

Between a Rock and a Rock

1 Sam. 14

(preached 6/3/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

As World War I was just beginning in 1915, a German submarine was off the English coast.

These German subs were enormous vessels even in that day.

The submarine spotted a tiny English boat passing by.

The boat was carrying a load of coal from one English port to another when the submarine decided to fire a torpedo at the boat.

The boat was not a military craft.

It was unarmed without weapons of any kind, yet the German sub decided to fire upon it.

Though the torpedo barely missed, the captain of that boat, a man by the name of John Bell, didn't turn and run from the enormous sub.

Instead, he used the only weapon that he had, -his boat.

He called for all hands on deck and instead of running, he set his course straight for the periscope of that German sub.

The crew on the boat heard a loud bang, an oil slick appearing on the water, and the German sub sank to the bottom of the sea never to be heard from again.

Here is a picture of a painting of what that scene may have looked like.

And here is an actual picture of a German sub (or uboat) of that time period.

Now, the amazing part of this story is the size of the boat that sank this German sub.

It was tiny compared to the sub.

It was essentially unarmed.

It was really no match for the submarine.

The only reason the story ends with the sinking of the sub is because the captain of that boat decided to fight instead of run.

Now, I don't anything about the captain of that boat other than his name.

I don't know if he acted out of anger.

I don't know if he was a Christian.

I just simply know that from a human perspective, the situation looked impossible...

A tiny working boat against an armed submarine...

Yet, it didn't end the way that it was supposed to end because that captain acted with great courage.

Now, we are going to look at half of 1 Samuel 14 tonight, and we are going to see an act of great courage...

However, we are going to know the source of the courage displayed in this scene....

Because we are going to hear from him in his own words...

And we are going to see that his courage was based upon his faith in the Lord.

The outcome of the courageous act we are going to see tonight is going to be the same outcome of what I just talked about.

The impossible is going to become possible because one man is simply going to act on his faith...

So, let's dive into 1 Samuel 14 tonight and look at how one man's faith changes a certain defeat into a complete victory...

I have broken verses 1-23 of 1 Samuel 14 into 4 parts...

And I want all these parts to be instructions for us...

In verses 1-3, we are going to see that....

Faith Acts When No One Else Will

Then in verses 4-5, we will see that....

Faith Goes Where No One Else Will Go.

Then in verses 6-15, we will see that....

Faith Finds Its Foundation in the LORD...

And the final truth that we will see about faith is that....

Faith Encourages Others to Move...

I. Faith Acts When No One Else Will (1-3)

Let's dive into chapter 14 by simply looking at verse 1...

¹ Now the day came that Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side." But he did not tell his father.

Chapter 14 is going to require a lot of work to get a good understanding about what is happening.

Though I don't want to overload you with too many details, I do want us to understand the setting....

So, we have Jonathan.

We met him last week.

He is Saul's son, who won a victory over the Philistines in chapter 13.

He is the same Jonathan who will become good friends with David.

But right here in verse 1, he is simply Saul's son.

We all remember Saul is the 1st king of Israel.

He was crowned the king in chapters 9-11.

He won his first battle in chapter 11, but disobeyed God in chapter 13....

So, things are not looking too good for Saul at this point in his reign.

Though he is still king, the kingdom will not continue through his family line.

And when chapter 13 ended last week, it looked real bad for the nation.

The king was disobedient.

The Philistines were preparing to destroy the Israelites.

According to verse 23 of chapter 13, the Philistines had gathered at Michmash ready to attack...

From last week, we know that Saul had gathered at Gilgal but after being rebuked by Samuel for his disobedience....

Saul and Jonathan had moved to Geba.

You can look at the map up here and find Gilgal, and then you will see Geba.

Now, the Philistines were at Michmash in chapter 13, and Saul and Jonathan were at Geba...

So, in verse 1, we see that Jonathan is ready to go into Michamsh with his armor bearer.

However, he doesn't tell Saul of his plans.

Now, let's look at verse 2...

²Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron. And the people who were with him were about six hundred men, ³ and Ahijah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the Lord at Shiloh, was ^[a]wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. Couple of things to see here...

First, Saul was no longer in Geba like he was in chapter 13...

Rather, he is on the outskirts of Gibeah...

If you look back at the map, Gibeah is south of Geba...

So, what do we see?

Saul moving farther away from the enemy.

The Philistines are in Michmash to the north of Geba, yet Saul is backing up.

He is even on the outskirts of Gibeah.

Here is another possible map of this area...

The second thing to notice is that Saul has company with him...

Ahijah is there...

Now, we see in the text that Ahijah was a descendant of Eli the priest.

So, now we have a priest descended from a line of disobedient priests sitting beside a disobedient king whose line will never inherit the throne in Israel.

And it is no coincidence that they are sitting under a tree rather than on the front lines fighting the enemy.

Disobedience often leaves you paralyzed and ineffective for the Lord.

So, these men are sitting looking defeated, while Jonathan is planning to attack...

And that is the lesson for us all in these first 3 verses...

Faith causes us to act when no one else will.

There is no question that things look bad for Israel.

No weapons.

The enemy is gathering to fight.

Yet, Jonathan is not waiting to die.

HE is preparing to act.

Doubt and unbelief will put you to sleep, while faith and trust will wake you up to act.

But not only will faith cause you to act when no one else will, faith will cause you go where no one else will go...

II. Faith Goes Where No One Else Will (4-5)

Verse 4...

⁴ Between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp crag on the one side and a sharp crag on the other side, and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. ⁵ The one crag rose on the north opposite Michmash, and the other on the south opposite Geba.

Jonathan had a desire to go to Michamsh where the Philistines were camped...

However, there was a problem...

Though Geba and Michmash were close to one another, there was a large gap between the two places..

The valley that separated them was not a slowly sloping valley.

Instead, it was a steep rocky cliff...

Bozez means slippery and seneh means thorny...

So, the plan to attack the Philistines at Mich mash was not going to be easy....

Here are some pics of that actual area today....

You can see the steep sides...

And that is why the armies camped there....

It is virtually impossible for an army to go up that step rock face without being destroyed in the process...

A basic truth of how to win a battle is to control the highest point in the area and make the enemy come get you.

So, the attack that Jonathan was preparing would require him to get down the side of Geba and then go up the side near Michmash..

Which would seem impossible in human terms to pull off....

But true faith will send you places that seem impossible to you...

True faith will put you in situations where other people think you are crazy to go.

True faith doesn't see the impossible, it simply says, "with God all things are possible."

So, faith acts when no one acts, and goes where no one goes...

But faith also finds its foundation in the LORD...

III. Faith Finds Its Foundation in the LORD (6-15)

Verse 6..

⁶ Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, “Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the Lord will work for us, for the Lord is not restrained to save by many or by few.”

Let me stop right there for a second...

I love what Jonathan says here..

First, his faith doesn't follow human math...

There are two of them going to confront a larger group of men...

But look what Jonathan says...

God is not tied down by numbers...

He can give deliverance by many people...

Remember in 1 Samuel 11 where 330,000 Israelites gathered to destroy Nahash the snake king of the Ammonites...

In that battle, God used a large number, but he doesn't need a large number...

IF you know the story of Gideon, his army of 300 defeated 135,000 Midianites.

We are concerned with numbers, God is concerned with faith.

And Jonathan has faith.

But it is not a presumptuous faith.

And I what is that notice what Jonathan says here...

Perhaps the LORD will work for us...

That is such a healthy view of God's sovereignty in this world.

Jonathan was a mere man; he did assume to know the mind of God.

He acted but he didn't command God to act on his behalf.

Wow, many in the church need to pay attention here.

There are men all over TV who command God to act on their behalf.

They name and claim whatever they want and demand that God provide it.

How dare we be so arrogant in our walk.

Jonathan was a man of faith but it was a well-balanced faith.

He did not presume that God would act on his behalf.

And that makes his faith all the more impressive.

If God had not intervened, it would have most likely cost Jonathan his life.

Real faith trusts the LORD whether we live or die.

So in verses 7-10, Jonathan and his armor bearer come up with a plan...

Verse 7...

⁷ His armor bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart; turn yourself, and here I am with you according to your ^[b]desire.” ⁸ Then Jonathan said, “Behold, we will cross over to the men and reveal ourselves to them. ⁹ If they ^[c]say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you’; then we will stand in our place and not go up to them. ¹⁰ But if they ^[d]say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the Lord has given them into our hands; and this shall be the sign to us.”

Though we can't be sure of how it exactly happen, I want to offer what I picture this scene to be...

Jonathan and his armor bearer are going to descend the cliff near Geba...

Then they are going to walk in the valley to the area below Michmach....

And their plan is to call from the valley up to the Philistines at Michmash...

In front of them will be this steep rock face, and they are going to call up to the Philistines right in front of that steep cliff...

And Jonathan says that if the Philistines answer and say, “we are coming down to you, then they will stay in their place and won’t go up.”

But if the Philistines say, “come on up”, then that is a sign that God is going to go with Jonathan and his friend to attack them.

Now, you need to know that it was not unusual for Israelites to switch sides and fight with the Philistines...

In fact, it was quite common in that day.

We are going to see in a few verses that there were a number of Israelites who had swapped sides and joined with the Philistines...

Reminds me of a poll that came out a few weeks ago that talked about a decline in people attending church in the last few years..

I read an article by Russell Moore about that poll that was spot on.

Moore claimed that the people living the church now were never really true believers...

He says that most of these people simply attached themselves to the church because it was expected of them..

It grew their reputation, their business and their power.

But now that the morality of Christianity is losing ground in the culture, they are jumping ship because it makes them now look bad to be in church...

They are examples of fair-weather fans...

When a team is playing well, their fan base always swells because they are popular...

But let them get on a losing streak and people hop right back off...

IT is a sad reality, but it was a reality even in Israel.

And many had deserted the nation when things were looking bad.

True faith finds its foundation in the LORD...

False faith finds its foundation in what is popular.

I say all that to say that the idea of two Israelites approaching a Philistine camp and calling up to them were common.

Most of the time, they were simply asking to join with the Philistine army....

And that is what Jonathan is going to use to his advantage as he approaches the Philistine camp at Michmash...

And though it is clever, the foundation of his plan is not his intelligence.

The foundation of his faith is that God may use him to bring relief to Israel.

So, Jonathan has built his plan around a faith that trusts in the Lord...

The plan is in place.

Let's see how it turns out beginning in verse 11...

¹¹ When both of them revealed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, the Philistines said, "Behold, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves." ¹² So the men of the garrison ^{le}hailed Jonathan and his armor

bearer and said, “Come up to us and we will tell you something.” And Jonathan said to his armor bearer, “Come up after me, for the Lord has given them into the hands of Israel.”

Just like Jonathan thought, the Philistines just think that Jonathan and his friend are simply more Israelites who have come out of hiding to join them.

Then they ask them to come on up.

Those words were music to Jonathan’s ears...

When the words to come on up rolled off their tongues, it was a clear sign that God was with them accorded to what Jonathan had planned...

Calling out to the Philistines solved 2 problems...

First, the answer indicated to Jonathan that God was going to be with them as they attacked the Philistine army...

But second, it put the Philistines at ease...

They would expect two Israelites to be approaching, so they would be less likely to attack....

However, the way they approached by coming up a steep cliff would conceal Jonathan and his friend up until the very end.

The Philistines would hear the pair climbing up and they would assume 2 things...

They are coming to surrender..

They will be tired by the time they reach the top...

Yet, neither would be true...

Verse 13...

¹³ Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor bearer behind him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer put some to death after him. ¹⁴ That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor bearer made was about twenty men within about half a furrow in an acre of land. ¹⁵ And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a ¹⁶great trembling.

Jonathan goes on the attack as soon as he reaches the top.

He kills 20 men in a half acre...

And then the Philistines were so caught by surprise that they began to run around like chickens with their head cut off...

The advantage of a surprise attack is that it leaves no time for preparation...

The victims are often thrown into a state of confusion and that leads to more victory...

On top of that, God sends a great earthquake to further the confusion of the Philistines...

It is difficult to deal with one disaster, but to deal with two at the same time is almost impossible...

The poor people of Texas have been dealing with flooding and tornadoes on the same day...

And that cause lots of problems..

Jonathan's plan has led to success...

And even though, he was wise in what he planned, his ultimate dependence was upon the Lord....

Now, let's move to the final section beginning in verse 16....

IV. Faith Encourages Others to Move (16-23)

¹⁶ Now Saul's watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude melted away; and they went here and there.

The confusion of the Philistines catches the attention of the men who were watching them from Gibeah for King Saul.

They notice the Philistines were running in all directions....

This news reaches King Saul in the next verse...

¹⁷ Saul said to the people who were with him, “^[g]Number now and see who has gone from us.” And when they had ^[h]numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armor bearer were not there.

It was obvious that someone had attacked the Philistines, but who?

So, they counted everyone but realized that Jonathan and his armor bearer were missing...

With all the confusion in the Philistine camp, Saul finally decides to act....

Verse 18....

¹⁸ Then Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring the ark of God here.” For the ark of God was at that time with the

sons of Israel. ¹⁹ While Saul talked to the priest, the commotion in the camp of the Philistines continued and increased; so Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand.” ²⁰ Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and came to the battle; and behold, every man’s sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. ²¹ Now the Hebrews who were with the Philistines previously, who went up with them all around in the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. ²² When all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines had fled, even they also pursued them closely in the battle.

There are 3 groups that show up to take advantage of Jonathan’s daring attack...

The first group is found in verse 20 and is made up of Saul and his men...

The second group is found in verse 21 and is made up of Israelites who had deserted Israel and joined with the Philistines...

The final group is found in verse 22 and is made up of all the men who had hidden themselves from the Philistines....

In short, the scared, the traitors, and the cowards all showed up now that the tide had turned.

And we could spend a while talking about all the unfairness there, but let me just say this....

Instead of criticizing the injustice of this situation, let's look to the faith of Jonathan here...

Simply put, his faith eventually increased the faith of others....

And the same is true of each of us when we act in great faith...

People take notice...

We don't act in faith to gain attention, we act in faith to point to the greatness of our God...

But in those acts of faith, we are an encouragement to others...

That is why I always tell people in trials...

Go through this trial by relying upon your trust in the Lord...

The new you come out of your trial, guess what you are able to do?

You can point people in that same trial to simply keep the faith and trust the Lord...

You made it through, in part, so you can help other make it through...

Trials are the proving grounds for our faith, but they also become the examples for others to follow when faced with the same tests...

When you are coming out of a trial, keep your eyes forward but your hand back so that you can help someone else in that same trial...

Jonathan's faith to act turned the tide of the situation that was facing Israel...

Now, the final verse of this section is the best verse....

Verse 23...

²³ So the Lord delivered Israel that day, and the battle ^{ljl}spread beyond Beth-aven.

Though we look at Jonathan's faith here, the ultimate source of victory was the Lord's faithfulness to his people.

He is the One who delivered his people in chapter 14...

God is the one Who gave Jonathan the faith to act.

And God is the One who showed enabled Jonathan to fight and win.

And that is where we will end tonight in verse 23...

When we get together in 2 weeks, we are going to get a glimpse at some ugly things that happened behind the scenes of this beautiful victory...

I'll save the bad news for then...

Conclusion

Let me end here with another interesting truth about this account..

Jonathan has acted like a king here...

He has acted like Saul acted a few chapters back when he gathered 300,000 men and went and destroyed the Ammonites...

Yet, guess what?

Jonathan has no hope of ever being king of Israel..

His father's disobedience has made it impossible for him to ever wear the crown..

But the amazing thing is that Jonathan didn't let that keep him from acting.

He could have easily just sat under the tree with dad and waited for it all to fall apart...

But he didn't.

Sometimes, we let our insignificance keep us from acting on our faith...

We think that great acts of faith belong to more important Christians, or more educated Christians, or more deserving Christians...

The truth is that God is pleased when any of his people step out upon the limb of faith and act.

Again, there is no guarantee our acts of faith will succeed.

Jonathan could just have easily have died in the attack on the Philistines...

But he was assured of dying if he simply sat under the tree with Dad and waited on the Philistines to attack.

His faith moved him to act, and I pray that our faith would move us to act just as well.

Let us pray.