

## **Let's Play a Game of "Saul Says"**

1 Sam. 14:24-52

(preached 6/17/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

### **Introduction**

Paul Harvey is a name that many of you probably know.

Paul Harvey was a radio personality in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

And he is probably most well known for his "Rest of the Story" radio segments.

These were short interesting and behind the scenes stories of famous men and women.

He did these segments for many years and they were about some of the most famous people in history...

George Washington, General Custer, Elvis Presley...

And they all contained little tidbits of information about their lives that most people had no knowledge of..

And they became real popular because they gave Paul Harvey's listeners a behind the scenes look at these famous people...

With that in mind, let's jump back in the book of 1 Samuel tonight...

We are going to finish up chapter 14 of 1 Samuel with a behind the scenes look that you we would not have known unless God had not inspired....

The author of 1 Samuel to write about it in verses 24-52 of 1 Samuel 14.

Now, to jog our memory, let's do a quick review of 1 Samuel...

This OT book is the story of 3 men....

Samuel, Saul, and David...

The opening chapters of 1 Samuel is the story of Samuel who would be Israel's greatest judge and essentially her last judge...

And the start of 1 Samuel happened during the time of the judges in Israel.

The nation began with Abraham and had grown into millions in Egypt....

Before leaving Egypt and settling in the land that God had promised to give them...

Yet when they arrived in that land, their disobedience toward God grew as well...

Since their founding as a nation, Israel had been led by God's appointed leaders...

Moses and Joshua.

But in the book of Judges, God sent a series of judges to rule the people...

And that was a very dark time in Israel's history..

The Bible says that during the days of the judges, the people did what was right in their own eyes...

As a result, Israel fell into a cycle of sin and disobedience...

Yet, God was going to bring them out of that with the birth of Samuel...

And the opening chapters of 1 Samuel are the story of Israel's greatest judge....

And even though Samuel had led Israel to victory over their enemies, the people were not satisfied with a judge....

They wanted a king like the other nations....

So, in 1 Samuel 9, God gives Israel them Saul, the very 1<sup>st</sup> king of Israel.

And Saul got off to a great start in his reign over Israel.

He defeated Na...hash, the snake king of the Ammonites...

And the nation rejoiced in their king, but in 1 Samuel 13, Saul disobeys the Lord..

And Samuel tells him that the kingdom will not remain in Saul's family...

So at the end of chapter 13, a disappointed Saul pulls back from the fight against the Philistines....

Even though he had earlier been ready to take on the world, at the start of chapter 14, Saul is no longer on the front lines of battle...

Rather he is content to sit under a tree while the Philistines ready their armies to attack Israel.

And so, 2 weeks ago, we read about the courage of Jonathan, Saul's son in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of chapter 14...

If you remember...While Saul was sitting under the tree, Jonathan went on the attack...

He climb the rocks walls below the Philistines and carried out a surprise attack...

The Philistines were so confused by the attack that they began to kill one another...

Saul sees that the Philistines are retreating and so he decides to enter the fight and the short story is that the Philistines are defeated and Israel is saved...

And if you look at verse 23 of chapter 14, you will see a summary of what happened in that battle..

**<sup>23</sup> *So the Lord delivered Israel that day, and the battle <sup>[i]</sup>spread beyond Beth-aven.***

And if God had decided to end chapter 14 right there, it would have been enough.

We would have learned much about Jonathan's bravery, and we have been blessed to see how God had used that courage to deliver Israel from the enemy.

Then we would have moved on to chapter 15.

However, chapter 14 doesn't end there...

In fact, it won't end for another 28 verses...

And these final 28 verse of chapter 14 are going to be the rest of the story of the battle on that day.

And most of these verses are going to be used to point out the foolish choices of Saul on that day...

So, before we get into this last section of chapter 14, I want to offer a reason why this section was included in chapter 14...

Why pick on Saul so to speak?

The big picture is that Israel has defeated the Philistines...

So, why a section of verses of Saul's foolishness?

Here's my two cents on that question....

You may have your own thoughts, but here's what I think...

First, Saul is on the decline spiritually...

His seemingly innocent act of disobedience in chapter 13 has now led to more disobedience...

If we didn't have this section in chapter 14, we may not see that Saul was continuing his downward spiral into sin...

And the truth is that Saul's disobedience is going to reach its peak in chapter 15..

And second, I think this section was included to contrast Saul and his son Jonathan...

Saul may be falling, but Johnathan is rising...

He is acting courageously.

He is fighting for the Lord's people.

He is taking charge...

And what is an application in our lives of what we see?

I would say this...

Like Father, Like Son is not always the case.

There is always hope in the next generation.

Saul may be losing his way, but that doesn't mean that Jonathan has to lose his way as well...

And so, let's take a brief look at this long section tonight and try to gain some wisdom from Saul's foolishness...

## **I. The Foolishness of Man-Made Rules (24-30)**

Verse 24...

*<sup>24</sup> Now the men of Israel were hard-pressed on that day....*

Now stop right there for just a second....

That is meant to tell us that there was a little more to this battle than what we just read in verse 23...

Yes, God did deliver them but it didn't go as smooth as you think...

It is similar to the answer that I gave to people who asked about our vacation....

I responded that we had a great time, and we did..

But does that necessarily mean that everything went great?

Well, no.

There was painful sunburn.

There was crying.

There was beach traffic.

There was sand everywhere in my clothes and shoes...



Not everything was great but overall it was great...

Well, verse 23 tells us that God gave Israel victory, but it wasn't all good because Israel was hard pressed that day...

Hard pressed means that they were burdened that day.

They were distressed that day..

They were stressed.

Now, you would say that any battle would be stressful, and that would be right...

But on this day, they were even stressed more than usual...

Even beyond the stress of battle, they were other things weighing on them...

And the reason that they were hard pressed is found in the second half of verse 24...

***“for Saul had put the people under oath, saying, “Cursed be the man who eats food <sup>li</sup>before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies.” So none of the people tasted food. <sup>25</sup> All the people of the land entered the forest, and there was honey on the ground. <sup>26</sup> When the people entered the forest,***

***behold, there was a flow of honey; but no man put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath.***

Saul had made a rule that no man could eat until the Philistines were defeated...

The simple fact is that Saul did not get this from the LORD....

If you remember, Samuel, who God used to communicate with Saul, has departed...

So Saul is on his own in a way, and he comes up with a rule forbidding the people to eat until the Philistines have been destroyed.

Maybe Saul thought this made his look spiritual in the people's eyes...

Maybe he was trying to bribe God into helping Him in battle by making the people look outwardly religious...

But the foolishness in the rule is that victory would only come through warfare...

And a basic requirement of warfare is to have well-nourished soldiers...

Even though I could spend the rest of our time tonight applying this principle today....

I simply want to say this...

Churches are full of people who want to apply their man-made religious rules to everybody around them.

If I have one pet peeve that I would like to rid the church of, it is folks who go beyond the word of God to make up and then try to force their rules upon the rest of the church....

And that is not a commentary on this church or any specific church...

It is a comment made from spending almost 2 decades around church people...

I am amazed at how many man-made rules I followed to the letter only to realize later that they were not found anywhere in the Bible.

Here's a good principle for us all...

Know what the Bible says before requiring everybody to follow your rules.

On issues where the Bible remains silent, show grace.

However, the sin of man made rules goes all the way back to Saul and even beyond him....

But we find something interesting about Saul's foolish order...

Not everybody heard him give it...

Verse 27...

***27 But Jonathan had not heard when his father put the people under oath; therefore, he put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened.***

If you remember from last week, Jonathan had departed from the camp to go out on his own with his armor bearer...

Saul must have made the rule after Jonathan left...

And so as the Philistines retreat after Jonathan's surprise attack, Jonathan is chasing after them....

Then he finds some of the honey but he eats it, and the verse says that his eyes brightened...

That is another way of saying that he had a sugar rush..

The food has given him energy.

Energy that Saul's soldiers lacked because they were under oath not to eat...

Verse 28...

***28 Then one of the people said, “Your father strictly put the people under oath, saying, ‘Cursed be the man who eats food today.’” And the people were weary. 29 Then Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land. See now, how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. 30 How much more, if only the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great.”***

One of the others lets Jonathan know of his father's rule about eating...

And Jonathan immediately sees the foolishness of the order...

He tells the other soldier...

No wonder we aren't killing more Philistines as they retreat....

Y'all are hungry and weak because my dad has acted foolishly...

Jonathan sees how ridiculous this order was..

And let me just say this...

Hold everyone rule up to the test of Scripture...

I cannot begin to describe the man made burdens that have been lifted from my back when people have pointed me to Scripture...

And shown me that I was following rules that simply weren't found in the Bible...

Jesus told the Pharisees that there rules were a burden upon the people that no one could bear....

And Jonathan sees the great burden upon the people on this day because of his father's man-made order.

And now in verse 31, we will begin to see...

## II. The Consequences of Man Made Rules (31-35)

Verse 31...

*<sup>31</sup> They struck among the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very weary. <sup>32</sup> The people <sup>[k]</sup>rushed greedily upon the spoil, and took sheep and oxen and calves, and slew them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood. <sup>33</sup> Then they told Saul, saying, "Behold, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today." <sup>34</sup> Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Each one of you bring me his ox or his sheep, and slaughter it here and eat; and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood.'" So all the people that night brought each one his ox <sup>[l]</sup>with him and slaughtered it there. <sup>35</sup> And Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first altar that he built to the Lord.*

Once Israel had defeated the enemy somewhat, they were tired and starving....

So, what did they do?

They grabbed the Philistines leftovers and began munching down.

I have been real hungry at times, but you hear stories of people who are so hungry and eat so fast that they can't even taste the food...

That is the story of Saul's soldiers here...

They grab the sheep, oxen and cows and tear into them raw eating blood and all, which was a clear violation of God's law...

They were not supposed to eat the blood of these animals, yet the hunger caused by Saul's foolish rule caused them to sin...

And sin they did until Saul heard about it and made them build an altar to slaughter the animals and drain the blood....

So not only has the Saul's foolish order led the people to physical exhaustion...

It is now spiritually destructive as well because the people are so hungry, they sin in their eating...

But that isn't the only consequence of Saul's man made rule...

Saul's order almost ends in tragedy...



### **III. The Tragedy of Man Made Rules (36-46)**

Let's look at verse 36...

***<sup>36</sup> Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and take spoil among them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good <sup>[m]</sup>to you." So the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here."<sup>37</sup> Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into the hand of Israel?" But He did not answer him on that day.***

Now that the soldiers are fed, Saul wants to continue the attack on the Philistines even by night...

So, he gets ready to go, but the priest reminds him that he needs to ask God if He approves of such a move...

And in verse 37, Saul asks God but he gets no answer...

In a normal situation, Saul would have asked Samuel, but Samuel has long since been gone...

At this point, Saul needs an answer to 2 questions...

Should he continue to pursue the Philistines....

But more importantly, why isn't God answering him?

Verse 38...

***38 Saul said, "Draw near here, all you <sup>[n]</sup>chiefs of the people, and investigate and see how this sin has happened today.***

Saul quickly assumes that there must some sin in the camp...

God isn't answering him because someone has sinned...

So, verse 39...

***39 For as the Lord lives, who delivers Israel, though it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But not one of all the people answered him. 40 Then he said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good <sup>[o]</sup>to you."***

In verse 39, Saul announces that whoever is sinning, even if it is his own son, he will surely have to die...

So he lines all of Israel up...

The people are on one side, and Saul and Jonathan are going to be on the other side, and in verse 41 the lot is going to be cast...

Verse 41..

***<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Saul said to the Lord, the God of Israel, “Give a perfect lot.” And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped.***

Probably much to Saul’s surprise the lot determined that the sin was not among the people...

It was found in either Saul or his son Jonathan...

Then verse 42...

***<sup>42</sup> Saul said, “Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son.” And Jonathan was taken.***

The lot has fallen on Jonathan, so Saul asks Jonathan what he had done....

Verse 43...

***<sup>43</sup> Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” So Jonathan told him and said, “I indeed tasted a little honey with the end of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am, I must die!”<sup>44</sup> Saul said, “May God do <sup>[v]</sup>this to me and more also, for you shall surely die, Jonathan.”***

Now, if we draw back from this a minute and think about it...

Jonathan is facing death because he tasted a little honey with the end of a stick....

That sounds almost ridiculous when we say it, but that is the tragedy of man made rules...

They leave no room for compassion and mercy...

They must be followed at all costs, and if even if it means that your son must die for tasting a bit of honey, so be it...

He must die...

I think the lot falling on Jonathan was not meant to reveal his sin...

First, Jonathan had not heard about the rule when he ate....

But second, the command was not from God but from Saul....

As I look at this scene, the lot fell on Jonathan in an effort to show Saul the foolishness of his order...

It was God's attempt to awaken Saul to his own foolishness of such a rule..

Look Saul, your son is about to die because you made a foolish choice to issue an order in hopes of looking religious...

Now, it is time to see how foolish you have acted...

Your son is about to die because he dipped a stick in a honeycomb and took a bite...

See how ridiculous you have acted...

But instead of seeing his own sin, he is now ready to kill his own son.

That is how far out of touch Saul is with the Lord at this point in his reign...

Do you remember when Saul won his first battle?

His supporters came to him after that victory and said to him...

“Let’s put your critics to death.”

Do you remember what Saul said?

He said lets not put anyone to death today. Let’s simply rejoice in the Lord’s victory...

That was only a few chapters back in chapter 11...

He showed mercy then even to his enemies...

But now after this victory, his is ready to put to death his own son...

The mercy that characterized him earlier is gone...

He is prepared to kill his own son for violation of a command not from the Lord, but from him...

And that is really what made man rules do the people who make them...

They make them unmerciful.

They make them blood thirsty.

Instead of looking for opportunities to show mercy, they become Pharisees constantly looking over everyone's shoulder making sure...

That they are following every little detail of their rules...

And so here is Saul ready to execute his son because he broke a man made rule...

Yet the people are going to step in...

Verse 45...

**<sup>45</sup> But the people said to Saul, "Must Jonathan die, who has <sup>[a]</sup>brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Far from it! 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 <sup>[r]</sup>rescued Jonathan and he did not die. <sup>46</sup> Then Saul went up from <sup>[s]</sup>pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.*

Though the lot landed on Jonathan, Saul was the one who sinned..

And the people step in to tell him just that...

How can you kill Jonathan?

He is the reason that we are alive today...

God is pleased with him.

He even used him today to deliver us from the Philistines...

Don't destroy the one who rescued us...

And though the crowd is often wrong, on this day, they were absolutely right...

And Jonathan's life is spared...

And the spiral of Saul's life continues...

Even the people are recognizing that Saul is no longer tuned in to God's will.

So Saul stops his pursuit of the Philistines...

And simply goes away from the fight....

His simple order had almost led him to kill his own courageous son...

Saul's time has passed, and though this isn't the final nail in his coffin, it is another step down in his reign over Israel...

And yet we find an interesting way to finish up this chapter in verses 47-52....



#### **IV. The Summary of a Man Made King (47-52)**

Though the end of chapter 14 is mostly about the foolishness of Saul, the chapter ends with the fame of Saul...

Verse 47...

*<sup>47</sup> Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he [t]inflicted punishment. <sup>48</sup> He acted valiantly and [u]defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of [v]those who plundered them. <sup>49</sup> Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan and Ishvi and Malchi-shua; and the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab and the name of the younger Michal. <sup>50</sup> The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the captain of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. <sup>51</sup> Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. <sup>52</sup> Now the war against the Philistines was severe all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he [w]attached him to [x]his staff.*

The chapter ends with a pat on the back of sorts for Saul.

The writer of 1 Samuel ends chapter 14 with a list of Saul's accomplishments....

Now, chapter 15 is going to be another act of disobedience on Saul's part...

It is almost as if the writer wants to sneak in something good before it gets even worse for Saul..

So, he talks about his war victories...

He talks about his family..

He talks about Saul's ability to choose good leaders...

Now, why do this?

I can only offer my insights because the Bible doesn't say....

But I think it is a combination of things....

Was Saul an effective king?

Yes, in some ways he was..

He won battles.

He defended Israel's borders from the enemy...

No one can deny that...

But I think this is placed here to teach us a valuable lesson...

Outward success is no guarantee of inward obedience...

Even though Saul was successful in some ways, he may have failed in the most important thing in life....

His relationship with His LORD.

It rings of Jesus words in Matthew 16:26..

<sup>26</sup> ***For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?***

## **Conclusion**

We haven't heard the last of Saul, but we have already seen the best of Saul...

And it is a sad picture in many ways...

Started out humble with the chance to be such a great king...

But disobeys and begins to spiral downward.....

In regards to last part of chapter 14, I love what one preacher says about Saul...

“God is not looking for winners but for disciples. He does not care what our hands can accomplish if our hearts are far from him. In the Bible and in life, obedience matters more to God than achievement, and Saul never quite understood that.”

Let us pray.