

Don't Let Fear Override Your Faith

1 Samuel 14:1-23

Faithfulness Under Pressure

By Dave Urbanski

Trusting in God is not always easy, even for Christians.

So often we find ourselves in the middle of difficult situations, and we forget that Jesus promised to be with us always, even until the end of time. Then we may do things in a panic or using our own strength. Or maybe, despite our faith in Christ, we're not completely sure he will help in our time of need. Doubt, even a little bit, persists.

Truth is, we can be confident not only that the Lord is with us at all times, especially in times of trouble, but also that he will respond to us. Sometimes that response will be exactly what we want it to be — but at other times that response will be something else, maybe something we aren't expecting ... or perhaps something we don't like. Where the rubber meets the road in our faith in Christ is how we as believers respond to the Lord when his actions are confusing to us — and even when they're not what we wanted. Ultimately we must accept that in the end God is all-knowing and all-powerful ... and we are not. He sees the big picture; we don't. The Lord works out all things in our lives in complete and total love for us according to his will; we, on the other hand, have no such ability.

God and his power and love is all we have.

It's a matter of faith and trust — literally falling to our knees in our times of fear and times of need and relying on the Lord for all things. Because the truth is, even when things are going *well* for us, we're *no less reliant* on the Lord. Likely it just *seems* as though we can handle things on our end. Inevitably, though, trouble comes, and we're reminded in stark terms that *now* we need Jesus. Well, we've *always* needed him. Every day. Every hour. Every second.

Our study last Sunday in 1 Samuel 14:1-23 illustrates such spiritual realities.

On the one hand we have Jonathan — a man of faith in God who meets challenges because of that faith. On the other hand, we have his father Saul who has no such faith and hides in passivity as a result.

Verses 1 and 2 spell out the disparity: “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.”

Pastor Scott noted that Jonathan oozes *action* in his desire to serve the Lord — and the fact that he doesn't want to tell his father about his intention to meet the Philistines head on demonstrates the growing tension in their relationship. Saul, unfortunately, was hiding in a cave in passivity, hoping things would resolve themselves.

Pastor Scott also pointed out a significant description in verse 3 that further underscores the problem at hand. It says that among the 600 men hiding with Saul is "Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli." We should recall from a previous 1 Samuel study of ours that Ichabod is the name of the son born the same day his mother learned his father was killed in battle — and the Ark of the God was taken away. The meaning of the name Ichabod? "The glory has departed." That is emblematic of Saul's life: The glory of God has departed, and there is no more blessing on Saul's life.

Fortunately, as Pastor Scott noted, if we find ourselves at a place where we've been living in disobedience and are wondering why God isn't blessing us, we can turn things around RIGHT NOW and repent and ask for the Lord's forgiveness, so that God's blessings may return to us. Further in 1 Samuel 14, we find Jonathan putting his faith into action in verse 6, as he tells his armor-bearer, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few."

Pastor Scott pointed out that Jonathan's choice of words is crucial; he doesn't refer to those in the opposing garrison as "Philistines" or the "enemy" but as the "uncircumcised." In other words, a direct reference to Abraham and the Jewish faith. Jonathan, indeed, is viewing this a *spiritual* battle, and he intends to fight it with spiritual resources. Pastor Scott emphasized to us that we should have the same attitude, telling the Lord we trust him to fight for us, and we're going to step out in faith — even if it's just a small step!

In verse 7, Jonathan's armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul."

Pastor Scott remarked at how incredibly encouraging the armor-bearer's reply to Jonathan is and asked if any of us have somebody like that in our lives. Or if any of us do that for others. Can we be like Jonathan's armor-bearer to those in our lives? If not, what is the Lord telling you about that in this *very* moment?

Verses 8 through 10 continue with Jonathan saying, "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 into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us."

Pastor Scott pointed out the similarities of these verses to Gideon's actions in Judges 6 regarding putting out fleeces to get some extra assurance that God was there. But Pastor Scott said Jonathan is acting with much more faith — even though he doesn't know what the next step will be! Which is OK — because even if there is darkness all around us, Psalm 119:105 promises that we can take that next step since the Lord's word is a "lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

With that, Jonathan and his armor-bearer show themselves to the Philistine garrison, who call them over, and Jonathan responds in faith, confident that "the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel." (v. 12) With that, 20 men in the garrison are killed, and verse 15 tells us "there was a panic in the camp, 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."

Another similarity to Gideon's battle, Pastor Scott said, with the enemy attacking and killing each other — and another miracle of the Lord. Indeed, when we obey God, it pleases him, and it opens the door for his miracles.

We then turn to Saul in verses 16 through 19, and Pastor Scott pointed out Saul's continued behavior indicating his indecision, his inclination to "sit around," and his hope that things will "go away" or resolve on their own. His behavior culminates with him seemingly beginning to exercise some faith by calling for the Ark of God and a priest's counsel — but then Saul suddenly rejects it and literally goes his own way. As Pastor Scott said, Saul literally second-guessed the Lord's help and the Lord's will in this situation. Very sad.

Our passage ends with Saul finally entering the battle, and three groups of people following him. The first group consists of the people who were with Saul; the second group consists of Hebrews who had been with the Philistines (literally those who gave into the enemy's culture to reduce pressure in their lives, Pastor Scott told us); and a third group who had been in hiding — and then grew backbones after hearing that the Philistines were fleeing.

Let us not be counted among such groups in our own lives. If that *is* us, let us turn about now. In the end, verse 23 tells us that "the Lord saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven." Pastor Scott noted that God indeed was "doing something in this space" — and that the saving had everything to do with God. Despite Jonathan's faith, he wasn't the one doing the saving. And it sure wasn't Saul who was saving. It was God and God alone.

In the same way, we should always be trusting in the Lord for victory in our lives, Pastor Scott told us. And he added that we all need to be living lives of faith ... to be looking for the Lord's blessing ... to be pursuing his kingdom above all other pursuits.

So let us step forward, seek after God's will and direction — and then (the key action) *obey the Lord*.

Are you ready to be like Jonathan and his armor-bearer today? Are you ready to trust that God will fight your battle? Do you believe that God can give you the victory?

If you are wavering in any way as you ask yourself those questions, do not despair: Right now, right where you are, turn to the Lord in prayer and ask him for his help, ask him to increase your faith in him, and then ultimately lead you in the way you should go!