Prayer - 1 Samuel Lesson 9 (2020)

Title of Message: **JONATHAN’S COURAGEOUS FAITH**

**1 Samuel 14:1- 52**

Individual acts of bravery impress us today. Heroes are glamorized in the movies. Doing a selfless act is often an impulsive reaction. In a life defining moment, a decision must be taken in a matter of seconds. We don’t stop to analyze the most reasonable options and outcomes. We don’t try to make sense of it– we just know we have to do something about it. Certain acts of bravery are based on moral conviction or motivated by fear. In either case – we’re MOVED to do something extraordinary, perhaps strange and even crazy. Brave, bold, and intrepid, are the qualifications of such modern “hero.” But seldom do we hear that a hero acts on **Godly faith**. Jonathan had such qualifications; he possessed an unshakable faith in God. Jonathan **knew** God was leading and protecting him. Jonathan had courageous faith and God was his powerful armor bearer.

*The Key Verse for this Message is verse “6” and it reads:*

***6Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.***

What circumstances catapulted Jonathan to act so intrepidly! Remember that the books of 1st/2nd Samuel are of meaningful transition. From a theocracy, to anarchy and into monarchy. Samuel is the last judge of Israel, though he vehemently opposed Israel’s popular demand in electing a King - God granted Israel Saul as their first monarch. Saul, the leader of the nation of Israel, in the time of gathering the Promised Land. The Philistines are again at war with Israel. In the past, Israel had used the ark of the covenant as if it were a lucky charm used for winning battles. By now they had forgotten that the priest carried the ark in front of the army and into battle because God had told them to. Samuel, God’s spiritual Shepherd rebukes Saul’s arrogance and impatience. Saul had sinned before God. Consequently, God would no longer favor Saul nor his lineage in kingship over Israel. Israel’s army dwindles significantly, many soldiers abandoned their loyalty to Saul’s army, others just ran away and hid in caves. Israel is outnumbered and surrounded by the Philistine army. As if this was not bad enough, (1Sam:13-22) ***“22on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them.”*** The threat of death was imminent. Saul is hopeless, at a disadvantage – spiritually and physically abandoned. In the face of great adversity - something has to be done – if we’re spiritually and physically very weak – what can we do?

These are the circumstances that frame Jonathan’s true spiritual character. This is how chapter 14 begins. *Let’s read verses 1-4…*

***1One day Jonathan son of Saul said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side.” But he did not tell his father. 2Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. With him were about six hundred men, 3among whom was Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod. He was a son of Ichabod’s brother Ahitub son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord’s priest in Shiloh. No one was aware that Jonathan had left. 4On each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez and the other Seneh****.*

Jonathan has a loyal armor-bearer, together they’re going to dangerous enemy territory. Jonathan is not pretentious gathering an army, instead; he is discrete and leaves with his trusted armor-bearer. Jonathan came up with a strange and secret plan that was seemingly crazy. He took initiative and had the willingness to step out on faith. As the second in command, he did not wait to be told what to do. Jonathan knew this was only God’s doing and he did not need to get permission.

It’s as if he had remembered Gideon, who defeated the Midianites with only 300 men (Judges 7).

If God did this extraordinary act, why not intervene for him now! In the meantime, Saul is resting in comfort under a pomegranate tree. Jonathan’s faith in God’s deliverance is what led him to go and believe in God’s protection over him. Today, having faith in God’s deliverance is a blessing in times of uncertainty. God is our refuge and savior. Jonathan pleaded for God’s help and he believed he would receive God’s help. More so, how important is that we pray and believe that our prayers are answered. *Let’s read verses 6-10…*

***“6Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go*** *[affirmative action]* ***over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will*** *[pleading for help]* ***act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord*** *[believing and accepting]****from saving, whether by many or by few.”7“Do all that you have in mind,” his armor-bearer said. “Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.”8Jonathan said, “Come on, then; we will cross over toward them and let them see us. 9If they say to us, ‘Wait there until we come to you,’ we will stay where we are and not go up to them. 10But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the Lord has given them into our hands.”***

Saul stays in stagnation, while Jonathan moves in direction. Saul’s leadership tumbles, while Jonathan’s potential springs forward into victory. A leader needs to be confident and have a decisive and purposeful strategy. Saul’s poor leadership was not a result of personality traits, but of decaying spiritual character. His destiny spirals out of God’s grace. Saul becomes more arrogant and dishonest, lacks integrity and is incapable of acknowledging his own mistakes. This is a significant contrast between Jonathan and Saul. King Saul got too comfortable in a place of prominence, while prince Jonathan was about to risk his own life. How do we see ourselves: as Saul or Jonathan? As Christians we need to take initiative and help others in times of need. We need to be an armor-bearer in the holy spirit.

Jonathan’s plan to go to the outpost seems absurd at first, putting himself in “deep trouble”. He is physically in a geographically trapped terrain between two cliffs where the enemy can easily kill him from above. But Jonathan had confidence that God would deliver him. Jonathan had faith that nothing could hinder the Lord from saving. *Let’s read verses 12-14…*

***12The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, “Come up to us and we’ll teach you a lesson.” So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Climb up after me; the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel.”13Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. 14In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.***

The name Jonathan literally means: “YHWH has given.” God’s purpose for Jonathan is revealed in his name. Jonathan’s name symbolizes this critical life defining moment. God had a meaningful purpose for Jonathan. He was rewarded because he was willing to see God’s spirit of glory. Jonathan moved only believing in God’s Word, not trusting in power or a mighty army. He had moved solely on courageous faith. This was Jonathan’s heroic moment and the impetus for greater defeat of the Philistine army. Similarly, we often have to decide and act on our faith. God honors our faith. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” [Romans 8:31] With God on our side – we will never lose. Jonathan knew that against all these odds – God always prevails because with God everything is possible. *Let’s read verses 15 -20…*

***15Then panic struck the whole army—those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties—and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.16Saul’s lookouts at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the army melting away in all directions. 18Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring the ark of God.” (At that time it was with the Israelites.)[***[***b***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+14&version=NIV#fen-NIV-7527b)***] 19While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand.” 20Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords.***

Jonathan was able to start a small but strong enough flame that spread in all Philistine fronts. God’s power sent a sort of earthquake which scared the Philistines. This along with a spirit of panic made the Philistines turn against each other. Hebrews who had been drafted into the Philistine army revolted and others who were in hiding regained courage and joined to fight. God had engineered these unique circumstances. Personally, facing the obstacle of a pandemic every day is draining as I think about my pregnant wife, my daughter’s schooling, and work. The fear of death is looming– this is a situation out of my control. Sometimes I’m overwhelmed with all that is happening, as if the world is being consumed by uncertainty. I ask God to simply guide and protect my day. I must trust and know that God is in control. I take one step at a time. **The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** [Philippians 4:7]

Later on, we continue to see foolish acts of King Saul. Making oaths that were not thought-out well. Saul was about to ask for God’s guidance in what to do. But, Saul canceled the involvement and sovereignty of priesthood in this important matter. He was more concerned with being advantageous on the opportunity to strike the Philistines while they were in distress. God had already caused this victory because Jonathan started it and God will see it to its end. Later, Saul continues to demand foolish commands from his loyal men. This is as if he was working against his very own men, putting their lives at risk. Only a mad man can take such irrational decisions.

Verses 24-33 show us how Saul’s impulsive oaths may have sounded heroic, but had disastrous side effects. Just as he thinks he is building-up his own ego; it really is adversely turning against him. His ridiculous demands backfire. He would make foolish oaths because he was overly anxious to defeat the enemy and incentivize his army to end the battle quickly. His men were too tired to fight. Not feeding the hungry soldiers after fighting is not normal. Even his own son will violate this command not knowing it. Later the men have to continue on fighting with more stress and violence, and consequently they would eat the plunder that still contain blood, simply because they were so hungry. This was against God’s law because blood represented life, and life belonged to God. Not just his own son but his entire army does the opposite of what Saul had all along demanded. Saul’s pride would go as far as to kill his own son to vindicate himself to the people. *39****As surely as the Lord who rescues Israel lives, even if the guilt lies with my son Jonathan, he must die.”***

It’s the reason why it’s not wise to be impulsive and make promises that may have tragic consequences. Although Jonathan didn’t know about the oath, nevertheless he was guilty of breaking it. Jonathan was noble and willing to accept the consequence for his actions. Saul was more interested in protecting his image and sounding righteous. He wanted to look right instead of being right. When we do something wrong, even if it’s unintentional, we could respond like Jonathan or like Saul. It’s difficult to admit we are wrong. It must’ve been extremely difficult for the king to humbly admit it. Honestly, in our lives, it takes more courage to admit a mistake, to repent, and ask for forgiveness, or even forgive. Not only do we need the courage to act in faith like Jonathan, but we also need the courage to repent and believe in God’s forgiveness and acceptance. The love of God for us is mercy and grace through Jesus Christ. We always have a way through Jesus. We can ask for forgiveness and forgive others because God has shown us this through Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away our sin. Depending on God and admitting our faults is truly courageous faith.

Fortunately, the people intervened to spare Jonathan’s life. Verse 45 reads, ***45But the men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God’s help.” So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.***

After being king for several years, Saul finally built his first altar to God, but only as a last resort. He would only approach God after he had tried everything else. This in contrast to what the priest who had suggested that God be consulted first. It would all had been better for him if he had done this as his first act as a king. God was his afterthought. For us, God cannot be and should not be an afterthought. It’s easy to always find ways that do not involve God. God usually is our leftover; the last resort. But God our Father should always be first. I realize that through prayer I should put God first; trusting in His provision, deliverance, and salvation. In our world where men have God as their last resort, Christians are his light.

We have an interesting dichotomy in us: a split in our soul where we struggle between reason and desire. Like the story of contrast between Saul and Jonathan [David]. The earthly Kingdom of God in Israel was split between he, who was in power, and he, who was in servitude. This is our spiritual battle. It’s easy to desire our wants, but the reality is that what is most essential is what we really need. We need Jesus! Jesus is King, and we are coheirs with Him in God’s heavenly Kingdom. There will be no split among us and within us – we will all be together.

It was all God all along the way. God was so good - He saw Jonathan do his part and then He stepped in and delivered an amazing defeat on the enemy.

Jonathan walked towards this dangerous situation only knowing that God would deliver Victory.

Let Jesus be the protagonist in our life. He died for us in order to save us. The least we can do is Remember. The Holy Spirit of Jesus is there, waiting for us to unload our burdens and worries – He is our healer and best Advisor. We have many limitations and obstacles today: Coronavirus, aging/sick family members, sons/daughters in the uncertainty of starting school or work. All these obstacles target the physical and spiritual well-being of what it is to feel human. We cannot even breathe in comfort without first assessing that there is no one around us without a mask. Yes, we need to have precaution and take safety measures but most importantly – we have to know that this is fear personified. God wants us to stay focused in the spiritual realm. Physical and spiritual battle grounds can only be won through Jesus Christ, seeking victory through Him for the Glory of God.

Ephesians 6:10-17 reads: **10Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

We need spiritual armor - Jesus is the bearer. We need to be ready to fight with these spiritual weapons today because the enemy is always near.

Jonathan was willing to climb and work himself-up the cliff. Jonathan went to battle both in prayer and with literally all his physical strength. If we want to see God’s best in us – we have to fight our best. Not only will we have to climb up, get up - but we will have to fight and run forward towards victory in the holy spirit of Jesus. We do our part and God will do his supernatural part to exalt us above all opposing odds. When we learn to trust in God – all things that seem impossible for us are suddenly all possible. Trusting the word of God is key and it is our sword. We can be courageous in faith knowing that God is on our side. Engage with expectation - commit your way to God and trust Him for the outcome. Let’s pray to be like Jonathan, who fully believed that nothing could hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or few.