

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Samuel 14. And we're only going to finish one chapter, so we're going to start at verse 24 and go to the end of the chapter.

Two weeks ago, we reminded you - and I try to remind you every week because I think it's vital when you're studying your Bible - that narrative books of the Bible are meant to teach you by placing you in the story. You get bits and pieces. You might want to say to the LORD, "I'd like to know what happened to this guy or what happened next or where did he go?" and God doesn't see fit to fill in all the blanks. But you aren't left without everything that you need to know Him better. And so, as we go through the historical books that we're doing now in the Old Testament (just like the book of Acts), those are narrative books; not so much every statement a theological one but just a report - it's kind of like reading a story. And so you place yourself where you can in the story. You learn from what God does give you rather than, "Gosh, He didn't tell us this or He didn't tell us that." Well, then you don't know. But go with what you know and what God has given to us.

So, two weeks ago, we started in chapter 13 to look at God's narrative report of forty years of Saul's reign, if you will, as the first king of Israel. In his third year of being the king, he did what God warned the people he would do: he conscripted an army; took three thousand men from their homes, from their families, from their workforce; took two thousand of them with himself. He stayed in a place called Michmash, which is just a few miles north of Jerusalem. A thousand of them he left with his son, Jonathan, at a city a couple of miles, actually, closer to Jerusalem. Saul's son was a godly young man. We're gonna see more of him as we go forward. But the big enemy against Israel at the time was the Philistines. They were powerful. History would bear record they were brutal. Because Jonathan cared for God's people, he took them on as they were attacking the city of Geba, which is kind of in the middle, where Saul and Jonathan were encamped with their armies. The attack that Jonathan took on, even though he was greatly outnumbered and outarmed, had a certain measure of victory, and it brought some relief to the nation. Saul, though, sitting a few miles to the north, blew the trumpet and tried to declare that he had brought victory; he hadn't done a thing. He was a guy that loved to get honor, had played no part in the victory at all. He called people to go to the East to Gilgal, which was a place where God had really

met with the people when they came into the land, and he called them there to celebrate what Saul had done - which was nothing. As a result, the Philistines were furious. Not only had they gotten beat by Jonathan - which was bad enough - but Saul now was broadcasting his big victory that he wasn't a part of, and the result was that this Philistine army began to gather to retaliate. (You can read all of this in chapter 13.) Thousands of chariots, horsemen and an innumerable amount of foot soldiers; and it looked bad. What Jonathan did really brought to bear these enemies of Israel, but what Saul did seemed to make it much, much worse.

Well, the prophet at the time, Samuel - old guy by now - had told Saul when he anointed him to be king that if he ever needed God's direction, "Meet with me at Gilgal. I'll offer the sacrifices that will enable us to ask the LORD for direction. And so, as the priest, I'll do that for you." Okay, fine. The problem was - as these Philistine armies were being gathered, the people began to be frightened, big time. So, as you read through chapter 13, you find that folks began to hide in the caves and the hillsides. Some of them crossed the Jordan River and went into neighboring countries. Still others just changed coats; they put on somebody else's hat - they joined the enemy. And Samuel didn't come within the prescribed time, or he came towards the end of that seven-day period. Saul, in the midst of that, seeing the people flee from him, decided he would take the role on as the priest; go in and offer sacrifice - which God wouldn't allow; was not a man of faith, was a man of selfish behavior - drive his own kind of life; and, in the midst of offering the sacrifices, Samuel did show up and said, "What're you doin', Saul?" and Saul basically said, "I've sinned with an explanation. The people are leaving, the pressure's getting more. I need some help. You weren't here so I went ahead and did what I thought we needed to do to get God's blessing." To Saul it was just a religious ritual; it wasn't a relationship with God at all.

As a result, God said through the prophet, "You are not going to stay king in your future generations. Your son won't be king, and his son won't be king. This is going to be a one-term dynasty," if you will, lack thereof.

Well, then, as Samuel did offer the sacrifices to the LORD, Saul didn't stick around to find out what God might want. He went home. He went from Gilgal back to Michmash; took only six hundred guys with him. He had two thousand before he started; already fourteen hundred of them had left. Everybody was terrified. At the end of chapter 13, we're told that one of the reasons they were frightened - besides everything else - is that the Philistines had cornered the iron market.

Israel had no ability to do that at all yet. So they had no weapons; they fought with farm implements, if you will. There were only two swords in the whole land; one belonged to Saul, one belonged to Jonathan. And so the Jews still relied upon the Philistines just to sharpen their axes and all. But the rest of the people, like I said, would have to fight with goads or sharpened sticks. To make matters worse - and I'm just kind of running us up to where we're at - the Philistine army had recently deployed in three different directions. So, pretty much, Israel was surrounded - surrounded by mean, armed-to-the-teeth, angry and ready-to-get-even army of those who hated God's people; and in the middle of them - Israel, a people that are out of touch with God, that are being led by a man who has no idea who God is. And the conclusion for everyone was, "This is probably it. This is probably the end of the line." Outwardly, it appeared hopeless. They would be annihilated. There was no way out.

And, as you read, you find that most of the people in Israel felt that way. The defection rate was going up day by day. Saul was still sitting in Gibeah with his six hundred men, under a pomegranate tree. He had given up. "Well, this is it. This is our last. We might as well just eat, drink and be merry" kind of thing. "Tomorrow we're gonna go down."

Well, that leaves us with Jonathan, a young man who believed in God and the God that he served. He was out with his armorbearer, just the two of them; had snuck out of the camp without notice. And Jonathan basically talked to himself and to his armorbearer, and said, "I wonder if God could use us to get us out of this situation because He can save by many or by few. And we could go fight that garrison over there. Maybe the LORD would be into that. Let's just see." And it was a maybe. He just wanted to see if maybe. "If so, God, I'll do it. I'll do whatever You want." Made himself available.

In the process, they came up with a solution that they said, "Look, if we make ourselves known to those guys up on the steep cliffs and they say to us, 'You stay there, we'll come down there and show you a thing or two,' then we'll see they're ambitious and they're driven, and so maybe it's not the time for us, and we'll get out of here. But if they're cocky, and they sit back, 'Yeah, well you get up here, man, we'll show you what's up,' then we'll know the LORD's with us." And they did and that's what the guys said, and Jonathan and his armorbearer, who shared, really, the same faith that Jonathan had as well, made themselves instruments to a supernatural God who Jonathan just saw as sufficient; and He led him and his

armorbearer into battle. They killed twenty people, and when they came over the top of the mountain, God stepped in and put His foot down; there was a big earthquake. And then the Philistines began to kill each other, in panic, and began to run in every direction. Which is where we kind of left the battle last week because four miles away from the front was Saul, sittin' around. And Jonathan was walkin' in faith and brought the battle to the enemy. "Nothing restrains the LORD, not by many or by few." And so He went before them.

Well, Saul's men - his army - saw a bunch of Philistines running in all directions. Nobody was chasing them. And, "Hey, look at this!" And Saul said, "I wonder who's out of the camp." Well guess what? It was his boy again who was always out there serving. He asked the priest, "Would you bring me the place of worship? Would you bring me direction from the LORD?" And, as the priest prepared to seek God, Saul couldn't wait. "No. Nevermind. I'll go fight without knowing God's will." And he ended up going out and fighting with his son. By the end of the day, Israel had pushed the Philistines out of their territory six miles away from where they started. Well, that's where we stopped last week, in chapter 14:23, "So the LORD saved Israel that day, and the battle shifted to Beth Aven." So, last week it was Jonathan and his faith that was the focus. Right? We should have the desire to have the LORD do with us whatever He wants. Even the most amazing things God is capable of if you're willing. And I think that's usually where we lose in the transaction; we stop short of trusting He could or He will.

Well, tonight, in the rest of this chapter, we turn from Jonathan and his faith to Saul and his flesh. And we quickly learn how much we can hinder God's work if we try to run the show without His help or support or, like Saul, try to take the lead without being led ourselves. And that's really the sad story of Saul. The Bible says, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." That's in the first chapter of the book of James (1:8). And you can see the comparison here. Saul and his son: one has faith, and one has victory; one sees God best, the other is a devastating fool who brings destruction to everyone he sees. He's a religious guy that's completely losing his mind. God is able to use one of the mightily; the other, all He can do is set him aside. And yet, throughout this picture - and I'm trying to review quickly for you - through all of these years, God continues to give Saul more chances. Even though he keeps losing a little bit on the front end, he just never wants to learn it and finally turn back to the LORD. And by the time we get to chapter 15 next week, he'll have run his course, and the mercy of God will have run out for Saul. And that'll be it. But understand, we read through chapters - it's

forty years, roughly of time, or at least thirty-three years. It goes by fast. These are just the first few years, but they defined his life. God has very little to say about Saul after those first three years until nearly to the end, when he starts to affect David's life.

So, verse 24 says this, "And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.' So none of the people tasted food." Now, we're told about this oath that Saul impressed upon the people before they headed out to battle. We can only assume that this vow was made sometime between them seeing that the Philistines were running and the time that Saul said, "Let's go to the battle." So at some point in there, in the day after the fight had begun, Saul speaks up like a big shot, and he says, "Nobody eats until I've been avenged of my enemies." Now understand. Until Jonathan went and did anything, Mr. I-want-to-be-avenged-of-my-enemies was sitting under a pomegranate tree, giving up hope, having lost 70 or 80% of his support and having defied the LORD and taking the place of a priest. This guy is an interesting guy. I don't know if you'd really like him. I don't like him, reading about him. But let's just say it this way: in any case, he focused again on himself, "I want to be honored. I want to get my vengeance. I want to be known as the king who brought these things to pass." And it says that the people that he oversaw were "distressed" because of it. In other words, rather than serving the folks, he had just added to their misery, but they hadn't been able to eat all day. Whatever Saul had said to them, it was done without divine direction because he wouldn't wait to hear from God. He wasn't concerned with what the LORD wanted or the glory of God. He just wanted glory for himself. That's Saul. So unlike Jonathan who kept saying, "Well let's see what the LORD will do," and "the LORD gave us victory," and "the LORD did this." He's just the opposite of his father.

But notice that it is a picture of Saul, again, who loves to blow the trumpet (chapter 13:3). And notice, again, it's Jonathan who takes the step of faith, and Saul comes along - way too late - to get the glory. Can you imagine saying to your people, when you're routing the enemy that literally has you cornered, and you think this is it, "All right, nobody eats until we wipe them out"? Wouldn't you say, "Eat, and let's go fight, you're gonna need your energy"? But that's not his interest. His interest is himself. So he shows up late. He's unwilling to wait for God's direction through the priest. He has no act of faith. He rules simply by his power. People were afraid of him. He's not interested in God's glory, the protection of the

people, or even the leadership to the nation. This is a foolish and rash oath that Saul asked the people to make - which hurts them, which keeps them from full victory. In fact, when we get to the end of the chapter, had they not done this - and just eaten - they could have wiped out their enemy once and for all. Instead, by the time you get to the end of the chapter, you'll read in verse 52 that this fierce war between Israel and the Philistines would continue through the whole life of Saul. He could have just wiped it out, but self and glory put an end to what God might have wanted to do in their lives had he just trusted the LORD.

So this vow, first of all, it distresses the people. We'll read in a minute that it almost cost Jonathan his life. It certainly caused Saul further public humiliation. But here's a guy who's religious, loves his outbursts, is a real selfish guy, and he just loves the flesh. So he speaks quickly, he makes decisions. What is that proverb that says..... "A man that is hasty with his words, there's more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 29:20). So he just shoots his mouth off in the midst of God winning a battle with two guys. Just shoots off his mouth. Won't even wait to hear from the LORD. The Bible is filled with examples of people who foolishly speak with their mouth before they hear from God. And it's usually a pretty good indicator of being away from the LORD. You remember Jephthah, maybe, when he was fighting the Ammonites (there in Judges 11) that he made a vow and said to the LORD, "If you give me victory, whatever comes out of my house when I get home, I'll sacrifice it to You." Now what was he expecting to come out of his house? I don't think he expected his daughter to come out, but she did. Now, I think the Bible's pretty clear that he didn't carry that out. But just to say something like that - how foolish could you be?! You can never vow to the LORD in a way that will get His help or His favor because God can't be bribed. It's His goodness, not yours, which leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). So be careful what you say. I always remember those words that Solomon wrote down in Ecclesiastes 5:2-5, where it says, "Don't be rash with your mouth, and let your heart not hastily say anything before the LORD. Let your words be few. Just pay what you vow or don't vow at all." So, here's Saul tryin' to be a king, but he's not; trying to be godly, but he isn't; trying to be a leader, but he doesn't lead. And he's put to shame by everyone around him. Needless to say, it was terrible.

I thought about today Joshua was trying to lead.....when he finally brought the people into the land (in Joshua 9), the LORD had said, "Wipe out everyone that lives in the land. If somebody lives outside the land, give them an opportunity to make peace with you, or you can wipe them out, too." And then Joshua began to

pray, and God began to lead, and it was pretty clear until he got a little cocky and thought, "Well, I can make decisions." And some folks came to him (there in Joshua 9), the Gibeonites, and they said (they looked old and worn, and their food was moldy), "Oh, we've come from a long way, but we heard you guys were destroying everyone. We want to make sure you don't destroy us, so can we make a deal with you that when you get to our land, you'll leave us alone?" And without prayer, and it says, "He didn't pray," Joshua said, "Sure, I'll sign on the dotted line." And they literally went ten more miles and came to their land. They were living right in the middle of the land, and now God had to let them live when He had slated to have them destroyed. But it was all because Joshua decided he wouldn't seek the LORD's will; he would just have his own way.

So, I know verse 24 we're stuck on - we'll get movin' here in a minute. Saul was able to elicit from the people a promise based on fear. They didn't believe his faith; he didn't have any. They didn't believe his direction. They knew he wanted honor. They didn't think about the consequences. He wasn't directed by the LORD. It was selfish, it was impulsive, it was destructive. It was religion posed as relationship. It was using authority for the wrong thing without the leading of God.

So verse 25 says, "Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath." So while Israel is pursuing her enemy, God provides nourishment for them along the way. But everyone in the group with Saul (that was left, that hadn't run) took their oath seriously; probably not because an oath to God was serious, because nobody was really walking with the LORD in the land at the time, but because Saul was serious. He would kill you rather than look at you. He was a tyrant. And so, had they been able to eat and refresh themselves, the battle would be over. But instead we read, in verse 24, that they were "distressed" because the people hadn't eaten all day; and they wouldn't eat even when they found food - that kind of energy that sugar can bring you - because they were afraid of Saul.

Verse 27 says, "But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath;" (he was busy fighting) "therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened." (He had a sugar rush.) "Then one of the people said,

'Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, "Cursed is the man who eats food this day." ' And the people were faint." The people, in horror, watched Jonathan break his dad's rules, and they knew what that could mean. They were afraid of Saul, had no confidence in Saul, didn't trust Saul. They liked Jonathan. They feared Saul, but they didn't respect him.

Verse 29 tells us that Jonathan's reaction was, " 'My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?' Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon" (six miles in all). "So the people were" not faint any longer, they were "very faint." Jonathan deplored his father's rashness. "Oh, my gosh! God is doin' this great work, and you step in with that kind of stupidity? While we're defeating these uncircumcised enemies of God's people, my father has troubled the land." Literal translation of the Hebrew words: "He's brought disaster. He has brought disaster to us." It is the exact same word that Joshua used when he confronted that guy, Achan, who was stealing at the battle for Jericho (Joshua 7); and people were dying, and they were losing, and, "You've troubled the land." Self-will will never find God's best. Right? It'll only hinder God's work. So Jonathan's a pretty smart guy. "If we'd all have eaten something and been feelin' refreshed and energized, we could have finished this now." But self-will never leads to God's victory. Know that. It only hinders God's work. So, if you have an idea, but you're not sure God's in it, here's my advice: don't do anything. Seek God's heart. Right? Don't go it alone. It's really never going to accomplish what you want. And you should remember that if you're ever trying to force your way without God's leading. Well, Jonathan was refreshed, but the people were now "very faint." I mean, they are just out of gas. They just couldn't move.

Verse 32 says, "And the people" (when the day was over) "rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood." Now, ravenous for food, hungry because they hadn't eaten anything, they eat the animals like the Gentiles would or the unbelievers would. You know, one of the things that the LORD had said in Leviticus (17 and 19) was that they had to clearly bleed the animals before they ate them. That's healthy from a physiological standpoint, but from a spiritual standpoint, it indicated that life was in the blood (Leviticus 17). That's what the people needed to learn because the LORD was to come, and He was going to give His blood for the

sins of man. He was going to die in our place. So it was a picture that God wanted to preserve. But, look, this was caused by Saul - his rashness, the stumbling block that he put before the people in terms of starvation. But Saul, he just won't admit his sin. He won't recognize that he is self-righteous, and he does this instead.

Look at verse 33. They step up and say, " 'Look, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood!' So he said, 'You have dealt treacherously; roll a large stone to me this day.' Then Saul said, 'Disperse yourselves among the people, and say to them, "Bring me here every man's ox and every man's sheep, slaughter them here, and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood." ' " And so he made himself a little butchery, and everybody in the area would bring their ox or their sheep to him; and he would slaughter them and bleed them. And it's kind of like he caused the problem, and now, "Let me just do it godly. Let me do this in a godly manner. Roll to me a big stone. Let me bleed them properly. Let me build an altar." But, look, he's missing the boat, isn't he? I mean, we're standing next to Saul in the story. He brought this oath and disaster. He now hides behind a ritual, and he's Mr. Good Guy, "I'm with you guys. You don't sin. Let me help you just do it right. Let me be the godly man that you know I am." I'm sure the people must have just shaken their heads at him. Religion is blind, isn't it? And Saul certainly is blind.

Do you remember the story in John (18:28), when the Sanhedrin brought Jesus from Caiaphas' to the Praetorium, and then, when it was early, they took Him to Pilate? But they wouldn't go into Pilate's house, and they said to Pilate, "You have to come out here and see us." And Pilate said, "Well, why won't you come here to see me?" and they said, "Well, this is the Passover, and we don't want to defile ourselves stepping into a Gentile palace." Now understand. Killing someone that was innocent was all right, but outwardly we want to look pretty holy. Right? This is how Saul is doing it. His heart is completely away from God. He could have cared less about the things of God. But his godless leadership continues. And they wanted a king, but, man, he's not very helpful to them. So he goes through the motions. Right? He's Mr. Expert about how to do things right before God. Don't you hate these kinds of people or this whole kind of attitude? It's just amazing to me. Blind to his own sin.

I remember David praying in Psalm 19:12-13, where he said, "LORD, who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me." Or, in other

words, "Let me see myself for who I truly am." Right? "God, help me to do what's right," not try to make excuses or look good when you know that you're wrong.

Notice verse 35. Pretty interesting verse. It says, "Then Saul built an altar to the LORD. This was the first altar that he built to the LORD." Isn't that amazing? This is the first one that he built. Of all of those years of leading and ruling, you would think that he would be seeking the LORD constantly. He doesn't. He goes to build a place of worship, but he's not worshipping.

Verse 36, "Now Saul said, 'Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and plunder them until the morning light; and let us not leave a man of them.' And they said, 'Do whatever seems good to you.' Then the priest said, 'Let us draw near to God here.' " So I think Saul was aware of the fact that he had utterly caused the defeat of the Philistines to be greatly hampered. He realized he'd put a big brake on this whole thing. They'd stopped for the night, if you will. But now everybody's eaten, they feel better. And rather than confessing his sin, "I'm sorry I made the wrong thing, it was a macho call, I'm a dummy," instead of that he just said, "Aw, come on. You guys can do it. Let's go all night." And everybody's terrified. "Whatever you want, bro. Whatever you want. You're the king." "Well, let's check with the LORD," and the priest stands up and says, "Well, can we just pray?"

"So Saul asked counsel of God," verse 37, " 'Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel?' But He did not answer him that day." (Not at all.) "And Saul said, 'Come over here, all you chiefs of the people, and know and see what this sin was today. For as the LORD lives, who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die.' But not a man among all the people answered him." So, Ahijah comes. He's the high priest. He asks the LORD, who doesn't speak. He doesn't speak. The first time he had said, "Let's seek the LORD" (back in verse 3), Saul said, "I ain't got time for this." He wanted to get to the action. Now he wants to hear from the LORD. God is not speaking. He's not speaking at all. So Saul makes this presumption, "Well, God would speak if there wasn't some kind of sin in the camp." But rather than saying of himself, "It's probably me," he looks around and says, "I don't know who it is, but whoever's messin' up me hearin' from God, I'm gonna kill him. I don't care if it's Jonathan." And everyone went, "Well, it's Jonathan because he ate." But no one said a word because they liked Jonathan; they didn't like Saul. So, Saul.....I want you to not lose track of that. Last week - faith of Jonathan. Here - the sinfulness of Saul. Oblivious to his own sin. Maybe you're like that, or maybe you know someone that's

like that; that you can make a good argument for your behavior, it all looks so spiritual and all, but it isn't. Right? It isn't. It's his sin. "Who's defied me? And who's defied the LORD that God won't answer?" And the reality is he had. It was his fault. It was something he had done. And God lets it get in His grace to this point so He can give to Saul another opportunity to make things right. Maybe now he'll realize he's so far off.

Notice that Saul is very quick to blame other people rather than himself. Everyone else is the problem, the culprit. Saul is not. Wanting to know the sin of others, he wants to impose a death sentence for the guilty party. He wants everyone to know he's serious, but he's fair. "I'll even kill my own son." You're a clown. I can't believe this guy. Again, frustrated by God's unwillingness to speak, he makes his second rash oath of the day. First, "Nobody eats until I get vengeance." Second of all, "Whose sin is it that's keeping God from blessing us? And I will have to take him out so that God can be with us." It's amazing how brutal you can be with people over the sins of others and how merciful you can be to yourself. Don't you think? I'm always more gracious to myself than to you. What? "I.....Oh, I swore. Yeah, but I had a reason." I heard from you, "Wow, I thought you were saved!" Right? Our judgment changes, doesn't it, from person to person. And I think that the closer you get to the LORD, the more merciful you become; and the further away from the LORD you get, the more brutal you become in your judgments. So Saul, whose entire life was spent ignoring God's authority, flinches when his authority is slighted even a little bit; though the only authority he had, God had given to him.

So, trace the power of corruption in Saul's life without submitting to the LORD. The people were terrified of him, and look, now, what he is doing; and these poor folks, they've just been following him to disaster!

Well, nobody answered. So, verse 40, "Then he said to all Israel, 'You be on one side, and my son Jonathan and I will be on the other side.' " He thought they were safe. And then he began to ask the LORD who it was that was troubling the nation from hearing from the LORD. "And the people said to Saul, 'Do what seems good to you.' " (Because they were in no position to argue.) "Therefore Saul said to the LORD God of Israel, 'Give a perfect lot.' " (Or, in other words, "Roll the dice so that You show us who it is that's the culprit." And the dice was rolled, and all of Israel got off the hook.) "So Saul and Jonathan were taken" (had the lot fall on them), "but the people escaped." Verse 42, "And Saul said, 'Cast lots between my son Jonathan and me.' " (Really, Saul?!) "So Jonathan was taken. Then Saul said to

Jonathan, 'Tell me what you have done.' And Jonathan told him, and said, 'I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand. So now I must die!' Saul answered, 'God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan.' " God does speak. He speaks to let Saul know how horrible of a man he is. "What do you think you've done?!" He might have asked that before he did the old, "I'm the boss, nobody eats, and everybody dies," his little speech. "I ate a little bit of honey. Now I'm supposed to die for that?" And then Saul, never giving in an inch, says, "Well, and more! May God do more. You shall surely die." This man should have been repentant. Instead, he's stubborn. He should have been pointing to himself, but he's self-righteous. He's not going to confess his sin even if it means killing his own son, and he even invokes God's name in the process. "May the LORD do more! I'm a man of my word. I've made a vow, and I have to keep it."

Remember the foolish vow that Herod made to Herodias' daughter (Matthew 14, Mark 6) as she danced before him? "You can have whatever you want." And she said, "Mom said to ask for John the Baptist's head on a platter." And John was his friend or at least the fellow that he had listened to often. Or Darius, who was the king when Daniel was serving in captivity. And everyone hated Daniel - at least all of the false prophets. And they got Darius (Daniel 3) to sign a bill that said, "Nobody talks to God. They all talk to you for the next month. They ask you. If anybody goes around you or talks to any other god, then they should be put to death." And Darius went, "Man, that's pretty cool. I'll be the boss of everything." And it was no sooner signed than it was turned on his good friend Daniel, who he trusted, and he was broken-hearted about it.

Saul wouldn't admit his error. And look at the pain and the conflict that could have been avoided if he had, just somewhere along the line, went, "All right. I'm an idiot." And put the loser thing (Pastor Jack makes an "L" with his fingers on his forehead) on his forehead. "It's me. I'm sorry." How much trouble could have been saved if sometimes we'll just confess our sin? I think the difference between David and Saul wasn't the volume of sin - because they both had plenty. But David was willing to admit his sin. He came clean. He did it a lot. He spit it out. He did dumb stuff, but he came through. Even for the year that he hid with the Bathsheba thing, and it destroyed so much.....when confronted, he was afraid he was going to be put to death, but he spoke up. So one is a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22). He confesses his sin. The other one just can't seem to get himself to say, "I'm sorry, it's me," at all.

Well, interestingly enough in verse 45, "But the people said to Saul, 'Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.' So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die. Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place." For the first time in this relationship between the people and the king that they wanted to have so badly, they now find a conflict, and the people stand collectively against Saul. It isn't because they love the LORD. Understand. These people are not doing that. But they didn't believe that this was justice. It was obvious God had used Jonathan to save them. They were sure of their annihilation. I love these words that say, "Jonathan has worked with God this day." Don't you love that? "He's worked with God this day," verse 45. "He's worked with God this day." Ahhhhh. Don't you want to be that person? The people recognized God's work, and Jonathan was innocent of any transgression. The sin started with Saul, and it had ended with Saul. Wicked, rash oaths. Prideful declarations. He got his "no confidence" vote two years into his rule. Now he's going to be here for forty years. But two years in, he's already been told he can only last one term. And by next week, we'll move him thirty-two years to about year thirty-two or thirty-three. So, literally, there's going to be thirty years absolutely skipped from when we end tonight to when we begin reading in chapter 15; thirty years of non-reporting of those forty years. Nothing to report. Saul is just given opportunity after opportunity for thirty years, even after all that we've read; and thirty years later, he's still not listening, he's still not following. God's very patient. God's very patient. "May God strike me dead," this one guy said to another. And he said, "Well, it didn't happen. I guess I'm all right." And the fellow said, "You can't wear out God's mercy that quickly." Thirty years Saul would continue down this same road. But notice, God has been working with Jonathan, and Jonathan has been working with the LORD. I love that! I love that. What does Saul get? Humiliation. He's rejected by the people; next week he'll be rejected by the LORD. And then he'll reject God's plan and fight as long as he can until he's dead. He'll die in rebellion. Rough start.

So, when you get to verse 46, if I'm reading through this, and I haven't read it before, I fully expect to read, "And Saul repented, admitted his error and said, 'You're right. I'm foolish.' " Instead, he goes home. He's dejected. He doesn't want to finish off the Philistines anymore. "Let's fight all night." He could care less because that's not what his concern is. He never showed any zeal for the LORD's glory, no concern for the well-being of the people; only concerned for

himself. And his true colors show here, and will continue to show for thirty years of silence, because God will pick up the story in year thirty-three or so, and it will still be the same Saul. So the battle against the Philistines, verse 46, stops. The Philistines get away with whatever casualties they've suffered, only to fight another day (verse 52) - "fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul." It could have been over with. It could have been stopped. But sin and self would leave the enemy in power. That's just the way it works. You want to live your life by sin and by self, then Satan's gonna rule; God's not gonna have His way with you. That's just the way it is. And it's the lesson of King Saul in a nutshell.

Verse 47, and here these verses are kind of a summary of the life of Saul; like I said, thirty years pass with nothing to report. Well, here's what's reported of those thirty years, "So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed them." So Saul was a brilliant, brave fighter; accomplished in military endeavors. All that the people wanted, "We want a king like the other nations," he absolutely lived up to. They didn't care about spiritual life because they already had Samuel. His foreign policy, according to verse 47, was pretty clear - attack everyone, just fight your enemies, everyone that moves. Right? So he expands Israel's border to the south in Edom, to the east in Ammon and Moab, to the north in Zobah, to the west in Philistia. He literally pushed the boundaries in every direction. He was a good fighter but not a very godly man.

So, here're his accomplishments in the flesh. Right? But God's interested in the spiritual well-being of His people. So every conquest, every victory was empty, was temporal at best. Saul never drew closer to the LORD. He doesn't report of a miracle. He doesn't humble himself at all, even though the LORD is giving victory to His people. He's protecting them despite the leadership of Saul.

So we read, in verse 48, "And he gathered an army" (which is what the LORD said he would do) "and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them. The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Jishui, and Malchisua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal." (There's actually a fourth son named in the genealogy, in Chronicles. So he had a family, had children; lived a while. Like I said, thirty years pass.) Verse 50, "The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the

son of Ner, Saul's uncle." So Abner was a first cousin to Saul (you can read about that in chapter 9). Verse 51, "Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel."

But then we read this, verse 52, "Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself." So here's his philosophy of rulership - get the strongest guy, get the arm of flesh. Don't worry about getting the Holy Spirit or the work of God. Just find the strongest, the most powerful. Sounds like the world, doesn't it? And that's how Saul was leading the people of God. So verse 52 tells you Saul's hope throughout his life. He would die with that hope. Literally without hope.

So I think the story of Saul is there's a rashness that comes when God's not in view. Right? When we're more interested in our passion than in our principles. "This is what we want" rather than "God, what do You want for me to have?" And in Saul's case, it was made worse because he had great power. So rashness and power, that's dangerous. Sometimes we're just in charge of us, and that's bad enough. But if you add to rashness prayerlessness and selfishness, pretty much every battle is gonna.....you might win in the world, but you're gonna lose in the LORD.

Jonathan had great faith. He took them on once. They gathered to come fight again. Jonathan, with one other guy, said, "Let's fight," and the LORD was with him. The only upsetting thing about the whole thing was that Saul came in to mess it up spiritually. The opportunity for victory was lost, and it never (from verse 52) returned to Saul again. The Philistines were a thorn in his side through a foolish vow that weakened the people. Ungodliness is being filled with your own sense of importance and blind to the truth. So, he shows up to help Jonathan, which is ridiculous.

Now, we'll continue in chapter 15 next week, but I wanted to point out to you that, as we read this story, not one word of recognition from Saul for his son's faith. Not one word where he said, "Jonathan, you did good. You were trusting the LORD." Not one word from Saul praising God for the victory He'd given. His heart is hard, his eyes are blind to his sin, he's refusing to admit any wrong. When others around him said, "Look, you're wrong," when everyone testifies to the same thing, everyone sees the sin but him. If he had any natural affection for his son, it was overwhelmed by his great love for himself. So he really couldn't do any more

than that. That's all he could see. He's even willing to let his son die rather than confess his own sin. That's awful!

Meanwhile, as we see Jonathan's behavior - and, by the way, it's phenomenal - you never hear Jonathan, one time, say, "Man, I'm a man of great faith," or, "Me and the armorbearer, high five. We need a medal or something or recognition. We should make the Time Magazine" or something like that. He doesn't, one time, toot his own horn. He's very interested in the LORD. Think about Jonathan for a minute. On the one hand, he's Saul's son which would mean if Saul did well, he'd have been the next guy to the throne. He'd have been a good king. But dad messed that up. Jonathan, so early, recognizes that David is to be God's choice that when David finally shows up at the palace (in a few weeks here, chapter 16 will start with David), Jonathan actually says (chapter 18), "Here's my armor. It's the royal armor. It has the royal insignia on it. You're gonna be the next guy. I'm not." And then he goes out of his way to save David's life, to support him in his endeavors, to warn him when there's trouble, and to be his friend to the end even though David would take his place. Because Jonathan's not interested in Jonathan; Jonathan's interested in the LORD's will and the goodness of the people.

So, interesting picture, though, what can happen when you decide to run your own life. Saul is already a long way from his beginning when God established him with the people. And they loved him, back in chapter 11. Now they've rejected him face to face. The LORD has enemies on a terrible course, and thirty years from now, the LORD's going to say to him, in the next chapter, "You're done. You're done." And the Holy Spirit is taken from Saul, and a distressing spirit is sent from the LORD to Saul, which will bring David, with his cool playing abilities, to try to drive away the demonic forces; when he comes to play, the demons leave. That's pretty interesting. Isn't it great, you come in here and worship, and the demons leave. Don't they? Whatever demons are harassing you, they can't hang around. They don't like the worship. Which tells me if you're late for worship, you may still have a demon or two. I don't know. (Laughing) Could have gotten here on time and been rid of 'em all, but..... I'm just readin' the Bible, man. You'll have to do it yourself.

So next week, we're gonna read chapter 15. Pray to be a Jonathan. And for the record, just biblically, God takes a lot of Sauls and makes them Jonathans by His Spirit. He can change you from one to the other. Amen?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson

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