

## **“Faith Moving Mountains”**

**January 15, 2017**

### **1 Samuel 13:16-14:23**

**SI:** We’re back to the book of 1 Samuel and our reading this morning is the story of an important battle.

God’s command to Saul on the day he was anointed king of Israel was to attack the Philistine garrison in his hometown.

Several times Saul was presented with opportunities to do that but out of caution or fear he wouldn’t pull the trigger—

because to do so would mean provoking a fight with a vastly larger force.

Saul had only 600 men and the Philistines had 30,000 men plus superior weapons.

But the point of the command to attack the Philistine garrison was so that

Saul would show his faith in God, show that his faith in the Lord was real.

That’s what the book of 1 Samuel is about.

It’s not just about kings and battles—

it’s about what faith in the living God looks like in real life.

**INTRO:** About five years ago I was trying to make my family go on hikes with me so I bought everybody hiking shoes. The brand I bought was Keens. The kids thought it looked goofy when we all put on the same new hiking shoes—they thought we looked like a shoe commercial, but they were good sports and went on a hike or two.

Fast forward five years.

If you took my Keens today and put them alongside Adrienne and Eliza's—especially Eliza's—you would notice a big difference.

Mine are battered and scuffed, the tread is worn down smooth in places.

The fabric on the heels has frayed and it's been patched with silver duct tape.

All the cushioning has been pounded out of them—the arch support has flattened. They are dogged out. Hers look great.

I know Eliza wouldn't say she loves to hike, but if she did say that, if she did say: I love to hike. I love to hit the trail. I love to scale the peaks. You would look at her nice, clean, 5 year old Keens, compare and contrast them with my battered and scuffed 5 year old Keens and you would know who really loves to hike.

The writer of 1 Samuel was a literary genius.

He makes profound moral and spiritual evaluations of his characters—

but he almost never does it directly, he does it indirectly, he does it subtly.

And the way he does that in chapters 13 and 14

is to compare and contrast Saul with his son Jonathan in dealing with Philistines.

He doesn't come out and tell the reader what was going on in Saul's heart—

but he shows us things that enable us to draw the right conclusions.

In chapters 13 and 14 you have a king and a crown-prince.

Twelve times in these chapters the narrator draws attention to their relationship as father and son. Look, for example at verse 1 of chapter 14.

Calls Jonathan again the “son of Saul.” Unnecessary, know who Jonathan is.

It's a literary device to contrast the two of them.

We read in verse 22 of chapter 13 that only Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear.

So we are left to wonder what each man will do with his weapon.

Why this comparison and contrast between father and son?

As I said a moment ago, one of the major themes of 1 Samuel is faith.

What does true faith in the living God look like?

How does it show itself in a person? What are the evidences?

We know what someone's shoes look like if he loves to hike—  
and we know what someone's shoes look like if she doesn't—  
even if she says she does.

What does faith in God look like? How is it proved?

Faith is not just confessed in words—it is also confessed in deeds—  
in deeds done or not done.

James says: Show me your faith by your deeds.

He also says: Faith without works is dead.

That's a perfect summary of 1 Samuel 13 and 14.

Let's see how faith is proved and we'll look at under just two points—  
I'll give them to you as we go.

I want to give credit where credit is due here.

I got this from Dr. Robert Rayburn's sermon on this passage.

## **MP#1 True faith is proved by acts of obedience to God's commands and callings.**

Let's explore this by comparing and contrasting Jonathan and Saul.

First, Saul's passivity in facing the enemy contrasted with Jonathan's assertiveness. We saw this already earlier in chapter 13 when Jonathan attacked another Philistine outpost when it became clear to him Saul wasn't going to do it.

Here in chapter 14 this contrast between the two is repeated.

Jonathan not only attacks, but he attacks without telling his father his intention. He didn't tell his father because he knew Saul wouldn't approve.

Saul afraid of Philistine reprisals. He would have forbidden provoking enemy.

You know the old saying that it's easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission.

That's not what this was—the excitable young man doing what shouldn't. This was Jonathan's faith. He knew the Lord had commanded them to fight.

He knew it was the king's calling first, and then his as crown prince.

So this is not just obedience to a specific command, but also to a calling.

The contrast between father and son in verses 1 and 2 couldn't be more stark.

Jonathan says to his armor bearer—let's go fight some Philistines.

Saul is sitting under a pomegranate tree consulting with a priest.

That brings us to the second big contrast.

All through these chapters Saul claims he is consulting God's will.

What does God want me to do? Earlier in chap 13 he tries asking God himself.

He asks Samuel, who gets disgusted with him and leaves.

Here in our reading he is with priest Ahijah and it says Ahijah wearing an ephod.

The ephod a vest with precious stones set in it that was used to inquire of God.

That detail implies that Saul was asking. What does God want me to do?

Then later, when Jonathan has provoked the Philistines, Saul still doesn't commit to join the battle. He asks Ahijah to bring the ark so they can ask God what to do.

Only when Saul realizes that the Philistines are on the run and no longer a danger does he say to Ahijah. Ok, that's enough. Don't need to ask God any more.

And finally leads his men into battle.

The problem with Saul asking what God wanted him to do is that the Lord had already told Saul what he wanted him to do.

This was not faith asking God for direction.

It was just a way for Saul to disobey God and sound spiritual.

Someone once said to me in all seriousness that he was seeking the Lord's will

about whether he should leave his wife for another woman. You get the point. If God has already made will known, then praying for his will is disobeying. Jonathan didn't ask if it was God's will to attack the Philistines. He knew it was, even it was scary, and he did it.

Another contrast. Jonathan thought about the best way to obey God.

In this case, that meant thinking militarily.

Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, Will show ourselves to the Philistines.

If they say: We're coming down to get you, then we'll retreat.

But if they say: Come up here and we'll teach you a lesson, that will be the sign from God and we'll attack.

There is a Jewish commentator named Robert Alter who argues there are details here that indicate Jonathan was not just looking for affirmation from God—this is a tactical decision.

If the whole garrison came down upon them in the pass, they would be beaten.

But if the two of them climbed up, hidden in the rocks as they climbed, they would more likely surprise Philistine soldiers individually or small groups.

It's a good point. Faith thinks: How can I best obey the Lord?

How can I best love my wife? How can I best parent my children?

How can I best serve my employer? How can I best use gifts in church?

Within the confines of my callings and my means and my stage of life—how do I best do the things God has commanded me to do.

Faith makes me think about them.

And to go down rabbit trail for a minute—this means that in many areas of life Christians are going to do things differently.

How will I educate children? Public school, Christian school, home school?

How will I spend my money? How will I be involved in life of the church?

How will I share my faith? We have to obey, but Lord leaves the specifics to us.

There've been times I've been critical about fellow believers, and said to myself—Why are they doing it that way? Why aren't they doing it this way?

Then I've talked to them and realized that they've thought about it.

Saul wasn't thinking as a commander at all in these chapters.

He wasn't giving orders or disposing his troops or leading them into battle.

Even when Jonathan put the Philistines on the run, Saul didn't say: Charge!

He and his men sort of oozed into battle. Lack of thought about God's commands. Another contrast.

Notice how Jonathan's prompt obedience instilled loyalty and courage and faith

in his armor-bearer. Jonathan said: Let's go attack those Philistines.  
How did his armor-bearer respond?

Do all you have in mind. Go ahead. I am with you heart and soul.  
In contrast, Saul, as we are told earlier in chapter 13 lost 1,400 of his 2,000 men.  
1,400 deserted and the 600 who remained were quaking in fear.  
Saul's lack of obedience was demoralizing.

The writer of 1 Samuel doesn't come out and say: Jonathan had faith, Saul didn't.  
He shows us two lives.

One that takes the callings and commands of God seriously and strives to obey,  
think about how best to obey,  
encourages other people with his commitment to obey.  
There is that—and then there is the opposite.

I'm sure Saul would have said he believed in the Lord.

But true faith is proved by acts of obedience to God's commands and callings.  
As James says: Show me your faith apart from your works,  
and I will show you my faith by my works.  
So, for the sake of our faith in Christ we go to church, and love our wives,  
and discipline and train our children, and are frugal with our money,  
and honest at work, and kind to others, and generous to the needy.

But is that all?

The problem with all these sorts of works as evidence of faith in Christ is that they  
are all so predictable and visible and measurable.  
An unbeliever could do all the same things, or at least appear to do them.

He would be doing them for other reasons, but he could still do almost all the  
ordinary acts of obedience that are part of the Christian life of faith—  
he could go to church, give offerings, share the faith, could even become  
a pastor—there are plenty of unbelieving pastors.  
So in this contrast between Jonathan and Saul that is there any act of faith  
that cannot be copied or counterfeited?

Yes there is. And that brings us to the second point.

**MP#2 True faith is also proved by acts taken in defiance of sight and circumstances.**

If Jonathan had asked Saul's permission to attack the Philistine garrison,

why would Saul have said No?

Because sight and circumstances told Saul that the raid would fail.

Because Saul's reason told him it would never work.

Just two men, with only one sword between them against a whole garrison. No.

But what did Jonathan tell his armor-bearer?

“Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.”

That's a devastating indictment of his father's unbelief.

Saul at one point had several thousand men, but still wouldn't obey.

Jonathan, with just himself and his armor bearer,

was confident of the Lord's power and readiness to grant him victory.

The Lord can conquer with a few!

And then Jonathan makes an ever greater statement of faith.

He says: “Perhaps the Lord will act on our behalf.”

In other words, Jonathan acknowledged he didn't know what the Lord would do.

It might be God's plan for him and his armor-bearer to die on that hill.

He says—Perhaps.

He was willing to act on behalf of the Lord's honor not knowing if God would give him victory or not.

This sounds a lot like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego at the fiery furnace.

King Nebuchadnezzar said, worship my image or I'll burn you to death.

Your god won't be able to save you.

They said: Our God can certainly save us from the fire if he chooses to do so—

but if not, we're still not going to betray him by worshipping your statue.

But if not . . . Perhaps . . .

Faith says: Our God is sovereign. He does whatever he pleases.

He may spare my life when I obey him. He may allow my life to be taken.

But I'm unconditionally loyal to him.

So even if sight and circumstances tell me it's impossible and even if the cards

are stacked against me, and even if I have no idea what God will do—

even so—I'm going to try.

Jesus says that if we have faith we can move mountains.

I'm going to pray and start pushing on the mountain.

I've been re-reading one of my favorite biographies.

It's Elisabeth Elliot's biography of Amy Carmichael.

Amy was a Scots-Irish Christian, she grew up Presbyterian but her formative spiritual experiences came through the Keswick movement.

She went to the mission field, first to China, then Japan for a few years, and finally to India where she lived for 50 years.

When Amy got to India in 1895,  
she assembled a small group of Christian Indian women.

They visited villages, trying to reach other Indian women with Gospel.

Then one day in 1901, they were staying in a mission house in some remote place, when out of the blue a little girl showed up. Seven years old.

It turned out she had escaped from a Hindu temple where her mother had devoted her to be a child prostitute.

She heard the other temple women talking about this white missionary lady and how evil she was, but this little girl, Preena, thought that nothing could be more evil than the temple and got the idea this woman might save her.

Preena had tried to escape before but was caught and the temple priests had branded her hands as punishment and to mark her as their property.

The Lord miraculously provided a way for her to escape and find her way to Amy.

Amy never married, and Elisabeth Elliot says that she was such a Victorian in her mindset that she barely knew anything about sex.

“Her Victorian mind refused to admit thoughts which were so unpleasant and certainly unnecessary.

So this little girl Preena crashed through that as she told Amy about her life.

And it horrified Amy and grieved her to the bottom of her soul.

Here’s how Amy later described the effect it had on her.

“Sometimes the broad smooth levels of life are crossed by a black-edged jagged crack, rent, as it seems by an outburst of the fiery force below. We find ourselves suddenly close upon it; it opens right at our very feet.”

So she felt like hell had opened up at her feet when she heard Preena’s story and began to realize there were thousands of little girls like her.

And, as Elisabeth Elliot writes, the overwhelming desire to save these children became a fire in Amy’s bones.

But sight and circumstance and human reason would tell her this was an impossible task, she was up against impossible odds.

Hinduism—an entire religious culture, deeply rooted, that not only justified temple prostitution but glorified it as something honorable and pleasing to gods.

Parents who were not only paid for their daughters, but who were honored and admired by their neighbors for giving their children in this act of devotion.

There was no shame in this, it was an accepted part of Hindu life.

This was during the days of the British Raj, the British rule of India—  
and there was a general policy by the British to respect religious customs.  
Political advantage to accommodate and honor Hinduism  
So there was no help from the governing authorities. Amy was warned not to make  
trouble in this way. Would not end well if she started trying to rescue these girls.  
But in defiance of sight and circumstances,  
she prayed that God would move mountains, and then she began to push.

When we pray for seemingly impossible things and start to act on those prayers—  
we have to say, like Jonathan did, Perhaps—perhaps the Lord will act.  
We don't believe in name-it, claim-it theology.  
If you have enough faith and you say it, God's go to do it.  
That's bogus. The word-faith movement, prosperity Gospel, wrong.  
Perhaps the Lord will act, says this great man of faith, Jonathan.

But look what happened in this case. God did act.  
Two men with one sword defeated a garrison and set a whole army on run.  
Amy Carmichael defied Hindu tradition, British policy rescued hundreds of girls.  
When we do act in faith, sometimes God moves and very unlikely things will  
happen and very difficult things will come to pass.

Of course we have to demonstrate our faith in Christ by ordinary, measurable  
obedience to his commands and callings. But if that's all, missing something.  
Francis Schaeffer use to say that we ought always to be praying for certain things  
that we would never expect to come to pass unless God intervenes.  
Where is the Philistine garrison in your life that needs to be taken by just two  
men with one sword?  
Maybe it's mending hopelessly broken relationship, overcoming compulsive  
behavior, provision kingdom-building ministry, salvation of hard, unbelieving soul.  
Saul didn't believe God could bring victory. Jonathan did.  
And look what the Lord accomplished.