking God. If you're surrounded by your enemy, and you're about to be annihilated, this might be a good time to get on your knees. But he doesn't. So maybe it was God's judgment from the previous chapter that said, "You're only gonna be a one-term guy." But whatever the cause is, he was very despondent. And yet we read, here in chapter 14, while that was happening, it was this young man, Jonathan, who wanted to go out and see if God had a plan. His dad was very indecisive, but Jonathan was not.

As we watch Jonathan, I want you to put yourself in his shoes for a minute because so often God puts us in a position where outwardly we don't look like we have much hope. I don't know if you've been looking at the world lately, but, man, things are gettin' worse. The only good thing about that is I just figure with it getting worse and worse, the Lord is coming sooner and sooner. But, we need to have a view that

is not moved by circumstance or numbers or public opinion or even their support. We serve a God who's great. He is more than capable. And, like Jonathan, there come times when we have to risk to serve Him; not recklessly so but with determination to say, "Lord, what do You want to do?" and look beyond the hopelessness of the situation to the power of God.

We read, in verse 3, that "Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD's priest in Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. But the people did not know that Jonathan had gone." The first part of that verse is just to say in the camp with Saul was the high priest. He was a great grandson of Eli. He was wearing the ephod which, according to Leviticus 8, contained the Urim and the Thummim - these rocks of colors that God would use in the Old Testament as the priest would seek the LORD, and he would reach in, and through them God would communicate His will. It was an act of faith. It needed to be because it always was. But yet it was a way that God, in the Old Testament, communicated to His people. So David would often come to the priest to seek God's will, and when he came, when there were plots against him, he would say, "Bring me the ephod," and he would say to Abiathar, the priest at the time, "Are they going to come and attack us? Will Saul be told that I'm hiding here?" And the LORD would guide David because it was an access point for the king as he was leading the people to God and to God's will. So verse 3 just says this: with Saul was the ability and the availability of the priest to seek the LORD for the people and know what to do. In other words, God was available to Saul. The picture here, though, is that Saul is not seeking the LORD: he's not seeking the LORD as the battle looked closer, as the danger grew, as the people ran. Even though it was available to him in the camp, he is so disengaged, not only does he not seek God, he doesn't even know his son is gone; his son, who is kind of in charge of the army with him. He doesn't even know for hours at a time where his own son is. But how tragic when God is available and we're not looking for Him, even in the worst of times. How foolish is this? What a totally weak leader Saul is, and had it always been like that. But he has an awesome son. And unlike Eli's sons or, for that matter, Samuel's sons, here's a young man who's unselfish and warm-hearted and genuine in faith; and he's a guy that you would just really admire, I think. And he and David will become the best of friends.

Well we read, in verse 4, "Between the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp rock on one side and a sharp rock on the other side. And the name of one was Bozez, and the name of the other

Seneh. The front of one faced northward opposite Michmash, and the other southward opposite Gibeah." So we're kind of given the geographical, if you will, setting of Jonathan's challenge outside of the town where Saul was sitting there in Gibeah. There was a ravine, some precipitous cliffs - peaks on both sides; in fact, so notable they were given names. The one, Seneh, means "toothy," faced to the south. The one facing north, Bozez, means "to shine." So we gather that the Philistines were on one side of the gorge, with lookouts on the peaks. Jonathan, with his armorbearer, was on the other side of the ravine, spying out the enemy's position. So Jonathan's on the move. God can move when you're moving. Right? If you're sittin', if you're parked, if you're docked, hard to steer. Can't steer a car..... we used to let the kids drive when the ignition was off because they can't go anywhere. So neither can we if we're not moving. So Jonathan's moving. He's got no answers, he doesn't know. There's nothing here where, "Well, the LORD told me to go." He's just going to see what God might want to do.

In fact, in verse 6, "Then Jonathan," after seeing the layout, "said to the young man who bore his armor, 'Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be' " - here's his motivation - " 'that the LORD will work for us.' " And here's his theory, " 'For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few.' " Isn't that awesome? I hope that verse is underlined in your Bible. He was correct about a couple of things. Number one - his enemies were the "uncircumcised." Now that's just a biblical definition that says these are guys who had no covenant relationship with God at all. And so Jonathan felt like when he came to battles, that he is God's son; as God's child, he had a distinct advantage over those who refused to follow the LORD at all. His motivation was, "They don't really belong in the land that God has given to us." He believed God could deliver them from the enemy. He even went so far as to believe, "He could just use me." Now I don't know if you could stand in his shoes and go, "That's exactly what I'd have said." I mean, there were these armed-to-the-teeth with iron weapons and swords, guys just breathing destruction. And then there's you, with one sword and one guy who's gonna hold the shield in case someone wants to hit you. I don't know if you'd come away saying, "Well, maybe the Lord'll use me because he's uncircumcised, he's in the wrong place, and God is able to work. Nothing can restrain Him." He doesn't need a majority. He has a great understanding of God's heart, and therefore he is willing to rely on His power. You plus the Lord, that's a majority. Do you agree with that? You with the Lord. I don't care who's in your way. You and the Lord = perfect. And what a good thing to learn, that, as God's people, there's nothing in the world that can restrain the Lord from doing what God

wants and to do it through your life. Since the time of Abraham - and you have a Bible - the significant factor of victory for God's people, in all kinds of wars and in all kinds of situations, was never the size of their army. Ever. It isn't always mentioned. If it's mentioned, it's always in the negative; they don't have near enough people. But it is only mentioned that it is their relationship with God and their reliance upon Him that brings them victory. Generation after generation. I know so often we find, even in churches, they offer seminars, "Well, this is a great strategy," and they tell you things to do, but they never just say this, "Just trust God." God establishes. God opens doors that no man can close. And for me, the great encouragement always is - as hard as things can look sometimes, God is bigger than all of this. And if He's with me, who can be against me? (Romans 8:31b). Know that. Know that tonight. Your boss is not as bad as the Lord, man. You know, if God wants to step in, He can overcome whatever it is - even tonight - that you're facing. But the people didn't see it that way. They'd chosen Saul - big, strong, muscular guy to defend them. But here's the real courageous guy - Jonathan, his son, who is now standing, looking up to a huge bunch of tough army folks who have lived and died fighting for generations. And all he has to cling to is his relationship with God and his understanding of who God is. That, for him, was enough. Even though there was great present danger, there seemed to be an absence of fear because he saw the glory of God with him. I'll tell you what - courage, if you add it to godliness, is a great asset. Saul had some tremendous natural courage. He was a tough guy. But without God, he sits frozen under a tree in despair, because his human strength will fail him.

So, I want to learn from Jonathan's venture of faith, for his actions were not undertaken by some special word from the LORD. I want you to get that. Right? You read a lot in the Bible, "Oh, and the LORD gave him a vision or a dream, and he woke up, and he went and did something." Jonathan had none of that. He was just sittin', ready to be destroyed with everyone else, when he said, "Let's go see what God might do." That's what motivated him. And I like the fact that sometimes you just have to act based on what you know without necessarily saying, "Well, the Lord spoke to me." Well, maybe He did, maybe He didn't. But for Jonathan, it was just a matter if he knew God's heart, "Let's see what He wants to do. I'm willing to do something if the LORD is willing to go with me." It was a venture of faith based on a maybe. "Maybe the LORD will work for us." But it was driven by a heart that knew the LORD and wanted to see the LORD do something in that situation. Don't you long to be that kind of person? Where you just.....it's so easy to get discouraged. Everything's, especially against the church. Man, we are at the

bottom of the totem pole, a lot of time, in the world these days. Right? You just.....you can't get it right as far as the world is concerned. But Jonathan wants to step out in faith. He wants to see what God will do. He'll test the water. He's unafraid of the challenge. He's willing to risk whatever it takes. He's ready to go. He's not playing it safe. He's not resistant. "Let's go." He's not worried about his reputation. He only wants God to show him what to do because up the hill and across the ravine and four miles away sits God's nation and a dad that just isn't going to do a thing about it. "Let's see what God will do." I love that whole concept, don't you? And it seems to me.....and we heard a lot of testimonies this week in New Jersey and in New York about the growth of the churches there and the fellowships that were there. And it is amazing how often it's the one guy that just goes, "Well, I didn't think it'd work, but we just trusted the Lord, and look what God did!" The church I taught at in Poughkeepsie this week - large church pastored by a guy that was a prison guard at Rikers for thirty years. He's as tough as nails. He looked like Saul, I'm sure. (Laughing) He's just big, and he's got brothers that are big, and they're just a bunch of New Jersey big dudes. And now the Lord's just pouring out His Spirit. He just wanted to see what God might do.

I remember, years ago, being at Calvary Costa Mesa when Monday night Greg (Laurie) was teaching the Bible study there in the church, and it began to fill up on Monday nights of all things. And Chuck, at one of our pastors' meetings, just said, "Maybe the Lord wants to do more than Monday nights with this thing. Let's see what God will do." And they rented the Irvine outdoor auditorium there for a while, and they moved it around, and eventually it became what we know today as the Harvest Crusades all over the country. But it was just kind of like, "Let's just see what God'll do." And I remember Chuck put his money where his mouth was; he funded the thing for years. He just believed in what the Lord....the Lord kept doing what God was doing. Jonathan was tired of just sitting and doing nothing. And so Israel's in difficult straits. He's willing to single-handedly take on a garrison. This is the nuttiest idea ever. Right? This is the craziest idea ever. But, "If the LORD goes with me".....and, after all, if you go back to chapter 13:3, it had been Jonathan's first step out in the war area that had caused all of this blowback to begin with. This is why the enemy was now gathering in such large numbers. But I like Jonathan a lot. I remember reading of Paul, and we read that he "didn't confer with flesh and blood" (Galatians 1:16). He didn't go to get a lot of counsel. He just personally went to the Lord. And don't you want to have that kind of conviction? What does it say, there in Daniel 11 that "the people who know the LORD shall be strong, and they will carry out great exploits." Daniel 11:32. You

should have that verse in mind as well. God can do great things in your life. If you're just looking at you, I can see how you could be disappointed. Or if you're looking at us, I can see how you'd give up. But if you look at the Lord, how can you give up? God has great things he wants to do. There's a world that needs to be reached. He wants to use us! What an amazing idea. What an amazing thought.

So Jonathan is an amazing guy to me. Just as I watch him. Jesus said to His disciples, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). I don't think.....the faith guys have butchered that to try to convince you to say, "Well, if you believe enough, you can get rich and healthy," and they carry it to their own benefit. But just think of the promise of, hey, if you can trust the Lord, nothing limits Him. It's exactly what Jonathan says here. There's nothing that can hold back what God would want to do in your life - whether you're looking for a better job or a ministry opportunity or praying about going to the mission field or hunting for a spouse. Jonathan is not interested in what God could do because that would be everything, anything. His interest is in what God might do. In other words, "Let's go and see." And I love the fact that his armorbearer, here, is a product of hanging around with a godly man. Because he will say to Jonathan, "Hey, whatever you want to do, man, I'm in." And I might have said, "You're nuts. I'm out. Here, you carry your shield. You're a knucklehead anyway. You're gonna fall down and hit your head. It's the hardest part of you. You won't need a hat." But he goes along. He has the same view of God that the one he's serving with does. Thank God He uses one man of great faith. It was Moody who said in his (well, he wrote it more than once), "The world has yet to see what God can do through the life of one man totally surrendered to Him," and then he said, "I want to be that guy. I want to be that guy." Jonathan would have liked Moody, and I know Moody liked Jonathan. He had good reasons for his faith. It's not just blind faith - put your hands over your eyes, and jump off the cliff. I mean, he knew the heart of God. He knew the ways of the LORD. He was basing what he was going to do based on foundational truths that he had learned. He knew of God's power. He knew of the weakness of the Philistines' position with God. He had reasonable faith. But, look, reasonable faith could make you do some unreasonable things. This is unreasonable. Put yourself in that ravine - with one guy and a sword, and more than a thousand guys breathing over the edge with blood in their teeth and murder in their minds. Could you stand here? He concluded God could win "by many or by few." He'd make all the difference. He didn't believe that God was limited by the capacity of the vessels He would use. And I think that's perfect. Don't you? God is not limited by you. But you can limit God. Yet He's not limited

by you. "Well, I don't have what it takes. I don't know what to say. I don't have.....I don't understand." It's, yeah, and.....? "Well, I don't know if we should go." Well, that'd be a good argument if God was handicapped by you. But He's not. He's just looking for hearts that are turned to Him. "The eyes of the LORD go to and fro through the whole earth" (2 Chronicles 16:9). That's all He's looking for. If God wants to work, He's not limited by not having an entire army. In fact, the word "no restraint" literally means nothing holds God back. What can stop the LORD?

Here's the problem for us sometimes in our Christian lives. We look at the problem, and it gets bigger; and the longer we look at it, our God gets smaller. And it isn't long before our God is way too small for the big problem. And so it's blown out of proportion, and our view of God and our hope in Him kind of diminishes over time. And so we fail to factor in the greatness of God. And, because of that, we don't see the solution, or we don't declare, with Jonathan, "Let's see what God'll do. Let's see what God'll do." We give up before we ever go to see what God will do. We sit with Saul under the tree. That's more our speed. But if you factor in the Lord, then you can't talk about difficulty. If God be for us, if God be for us (Romans 8:31b).

So Jonathan just wants to know, "Is God for us?" He's not stupid. He's not assuming God is going to, today, give him victory. But, "What if He wants to, and I miss this?" So he goes to find out. I want to be that guy. There are plenty of circumstances, by the way, in Scripture (and encouragements to us) of single or few who produced great results facing inequitable circumstances. I mean, if you go to 2 Chronicles 14, there is a fellow named King Asa there who is set with the daunting challenge of one million Ethiopians coming to destroy him. And, to be honest with you, the nation with him goes, "We're toast." I'm not even sure that's the original Hebrew, "We're toast." That's pretty much what they said. And when Asa goes to pray, he says to the LORD, "LORD, you can save by many or by few. You don't need horsemen. We don't need chariots. We've relied on You. Your eyes are looking to show Yourself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal to You. Help us! You can handle this. And we're gonna go fight knowing that You're gonna help." And they went out to fight. It's kind of an issue of seeing the LORD as opposed to seeing the problem. I love that. "So let's go see." Isn't that a great idea? You have that kind of attitude? "Let's see what God'll do with us today. Let's see if God'll use me to share with them. Let's see if God'll use me to go there. Let's see if the Lord'll open a door." How often do you have these ventures of faith

where God's moving your heart, but you don't know if it's going to work out or not? And sometimes it doesn't, and sometimes it does. But how good to be out there.

"So his armorbearer," in verse 7, "said to him, 'Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart.' " See, fellowship in faith is contagious, isn't it? I always tell people, "Be careful who you hang around with. Look closely to your friends because that's you." I would rather have one friend like Jonathan than a hundred powerful friends like Saul. Some have friends who are known for their divisiveness and lack of commitment and gossip. And that's their friends. Well, that's you. And I love the fact that the only words out of the armorbearer's mouth are, "Let's do what the LORD has put on your heart." Don't you want friends like that? Folks who encourage your faith, bring you forward. You don't want reporters; you want newsmakers, don't you? You don't want people making, "Oh, things are bad." No. You want people to make a difference. I thought about the story in the Old Testament - and we'll get to it eventually - of the woman in debt who had lost both of her boys to slavery because of her debt (2 Kings 4). And she lamented to Elisha, "I only have one bottle of oil left, and then that's it. We're gonna be done, and we're gonna die." And Elisha told her to go to the neighbor's and borrow vessels. He said, "Borrow as many as you can. Go home and close the door, and pour out from that one jar of oil into the empty ones." And she did. And she poured, and eventually all of the bottles were full, and the oil stopped running out of this one vessel. And he said, "Now take the oil and sell it to pay your debt." And then he said, "What would have happened if you'd have gathered more vessels?" In other words, we can always limit God by our inability to trust Him. But we can never put ourselves so far out there that God can't meet the expectation. There's another story - it's in 2 Kings 13 (we'll actually get that a little later) of a fellow named Joash, who comes to Elisha when Elisha is dying. And he said, "I'm a little worried that you're gonna leave me alone. We're fighting these Assyrians, and I think we're gonna be destroyed." And it is Elisha who said, from his death bed, "Look, take your bow and your arrows, and put your hand on the bow, and then shoot them out the east window." And so he did. And Elisha said, "Shoot again, and the LORD's arrows will go before you." He said, "And then take these remaining arrows, and strike the ground as you would strike the enemy." And he hit the ground three times, and he stopped. And Elisha, already sick to death, got angry and said, "You know, if you'd have hit the ground five or six or more times, you could have defeated the enemy completely! But you stopped at three. So now the LORD is only going to be able to give you a partial victory." But the whole thing was: it the attitude of faith and the commitment to God being able to do it. And so

you find that pressing on in the Spirit. We need men and women like this. And here's his armorbearer; he's just on the same page.

"Then Jonathan said," in verse 8 to him, " 'Very well, let us cross over to these men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say thus to us, "Wait until we come to you," then we will stand still in our place and not go up to them. But if they say thus, "Come up to us," then we will go up. For the LORD has delivered them into our hand, and this will be a sign to us.' " So now look, Jonathan isn't foolhardy. He wants to know if God's in it or not. He wants to test the water. He allows the possibility that God might not want to do a thing. So he tests his inspiration with mature wisdom: no impulse here, no foolish behavior. He wants to confirm God's Word. Is there an open door here? He wants God's counsel. He's looking for God's response. He's not a sign-seeker in the bad sense; he's just seeking the direction of God in a good sense. He wants to be prudent and careful. So he says this, "If the enemy is aggressive, 'Stay right there, man, we're comin' down to you,' we're bailin'. If they're cocky and self-assured, and they're sitting up there, 'Yeah, just come up here, we'll show you a thing or two,' we'll know that God is with us because He blesses those who humble themselves."

And so the moment of truth, verse 11, "So both of them showed themselves" (there in the valley) "to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, 'Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden.' Then the men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armorbearer, and said, 'Come up to us, and we will show you something.' Jonathan said," "Bam!" No. That's not what he said. (Laughing) " 'Come up after me, for the LORD has delivered them into the hand' " (not of Jonathan) " 'of Israel.' " Right? The challenge and then the assurance of faith, "Thank You, LORD, for an open door." Jonathan didn't see himself as doing this for himself. He saw himself as representing Israel, God's people. "God has delivered them into Israel's hand."

"And Jonathan," verse 13, "climbed up on his hands and knees with his armorbearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan. And as he came after him, his armorbearer killed them. That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armorbearer made was about twenty men within about half an acre of land." So, from what we gather, both prolific rock climbers; their bows and all put away, climbing vertically. The defense for the people was the steepness and the inaccessibility of the ridge. But they had great motivation. And so we're not told how long it took, but they got up there. And when they did, they caught the people

by surprise; and before they could blink, twenty of them were dead. And the alarm sounds, and the troops began to scurry, believing they were under siege.

We read, in verse 15, "And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and the raiders also trembled; and the earth quaked, so that it was a very great trembling." I love how the LORD then steps in. He enters the fray. He puts His foot down, so to speak. He shakes the earth. Jonathan and the armorbearer had gotten twenty early on. Now the LORD was about to get thousands more. And the commotion and the noise began to draw the attention of Saul's watchmen because faith in action will even be seen by the unfaithful, so often, who are sitting by and doing nothing.

We read, in verse 16, "Now the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin" (four miles away, mind you) "looked, and there was the multitude, melting away; and they went here and there." In other words, the troops were running everywhere. "Then Saul said to the people who were with him, 'Now call the roll and see who has gone from us.' And when they had called the roll, surprisingly," (I don't know why) "Jonathan and his armorbearer were not there." Can you imagine sitting with Saul, disappointed, sure we were gonna get killed, the enemy comes running in every direction, and no one's chasing them. They're just running! Large groups of foot soldiers, chariots leaving en masse, Saul unaware of his own troop movements, doesn't even know who's gone, finally figures out it's that dumb kid of his, again, who caused this problem to begin with.

Verse 18, "And Saul said to Ahijah," (the high priest) " 'Bring the ark of God here' (for at that time the ark of God was with the children of Israel). Now it happened, while Saul talked to the priest, that the noise which was in the camp of the Philistines continued to increase; so Saul said to the priest, 'Withdraw your hand.' " Now I don't want you to misread this. Saul is not looking to seek God here. He never uses the ark for that purpose. He just wants to summon the priest and the ephod to find out what might be going on. He just wants information. He doesn't want God's direction. You don't find that with Saul. He's inquisitive, and we'll learn that in verse 19 because Saul, he's in a hurry. Things sound like they're getting out of hand. He hasn't got enough patience to just simply wait upon the LORD, so he says to the priest, "Nevermind. Don't. Pull your hand out of the ephod, where you're going to reach in there and see what God might say." He has no time to wait on the LORD. "We gotta go." He should have been seekin' the LORD all along.

Jonathan, by faith, had now won the victory before Saul could even decide what to do.

So we read, in verse 20, "Then Saul and all the people who were with him assembled, and they went to the battle; and indeed every man's sword was against his neighbor, and there was very great confusion." Remember, Israel didn't have swords. So these folks were killing each other. Verse 21, "Moreover the Hebrews who were with the Philistines before that time, who went up with them into the camp from the surrounding country, they also joined the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. Likewise all the men of Israel who had hidden in the mountains of Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, they also followed hard after them in the battle. So the LORD saved Israel that day, and the battle shifted to Beth Aven." Saul goes to join his son in the work. But, look, he's already missed it! This is after the fact. It's easy to show up after a work of God is established and go, "Aren't we great?!" Where were you when we had nothing? When we didn't know what God was gonna do?

So God goes to work. He shakes the earth. The enemy's now destroying themselves. And look what's happening, verse 21: the traitors become traitors again, and they go back to Israel. Those who were AWOL and hiding find new courage. The LORD begins to rout the Philistines westward to Beth Aven. By the end of the day (verse 31, which we won't get to tonight), they pushed them all the way back to Aijalon, which is about six miles back into their own territory. They were pushed out of the land. So the LORD saves the nation that day - through one guy (and his armorbearer) who is willing to join forces with God by faith, one man living out, "If God be for us." I think you've got to go back and circle, in verse 6, the words, "nothing restrains the LORD." It's one of those very important verses that you have to.....it's kind of a principle of God.

Maybe tonight you find yourself in church, and there are some problems in your life that seem to be greater than you. Maybe you are addicted to drinking or drugs. Whatever it might be....you've tried the programs, they're not workin' for you, the cures don't seem to help. You're resigned to living without victory. What if God wants to do something? What if the Lord would step in? You feel your sin is too great to be saved. Satan would convince you God doesn't forgive. God has a different program. Maybe you're discouraged in your ministry. Maybe your faith has let you down. Maybe your zeal is gone. What if God.....? God isn't restrained. No matter what the issue is, the power of God is sufficient to work in your life.

Isn't He? He's more than able. No restraint on His part. Would that there were no restraint of faith on our part. He's available. He's willing.

Here, the people of God are oppressed. The enemy is entrenched. The challenges seem insurmountable. The leadership is questionable. And there are two guys walking with God. In the midst of thousands. I wouldn't get too hopeless. "Well, the church....." You just need a couple of good guys, girls. A couple of faithful folks. There's a great verse in Deuteronomy 32:30, where the LORD's speaking to Moses, talking to them about, "How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had surrendered them?" "Five of you," Leviticus 26:8, "shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you" because the LORD is with you, constantly.

Don't be too discouraged. You're not a minority. Don't take the old, "Well, I'm a minority" (Pastor Jack speaks in a whining tone) outlook. We might be, except the Lord is a majority. I'm so glad He is.

So, step out in faith. Let's see if God might work with you today because you can miss out a lot if you sit with Saul, under the tree. Hey, there're six hundred people there. You'll find a lot of company there. There's only you and another guy in the ravine making yourself known to the enemy. But deliver us, LORD. Because we don't want to be like Saul, do we? We want to be like Jonathan. And I hope that's your desire tonight.

We're going to have communion tonight. Here's where we find life. You know that? Where Jesus brings us to that place of reminding us He purchased us. He saved us. We're delivered from our flesh and from our weaknesses, and the Lord moves in, and He makes His home in our life. And we can be like Jonathan. We can defeat the enemy simply by trusting God, knowing His Word. Jonathan was moved with a "maybe" based on an understanding of who God is. You can be moved every day by that same truth. In fact, you probably know a lot more about God than Jonathan did because you have all the.....look at all these pages he didn't have (Pastor Jack thumbs through the Bible). You've got all of 'em.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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