

Project possible

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[0:00] There's two young men in this chapter, and it may seem rather foolish, but they think they can have a go. He doesn't even tell his father there's no point. His father won't see any point in them going.

But nevertheless, Jonathan, the son of the king, heads off with his sword and his young armor-bearer. But he faces what is a literal uphill battle.

We've spoken already of the impossibility. Well, listen to this in verse 4. On each side of the path that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff.

One was called Bozes and the other called Sena. One clistered to the north towards Mishmash and the other to the south towards Geba. They are faced with two cliffs.

Bozes, which the name means slippery, and Sena, which means thorny. Thorny and slippery cliffs to climb if you want to reach the Philistine army.

[1:38] Project impossible. Faces a literal slippery and thorny uphill battle.

So faced with the impossibility of a cliff and the impossibility of two people against a whole army, you would think the two boys would realize what a silly idea this was and hurry off back home. Hurry off and join Saul under the pomegranate tree, maybe. But no, Jonathan has other ideas. Have a look in verse 6. Jonathan said to his young armour bearer, Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men.

Perhaps the Lord will act on our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.

Maybe you're thinking this is some sort of proud, arrogant rebellion against a father. But actually, I think this is a real statement of faith that Jonathan has here.

[2:55] Faith in the Lord his God. He knows that the battle belongs to the Lord. He says there in verse 6, Perhaps the Lord will act.

Not just some wishful thinking. Perhaps the Lord may do something. But actually recognising that the Lord is the Lord. And if it pleases him to use these two young men against this whole Philistine army, the enemies of God's people, then the Lord will do that.

He can certainly save using us. He can save whether by the many or the few.

And nothing can hinder that. If that is the Lord's purpose. And so with the Lord, project impossible suddenly becomes project possible.

Jonathan and his young armour bearer are most certainly in the few category.

[4:08] Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few. They are two. And in fact, the Israelite army, they've been reduced down to 600.

They are few. And so the armour bearer with him, by his side, says, Do all you have in mind. Go ahead. I am with you, heart and soul. So, so boys, what's the plan? The plan for project possible. What's the plan?

Verse 8. Jonathan said, Come on then, we will cross over towards them and let them see us. If they say to us, wait there until we come to you, we will stay where we are and not go up to them.

But if they say to us, come up to us, we will climb up because that will be the sign that the Lord has given them into our hands. So they will go towards the enemy territory.

[5:11] If the Philistines say, we'll come down to you, then they won't go up to them. But if they say, come up to us, then they will go up a thorny or slippery cliff, all the while knowing and trusting that the Lord will be giving them into their hands.

Confident only in the Lord's power to save, whether by the many or by the few. And so they go. Verse 11. So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. Look, said the Philistines, the Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in. The Philistines are probably feeling like the cat who's got the cream, rubbing their hands together. This is exciting. The Hebrews are crawling out of their holes. They're coming to us. Victory is ours. And so what do they shout in verse 12? Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson. Full of themselves, aren't they? Why wouldn't they be? It's impossible that these two young boys could possibly even dream of defeating these Philistines. [6:28] And what happens? Verse 13. Jonathan climbed up using his hands and his feet with his armor bearer right behind them. Like a special forces officer like that guy we spoke about earlier. Climbing up the cliff. with his armor bearer following closely behind. And what happens? I know I'd be worn out after such a climb but actually look at what happens. Verse 14. In that first attack Jonathan and his armor bearer killed some 20 men in an area of about half an acre. nothing can hinder the Lord from saving whether by the many or the few. These two boys go and kill about 20 of those Philistines. What happens next was truly a work of the Lord's. Jonathan and his armor bearer were right to have their faith in the Lord weren't they? Verse 15. Then panic struck the whole army. Those in the camp and field and those in the outposts and raiding parties and the ground shook. [7:52] It was a panic sent by God. They had the Lord their God on their sides and panic struck the Philistine army. These two men the son of the king and his young armor bearer were being used by the lords. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving whether by the many or by the few. And now Saul's men with him by the pomegranate tree see what's going on from a distance and they prepare to join the battle. Have a look there in verse 16. Saul's lookouts at Gibeah and Benjamin saw the army melting away in all directions. Then Saul said to the men who were with him muster the forces and see who we have left. When they did it was Jonathan and his armor bearer who were not there. Muster the forces who's even left? There's about 600 of them. [9:04] There's a couple of people missing. The son of the king is not here and his young armor bearer they must have gone off afraid they wouldn't be involved in this Philistine panic would they? They're just few. And so Saul in continuing to think about how he's going to tackle this in verse 18 summons Ahijah the priest to bring the ark of God at that time it was with the Israelites. In other words Saul is kind of wanting to bring God into this in some way. Is Saul finally looking to the Lord for help? Or is this a dangerous game? The last time the ark of the Lord went with them into battle they lost it to the Philistines and Ichabod was born which means the glory of God has departed and you know what Ahijah is a relative of Ichabod see there in verse 3 he was a son of Ichabod's brother Ichabod was his uncle it's not clear whether this is a good move or a bad move from Saul but I think what happens next is a signal of where Saul's trust is it's not in the Lord's he says go away to the priest verse 19 while Saul was talking to the priest the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more so Saul said to the priest withdraw your hands and then Saul thought this is time I see the Philistines are in tumult let's go and attack forget the Lord let's go and attack let's go into battle so verse 20 then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle they found the Philistines in total confusion striking each other with their swords so the Israelites are in battle they are firmly in battle those 600 are taking the opportunity of those Philistines being in complete confusion a confusion sent by the Lord and verse 21 those Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines and had gone up with them to the camp went over to the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan when all the Israelites who were hidden in the hill country of Ephraim learned heard that the Philistines were on the run they joined the battle in hot pursuit these people who deserted the Israelite army they were back they saw who was now going to be on the victory side probably a bit like when I decided to support

[12:12] Portsmouth Football Club when I saw they were going to win the FA Cup but the battle it wasn't actually won by Saul and his army the battle wasn't really won by Jonathan and his armor bearer look who gets the credit there in verse 23 so on that day the Lord saved Israel and the battle moved on beyond Beth-Avon it was the Lord the Lord saved Israel on that day and Jonathan was right nothing nothing can hinder the Lord from saving whether by the many or by the few the Lord was where the victory how the victory was won and so project impossible became project possible and Jonathan knew how it was going to be possible by faith in the Lord and that's where we get our first point this morning faith in God's power to save

Jonathan's faith was in the Lord despite the circumstances around him looking rather small and hopeless and weak despite the enemy in front of him looking strong and mighty and I think his faith and that of his armor bearer is one we can learn from this morning when we face situations in our own life that look huge and we think how are we going to face that it looks like a cliff that we can't see over and maybe there's there's a whole Philistine army on the other side metaphorically speaking Jonathan says perhaps he trusts in the Lord perhaps the Lord will work the Lord will act on our behalf nothing can hinder the

Lord from saving whether by many or by few he knew that the Lord was mightier than this army this Philistine army he knew he had the power to save even with these two young boys and he knew that he was sovereign and his work would be done if he chose if he was choosing to use Jonathan and this armor bearer he would do it to defeat the enemy if the Lord was choosing not to use them then the Lord knows he's the Lord he's on the throne and we by faith we need to be looking to the Lord don't we we may not see or know what is ahead but faith isn't seeing and knowing what is ahead it's it's saying I don't know what's going to happen but I know God is sovereign and his will will be done and so

I will trust him and I think some of us need to hear that this morning some of us are going through some dark trials right now and we need to know where our faith should be in it should be in the Lord whether we feel alone or afraid know this that God has power to save God knows the outcome he knows what lies ahead of you and so I'm going to put my trust in him I don't know where he's going to lead me but I know he will I know who holds the future as impossible as two men with one sword seems God used them to bring about his purposes of deliverance here and if you are still not sure that it is in

God that your faith should be in if you're still not sure that God can save by just a few maybe this is just a little bit of a chance going on something else was going on well I think we need to remember the cross don't we God saved God's purpose is being worked out by the few actually by the one the son of the king of the world went alone very much firmly in the few category and though on the cross it may just appear to many people as one man bleeding and dying weak and vulnerable actually we see there by faith a great victory being won some may look for powerful signs others may look to wisdom from books from philosophers from

[17:45] YouTube but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles but to those whom God has called both Jews and Greeks Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God Jonathan had faith in the Lord's power to save even by few and we by faith see on the cross Christ power to save and that's where we live that's where we find strength for the battle against sin it's where we find hope for the future and so as impossible as our situations might be we know the Lord is God's and he can work in mighty ways through the weakest of means and so

I think we should be like the armor bearer here in this chapter and say to God go ahead I am with you heart and soul faith in God's power to save secondly the foolishness of faith in self you see Saul his faith wasn't in the Lord heart and soul his faith was more in his self the army they've been in battle it's strenuous it's involved climbing up cliffs it's hot and hard and heavy work an army needs sustenance but we find that they are not allowed to get it verse 24 now the Israelites were in distress that day because Saul had bound the people under an oath saying cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes before

I have avenged myself on my enemies so none of the troops tasted foods they're in distress or more literally they're hard pressed an army weak in numbers is also weak in strength because Saul has told them not to eat any food the Lord God as we saw he's the one who saved Israel on that day but Saul he wants to be the one who gets the glory notice what he says there in verse 24 the reason for the binding them under this oath he says before I have avenged myself or my enemies it's selfish forget you lot Israel you're just my tool for winning my battles before

I have avenged myself or my enemies before that happens you're not going to eat no food for you Israel isn't this what you wanted in a king a king who would go and fight your battles just as Samuel warned them he would they would get a king who would take and take and take from them and here he is taking away their rights to food but then food comes and it's sweet honey from the honey comb oozing out and look what happens in verse 27 as nobody dared touch that honey verse 27 Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath so he reached out the end of the staff that was with in his hand and dipped it into the honey comb he raised his hand to his mouth and his eyes brightened

Jonathan's there having this honey his eyes are brightened and you can imagine other people in the army over there!

[22:16] looking upon this and thinking what's he doing? Do you not know about his father's commands? So you can imagine who's going to tell him?

Who's going to stand up for us here? We're hungry! How dare the son of the king do that? Verse 28 Then one of the soldiers told him your father bound the army under a strict oath saying curse be anyone who eats food today.

That is why the men Jonathan didn't know and Jonathan is outraged. Jonathan said my father has made trouble for the country.

See how my eyes are bright and when I tasted this honey. How much better would it have been if the men had eaten today?

Some of the plunder they took from the enemies would not the slaughter of the Philistines been even greater. Jonathan sees that if this army could have eaten they may have won an even greater victory against the Philistines.

[23:31] If it wasn't for the Lord helping them maybe they wouldn't want any because this army was told not to eat. this is Saul's selfishness going on.

It would have been better if they could eat. But it gets worse. Verse 31 that day after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines from Mishmah to Ajalon they were exhausted and so they pounced on the plunder and taking sheep and cattle and calves they butchered them on the ground and ate them together with the blood and then someone said to Saul look the men are sinning against the Lord by eating meat that has blood in it.

An issue this command had led them into sin. They were eating meat with blood on it and if you read Leviticus 7 you would see that the blood of the animal is prohibited!

do that! But Saul here to give him some credit is willing to stand up for God's commands.

He says down in verse 33 after someone had pointed out the sin of the people he says you have broken faith he said roll a large stone over here at once then he said go out among the men and tell them each of you bring me your cattle and sheep and slaughter them here and eat them do not sin against the Lord by eating meat with blood still in it Saul was willing to protect the laws of God here and protect the blood of the animals and he makes an altar but in the process he's kind of doing what he did last week foolishly taking the role of a priest and that got him into lots of trouble and so now when Saul actually decides to ask God questions we read this verse 37 so Saul asked shall I go down and pursue the

[25:52] Philistines will you give them into Israel's hands but God did not answer them on that day Saul finally speaks to God and God doesn't answer and so someone must be at fault the big thing I think we should see here still is Saul's selfishness Saul's selfishness you see he stood up for the blood of the animals but as we're about to see he's very willing for his son to be put to death verse 39 as surely as the Lord lives who rescues Israel even if the guilt lies with my son Jonathan he must die but not one of them said a word and

Saul is going to organize them he's going to sort this out he thinks so in verse 40 he says to the Israelites you stand over there and Jonathan and my son Jonathan and I will stand over here and he's going to as is explained in verse 41 use Urim and Thumen to work out who's at fault it's a kind of divine head and tails with a coin you make a decision someone chooses heads someone chooses tails and base your decision on that here it's using Urim and Thumen two stones which were associated with the priest used for discerning the will of God and this time selecting whether the sin lies with Saul and Jonathan or with the rest of the people and what happens is that Jonathan was taken he was revealed to have been at fault and so Saul questions him in verse 43 tell me what have you done so Jonathan told him I tasted a little honey with the end of my staff and now I must die this was all Saul's doing this was Saul's command that Jonathan had broken not one of the Lord's commands and now Saul is really willing for your son to be put to death but you stood up for the blood of those animals but wait verse 45 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 shall fall to the ground for he did this today with

God's help so the men rescued Jonathan and Jonathan was not put to death the men stood up for Jonathan Jonathan he humanly speaking he was the one who saved us not you Saul why are we slaughtering our saviour without Jonathan the victory would not have been won humanly speaking without his faith in God and his power to save and so Jonathan was rescued by the people but Saul here we see his selfishness selfish commands selfish ambition to win the victory to get the fame and the glory for himself Saul kind of thought he was the saviour taking victory into his own hands but

Saul got it all the wrong way round Saul you are not the saviour of your people even the people around Saul reminded him you're not the saviour Jonathan gets the credit here if we read in verse 47 we read how the history books record Saul they record him quite well after Saul had assumed rule over Israel he fought against their enemies on every side Moab the Ammonites Edom the kings of Zobah and the Philistines wherever he turned he inflicted punishment on them he fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites delivering Israel from the hands of those who plundered them humanly speaking in the history book Saul gets a lot of glory he's spoken of in a good light but in this chapter of

[31:22] God's word we've also seen that spiritually speaking he's failed he's not trusted in the Lord his son has he's not in terms of his relationship with God it was a disaster and as we look at Saul we could look at him this morning and condemn him and say yeah Saul you've been terrible but actually I think Saul's a warning to us as well don't have your faith in yourself don't trust in yourself it's easy for us to condemn Saul this morning but what about all the times we've thought that I don't need to turn to God for help where have I trusted in my own wisdom and not in

God but this passage shows us through the son of the king Jonathan that I can't trust myself I need to trust!

he has the power to save the cross shows us I can't save myself even though the world might say I can I can't that's why Jesus has bled and died on the cross Jesus alone we trust the salvation and if you want to hear more about that come back this evening so where's your faith is it in God and his power to save are you looking to yourself and your own power to save let's pray