

## **Jonathan — A Portrait of a Godly Man**

**1 Samuel 14:1-23**

**By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)**

Now before we read the passage, and it's 1 Samuel chapter 14 — Saul and about six hundred men are on one side of a valley and about thirty thousand plus Philistines, or Philistines, are encamped on the other side of the valley and a battle commando attack is about to occur. Now before we read the passage, let's look to God in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank You for the Scriptures. They make us wise, they show us the way of salvation, they show us how to live and how to die, they teach us about Jesus, they teach us about our sin, they teach us about faith and trust and hope and confidence in You rather than in ourselves. Tonight, O Lord, we are as needy as ever. We pray now, in the stillness of this Lord's Day evening, come down, come by Your Spirit, minister to us we pray. Bless this Word to us. Make the Scriptures come alive by Your Spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

One day Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side." But he did not tell his father. Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave at Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men, including Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the Lord in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. Within the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side. The name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba.

Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of those uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few." And his armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul." Then Jonathan said, "Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. But if they say, 'Come up to

us,' then we will go up, for the Lord has given them in to our hand. And this shall be the sign to us." So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, "Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves.'" And the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor-bearer and said, "Come up to us, and we will show you a thing." And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Come up after me, for the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel." Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him. And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow's length in an acre of land. And there was a panic in the camp, and in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic.

And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude was dispersing here and there. Then Saul said to the people who were with him, "Count and see who has gone from us." And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. So Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God here." For the ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel. Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand." Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle. So the Lord saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.

Well, thus far, God's holy, infallible Word.

John Knox, 16th century founder of Presbyterianism, galley slave, spent some time in Geneva, some time in England, before founding what is the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the 16th century. John Knox once said, "One man with God is always a majority. One man with God is always a majority." Well another John, or a Jonathan here, is one man and his armor-bearer with God. Chapter 13 had closed. you may remember, in hopelessness and despair. The Philistines had attacked in huge numbers, they have plundered more or less Israel, Saul has withdrawn to a retreat on a rocky mount with six hundred men, the rest of Israel have fled, none of them are allowed to have blacksmiths, anyone to sharpen knives or instruments — they had to go to the Philistines in order to do that. And we have this standoff position here in the opening of chapter 14. You

have two camps on either side of a hill with a valley in between - six hundred men with Saul on the one side and about thirty thousand plus on the other. Some commentators estimate maybe thirty six thousand Philistines versus six hundred of Saul's men. And this is where Jonathan emerges.

Some of you might have seen the recent series of dramas based on the opening chapters of Samuel on *NBC*. You will be grateful if you didn't. It was called, *Kings*. It was set in a modern context retelling the Bible story. Jonathan, as you might have predicted, was depicted as gay. That's because of Jonathan and David's friendship. Many modern commentators go down that path, sadly.

Jonathan is a man of extraordinary courage and conviction and faith. The situation here is hopeless. What do you do when the odds are against you? What do you do when there's nothing you can do, there's nothing you feel you can do? Traditional wisdom says, "Don't even try." Traditional wisdom says, "Play it safe." And I want you to see in verse 2 and 3 here we have a little glimpse of Saul. Saul has failed already and offered a sacrifice which he shouldn't have done before Samuel got to him, you remember in chapter 13. God has already told Saul the kingship will depart from him. Saul is playing the "end game." And Saul, Saul is hunkered down. He's getting ready perhaps for the "long game." He's convinced himself there's nothing that you can do. He has a priest, Ahijah. Read between the lines. Actually just read what the text tells you. Who is Ahijah? He has Ichabod's genes all over him. Ichabod is the son, you remember, born to Phinehas' wife. The two sons, you remember Hophni and Phinehas of Eli, whom God killed. And the son that was born was called Ichabod, "the glory has departed." Saul is hunkered down with "departed glory" as a priest. As far as Saul is concerned it's "Mission Impossible." There's nothing you can do. It's a sad picture of hopelessness and despair and dejection.

But then in contrast you have Jonathan. He's introduced in the first verse, and then from verses 4 all the way down to verse 13, you have Jonathan and his armor-bearer. We don't know the name of his armor-bearer. What an extraordinary man this armor-bearer, this kit-bearer is. He will go with Jonathan no matter what. He will serve him loyally and faithfully no matter what. Andrew Bonar has a marvelous little sermon on Jonathan's armor-bearer. He's a braver man than I to preach a sermon on a man about whom we don't know his name, but the point, the point of Bonar's sermon is to say — He may go unrecognized in this world, as some of you go unrecognized in this world, but he will be recognized before the Lord of glory and his name will be read out on that grand day.

You're with Jonathan. The whole focus of this passage comes out in verse 6 — "Let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us." He has no guarantee, he has no promise that God is going to work for him, but it may be that God will work for him because "nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few."

That reminds you of so many passages in the Bible — of Gideon with thirty two thousand men, you remember, and God whittles them down to three hundred. It reminds you of Sennacherib when he is bunkered down in Jerusalem and a hundred and eighty five thousand Assyrians are outside the gates of Jerusalem and in the morning they are dead. Or think of that incident with Elisha and his servant in Dothan, you remember? And the Assyrians are on the mountaintops in the morning and Elisha prays, “Lord, open his eyes.” The servant had come out and said to Elisha, “Alas, my master, what shall we do?” “Open his eyes, because there are more with us than be with them.” And the hills were alive, not with the sound of music, but the hills were alive with angels and the mighty servants of God. God isn't dependent you see you numbers, that's what Jonathan is saying — He can win this battle by few as He can win this battle by many.

If the Lord is on our side, what is there that can withstand the determination and the plan of Almighty God? Now my friends that is extraordinary faith. We can hunker down in passivity, we can hunker down in despair, we can hunker down in crippling, debilitating lack of faith, or we can do what Jonathan does. We can take the initiative.

Now Jonathan sets up a sign. Don't be too hard on Jonathan for setting up a sign. He had no promise and no guarantee. He sets up a sign that if the Philistines say, “Come up,” that is going to be the sign that God is going to give the Philistines into their hands. And in a matter of moments, twenty Philistines are dead. And then in the latter section of this passage you see Saul again. And Saul doesn't even know that Jonathan and his armor-bearer are gone and he dithers for a moment and he says to Ahijah the priest to send for the Ark of the Covenant and everything within you wants to say, “Don't do it. Saul, remember 1 Samuel chapter 6. Remember what happened the last time you used the Ark of the Covenant like a talisman in battle.” And eventually the faith and the courage and the conviction of Jonathan spills over into the army of Saul as they see the rampage and hear the tumult on the other side of the valley and they join in this battle and there's a great victory. Now that's the story.

And I want to ask you tonight, “Why is this story here?” Some of you are interested in history. You tell me all the time you watch the *History Channel*. That defines you. You know there are certain people who watch the *Food Channel* and there are others who watch the *History Channel*. And some of you love history and others of you begin to yawn. Why is this passage here? It's a fascinating story. Brister loves war stories. Almost every week we get a war story from Brister. He loves war stories. This is a great war story. It's a commando war story. I'm not sure if I can relate a similar incident where one man with his armor-bearer won the battle in a commando raid of daring proportions. It's a wonderful story. It would make a wonderful movie. But why is it here? Why is this part of the Word of God? What does this have to say to us in 2009? What does it have to

say to us tonight and this week in particular, after yesterday in particular? What does this passage have to say to us?

## **I. The battle is not won by our strength, might and resources.**

I want to suggest to you that it says at least three things. It says first of all, that the battle isn't won by our might and our strength and our resources. We need to remember that. First Presbyterian Church, with all that we have — “It's not by might and it's not by power, but it's by My Spirit, says the Lord.” The kingdom isn't going to be won because we have a big church and we have lots of resources. God can win the battle without us. God can put the front tier of the battle in some small, tiny, almost insignificant part of His kingdom. We need to be constantly reminded of what Paul tells the Corinthians — that not many mighty are called and not many powerful are called.

John Bunyan is my, I think, all time favorite theologian. John Bunyan never went to school. As far as I can tell, he didn't even have a basic education. He was raised in almost abject poverty. When John Owen was talking one day - and wouldn't you give a dollar or two to overhear a conversation between John Owen and King Charles II? - and John Owen one day was talking to King Charles II, he told the King that he had been listening to John Bunyan preaching in London. And the King rebuked him, scoffed at him. John Owen was the vice chancellor at Oxford University. The King could not for one moment understand why John Owen would be listening to someone like John Bunyan. And John Owen said he would give all of his learning if he could preach one sermon like John Bunyan could preach. I think we need to remember that and I think it comes out of this passage. It's what Jonathan is saying — “God can win by many or God can win by few because it is not us, it is not our might, it is not our intellect, it is not our money. It is the power of our sovereign God. If God is on our side, if the Lord of glory is on our side, nothing can stand in our way and nothing can withstand what God has purposed.” That's the first thing.

## **II. If God be for us, what enemy cant stand in our path.**

The second thing, and it follows from that, that if God be for us, what enemy can stand in our path? I've been asking that question in the last few days as perhaps some of you have. The enemy in this case is not a Philistine. The enemy I have in mind is cancer. If God is for us, what is cancer? If God is for us, what is Alzheimer's? If God is for us, then how can I know that God is for us?

Do you remember the logic of the apostle? “He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, with Him, freely give us all things?” If you were to ask Missye Rhee tonight if she would prefer to be back here in that pew, somewhere halfway down on that side, or enjoying the triumph

and the beauty and the splendor and the magnificence of the sight and the sound that surrounds her this evening, do you know what she would say? Yes you do, because victory is hers. As Ligon said yesterday in the sermon, "Cancer may have beaten her, but the grave has not beaten her, because in Jesus Christ, there is victory and resurrection and eternal life and a new heavens and a new earth. Because He has spoiled principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the Cross." If God be for us, who can be against us? That was Jonathan's faith. What are these Philistines — thirty six thousand of them — what are they if God is for us, if God is on our side, if God is going before us, if God is equipping us? Because the battle is the Lord's.

### **III. The battle is the Lord's.**

But there's a third thing that I draw from this passage. What's the difference between Saul and Jonathan? Saul was a man who played it safe. He played it safe. There's a lot to be said for playing it safe. Do you know my friends, if the elders and deacons of this church had played it safe, this building would never have been erected. We wouldn't be in this building tonight for a start if they had played it safe in this economy. Maybe there's a word here, maybe there's a lesson here, maybe there's a challenge here, maybe to those of you who have the enormous responsibility of strategic planning — planning for the future.

You know there are men in this church and that's what they've been doing, they've been talking about the future — where do we want to be ten years from now with all the obstacles and all the difficulties and all the enemies and all the problems and all the trials? I wonder if this is a challenge to us. Will we be a Jonathan or a Saul. Will we play it safe or will we say, "The battle is the Lord's. The battle is the Lord's. For nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few."

The motto of the SAS, these are the Special Air Service commanders of the British you know, but their motto is, "Who Dares, Wins." It's in Latin, but it means, "Who Dares, Wins." I can't help but think, you know, of the very last thing that Jesus almost did with His disciples. After His resurrection, Peter — where was Peter? He was back up in Galilee fishing, fishing, because Jesus had died, Jesus had been buried, and if there was one thing that Peter knew how to do it was fishing. He'd gone back to his old job. He was playing it safe. And you know, it's extraordinary, fishermen, and a good fishermen that Peter undoubtedly was, he caught nothing. And then do you remember what Jesus says to him in the boat? "Put down the net on the other side." And you can hear Peter muttering, "You know, what does He know about fishing? I've spent my life fishing." And you can almost imagine him casting these nets down and then all of a sudden the boat is almost about to capsize because it's not about Peter, it's about the power of God. It's about the power of a resurrected Christ.

That's what went through this building yesterday afternoon — the power of a resurrected Christ in the face of everything that this world and the devil and hell itself can do. And Jesus is victorious. I wonder tonight if that's a challenge to you. Are you just going to play it safe, or will you take the Word of God and the promises of God and the power of God and do what Jonathan did?

Let's pray together.

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