

1 Samuel 14

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[0 : 00] Now, last time, if you can remember that far back, we saw how Saul's great, great problem was that he tried to approach God on his own terms.

And that is a serious, serious issue. It's one which many people are guilty of. All over the world tonight, you'll get men and women who try, who think that God can be approached as long as we approach him in sincerity.

I have no doubt that Saul was a sincere man. The problem was that he was sincerely wrong. And that's the question that we all have to ask ourselves this evening.

It's not whether we're sincere in what we're doing, even in coming here. It's whether we're right, whether we're listening to God. I called it DIY religion.

DIY, do it yourself. In which Saul thought that it was an easy thing for him to, if there wasn't a priest, if Samuel hadn't shown up, then he could just simply offer sacrifices up himself.

[1 : 09] The one thing that God had forbidden his people to do was to imagine that they themselves could offer sacrifices or approach him in their own way.

Now he's doing it again. He's doing, once again, this is DIY religion. We'll see what I mean in a few moments' time.

But first of all, I want us to see that the chapter is divided into two. There's the good news. There's the news of how God delivered Israel through Jonathan, through the faith of Jonathan.

And like I said, Jonathan is a man here who is proving himself already, not only to be a mighty warrior, but his everything that Jonathan is, is grounded in his love for God.

You can see that even in the way he speaks. Because when all appears to be lost, and when the Philistines appear to have the upper hand, and Israel is quaking in fear, and it appears that there's no answer whatsoever.

[2 : 12] There's only a matter of time before the Philistines move in just for that final kill and for the destruction of Israel. Well, what they're not taking into account is that Israel, for all their weaknesses, and for all their sinfulness, Israel belongs to God.

And the Philistines never seem to have quite got that for some unknown reason. You find that in these chapters particularly, the Philistines again and again and again, they make every attempt, and they always fail.

Ultimately, there are times when it appears that they win the battle, like way back at the beginning of 1 Samuel, when they took the ark of the Lord. But that was once again when Israel had departed from the Lord.

They weren't living in step with him. And now here it was again. And the Philistines were simply counting the days or counting the minutes until they finally, and of course they had become complacent in that.

Time had gone on. The Israelites weren't doing anything. The Philistines weren't doing anything, no doubt. They were just sitting back complacently, just counting their successes and wallowing in their future final victory.

- [3 : 25] And it appeared, as far as God's people are concerned, to be a completely hopeless situation. And that's when God worked. When it just, when it appeared that all was lost, that is when God moved in.
- But he didn't do so in ways that you might expect. He didn't do so by creating a, well, we do read that the earth quaked. But it was not God's direct intervention.
- He did so by putting it into the heart of someone who was in favor with God. Now that person was Jonathan. And it doesn't tell us that he was better than anyone else.
- He was a man of faith. And faith is when you listen to what God says and take it to be your own and live by it.
- That's what faith is all about. It's not how sincere you are. It's whether or not your faith rests in the living and the true God alone. And in our case, in the New Testament, it's faith in Jesus Christ alone.
- [4 : 35] There's only one way in which we can be right with God this evening. And there was only one way in which Jonathan could be right with God on that day. And that was by trusting in him and by depending upon him alone for his salvation and for his guidance and for everything in his life.
- And you can't help but admiring this man. He's only got one person with him. There's something about this story that reminds me of a story we'll come across later on.
- And a story that we all know. And every person knows the story of David and Goliath. Of how, again, similar circumstances. When Israel was quaking in their shoes.
- Saul was inept. Couldn't do anything. David came along as a young boy. I'm not quite sure how young he was. I don't think he's quite as young as we sometimes make him out to be. But he came along with no training.
- With only five stones in his sling. And he went against the giant in the name of the Lord. And he won the battle ultimately.
- [5 : 44] Well, Jonathan's doing exactly the same thing here. He's going out in faith. Because faith doesn't depend on the size of an army. Faith depends upon the power of God.
- Look at what he says here. These marvelous words. And he said to the young man, Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us.
- He takes God into the equation. And that's what faith does. For nothing can hinder the Lord. For saving by many or by few. Something really marvelous about how tentative Jonathan is.
- How he's prepared to take just one small step after another. He doesn't know what God's going to do. He says it may be that God will work for us.
- He's putting his trust in not only in the God he knows, who is the God of the universe, but the God who has pledged himself to his people and who he can trust because of his promises. God had made promises to Israel through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never to leave them.
- [6 : 54] They would be his people and he would be their God. They had blown it. They had acted sinfully against him. And yet Jonathan somehow knew that God's grace overcomes our sin.
- That's what faith really is. Faith is what looks to God despite what we've done against him. And knows that God's grace goes beyond our sinfulness.
- And that's where, of course, we come in tonight. That's where the gospel comes in. Because we trust in the Lord despite our sinfulness.

In fact, we tonight take our sin and confess it to the Lord, knowing that if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness.

That's the God we believe in. It's not a God who rewards like for like. It's a God who has sent his son into the world so that through the death of his son, that our sin could be forgiven.

[8 : 06] And so that his grace could come upon us this evening. And that's what we depend upon in the light of what we're going to do next week. The Lord's table.

That's what faith is. And we sit at the Lord's table by faith, knowing that we've sinned against him. And yet knowing that God has pledged himself, he has promised himself to be our God and our Savior through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And faith is just what takes hold upon that promise. And says, Lord, I know I don't deserve it. You know I don't deserve it.

But your grace is not about what I deserve. Your grace is about Jesus having suffered your wrath for what I deserve.

And me having everlasting life, new life, abundant life through his death on the cross. And so that's what faith is. Faith is what takes hold upon God, the God of Israel, the Lord, the covenant-keeping God.

[9 : 19] And he's the same God as we worship and as we remember and as who has sent his son into the world for us. There's something really admirable about Jonathan.

There's something very... I'm not at all convinced that Jonathan went with absolute... He was confident in the Lord, but yet he simply didn't know what was going to happen.

And the life of faith is that as well. And I think a lot of people get this confused because they look at some Christians. You look at some Christians and it appears as if that they know everything that's going to happen and they've got it all...

Well, that's not the case at all. I don't know a single Christian in this world who knows everything that God's going to do in him. They may give that appearance. And there might be somebody here tonight and you should be at the Lord's table and you know you should be making a profession of faith and yet you're comparing yourself against someone who you think is more confident in their faith than you are.

And you say, because I'm not confident in my faith, because I'm not so, so definite, then there's something wrong and I can't sit at the Lord's table.

[10 : 33] There are all kinds. I wonder sometimes what goes through a person's mind as you think about whether or not you should sit at the Lord's table. Because in my case, it was so long ago, I can't even remember what went through my mind.

All I know is this. All I know is this. You don't know what's going to happen in your life. You can't guarantee what's going to happen in your life. You don't know to what extent you're going to let the Lord down at various points in your Christian life.

See, a lot of people say, well, because I might... who knows, in five years' time, I might let the Lord down. Why should that stop you coming to the table? You don't know. I don't know.

Nobody here knows what's going to happen in the future. Faith is every day. And it's taking God at His word in the situation that we're in. That's what Jonathan is doing. He's saying it may be that the Lord will help.

We can say more than that. We can say hitherto, God has helped us, and God will sustain us, and strengthen us, and lead us, and guide us, because He is the Lord who has sent His Son into the world.

[11 : 37] There's so much we can learn from the faith of those who lived in the Old Testament. So much about their lives, and what they said, and what they did, that we can draw from, and that has so much relevance in the way in which we live for the Lord here today.

And I didn't get a chance of hearing Dale Ralph Davis when he was here two or three weeks ago. I'm very sorry I didn't. But I've got all his books, and I read his books, and I read his books in preparation.

And here's what he says about Jonathan. It's as if, he says, Jonathan says, God can do mighty works with very small resources, and God may be glad to do it in this case.

And how can we know, dear armor bearer, he says, unless we place ourselves at His disposal? How refreshing, he says, it is to hear Jonathan's, who knows?

There's always something tentative, isn't there, about faith. You're always taking one step after another. That's what faith is. And I'm asking you tonight to think about that. If you are a follower of Jesus, and you haven't made that faith public yet by sitting at the Lord's table, take that one step.

[12 : 54] Didn't say take two steps, or three steps. Just that one step. Put yourself at the Lord's disposal. That's what faith is. Surrendering to God, and all that He can do, and will do in your life.

And Jonathan, of course, discovered far more than perhaps he expected. Not only was he able to defeat the garrison, but the whole place just erupted into a scene of panic, death and defeat and destruction, because that was what God was doing.

And I say that to people who have been Christians for a long, long time, and yet there's something within us that tends to either opt for an easier life or for a more comfortable, predictable life.

I wonder if tonight, in the face of what we, what surrounds us as in our nation, and all the unbelief, and the atheism with which we, the strength of the hostility against the Christian faith, that hostility, of course, has its own feet of clay, has its own weaknesses, which can be broken down by the Lord.

Who knows what God will do in days to come through men and women like Jonathan who are prepared to take God at His word and to take that step of faith. Who knows what God will do?

[14 : 19] But if you're not prepared to put yourself at God's disposal, then you won't know. And that's the challenge that God places before us. In any case, we know what happened.

We read the story. Jonathan defeated. Jonathan, his armor bearer, defeated the garrison. And of course, from there, there spread this incredible panic throughout the land, throughout the whole army of the Philistines that had five minutes previously been so confident in themselves.

Very quickly, that fear set in and the tables were turned and Israel was now on the victor side because the Lord, verse 23, saved Israel that day.

That's the good news. That's the story of faith. Meanwhile, from verse 24 onwards, we get the other side of the story.

We get the fact that Israel once again were hard-pressed that day because Saul in his foolishness once again was at the DIY religion.

[15 : 21] What do I mean by that? He thought, what did he say? He said, Saul had laid an oath on the people saying, cursed be the man who eats food until it's evening and I am avenged of my enemies.

What was he doing? He was forcing all of his people not to eat until there was victory over the Philistines.

Forcing his people. Now, what was he doing? He thought that he could attract the favor of God by something he forced the people to do.

Denying, in this case, denying themselves food. Now, anyone knows that an army cannot march in hunger. An army, what do they say? An army marches in its stomach.

Well, that's the first thing that an army needs is the strength of body and soul to be able to confidently go into a battle. He was denying them the very thing that they needed.

[16 : 28] There was no common sense. There wasn't an ounce of common sense about this. But yet, from one point of view, it sounds good, doesn't it? It sounds quite noble. It sounds quite, quite pious to deny yourself.

Imagine Saul standing up in front of the people and says, I declare that. And here again, false sincerity. There's nothing worse than it. I declare that until God gives us victory.

We are not going to eat anything. It was an enforced fast. A fast is where someone stops eating for a particular purpose. I'm going to say something about that later on, just a couple of minutes later on.

But this was an enforced fast. Fast was never supposed to be enforced. It was supposed to be voluntary. But Saul had put the people under a curse and said, curse be anyone.

He was sort of enforcing this vow upon them of abstinence with regard to food. The problem in what Saul was doing was that he was, he believed, obviously believed, that somehow or other he could win the favor of God by something he either did or didn't do.

[17 : 49] Once again, DIY religion. Because you can't do it. God will not be negotiated with on our terms.

You can't change God's mind by denying yourself food or by doing something to achieve what you want him to do.

He can't be manipulated in that way. And here's the very man who had refused to listen to the command that God had given Moses and he had deliberately disobeyed that command in sacrificing himself instead of waiting for Samuel.

Here's the very man and he thinks that he can manipulate God in some way and that he can change his mind in some way. somehow draw the power of God by refusing the people under him food.

What a contrast between him and his son Jonathan. Jonathan advances in the strength and in the faith of the God he serves.

[19 : 01] Jonathan has sat down and he has listened to God and he has worked and he has acted on that knowledge.

Saul is still desperately clutching at straws forcing the people to take a vow that they could not possibly keep. And a vow in actual fact that resulted in a situation that was worse than it could have been.

the victory could have been greater had Saul not so foolishly believed that God could somehow be changed or the victory of God could somehow be bought by his actions.

You know it's a form of legalism. Legalism is when we believe we can please God. by the things that we do or the things that we deny ourselves.

And there's something very serious about this chapter. Of course it's all serious but there's something very applicable to even the life of a Christian.

[20 : 13] Because a Christian can be tempted to believe that somehow God will be more pleased with him if he denies himself certain things or if he does certain things for the Lord.

This can happen particularly at a time of crisis or a time when we're looking for God to show us his will in certain areas. Which choice will I make?

Will I go to the right or will I go to the left? Where am I going to live? What job am I going to take? And sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking that if we do something for the Lord then God is going to make his mind known to us.

Or if a family member is ill we might try to bargain with the Lord. Try and say well Lord all I'm asking is that if you heal my loved one I'm going to do this for you.

I will give you this. So it's not just Saul who falls into this danger. Anyone can fall into the danger of believing that somehow or other we can bargain with God and change his mind on certain things.

[21 : 34] That's legalism. Believing that somehow if we do certain things or if we don't do certain things there's only one thing that God is pleased with. And that is faith.

Faith that rests in Jesus Christ. Our relationship to God is not what we do for God. It is what God has done for us.

And once again that's what communion is all about. Because tonight we fall into one of two categories. There are those of us who have accepted Jesus in his death and in his resurrection as the payment, as the atonement for our sin.

We rest in what God has done for us. We have confessed our sin and we continue to confess our sinfulness before God and we joy in his forgiveness because Jesus died on the cross.

we stand tonight justified, clothed with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because he died for us.

[22 : 55] Faith is resting in what God has done for us. It's not what we do for God. You can fast for a month and that won't bring you any closer to God than the Lord Jesus Christ will.

the only person who can bring us to God is the Lord Jesus Christ. The other category are those who try and like Saul so foolishly think it's a matter of what you do and the sincerity of your actions.

Is there someone here like that this evening? You believed your whole life and you still believe. Well, you say, it doesn't matter how often you've heard the gospel. You say, well, as God, if I look at my life, I'm not that bad.

I do this, I do that, I come to church, I pay a certain amount in the envelopes, I'm a pretty decent guy, I'm a respectable person.

If I ask my friends, you go and ask my friends, any one of them will give me a good reference. I don't swear, I don't drink, I don't lose my temper, I think I'm getting better as I get older.

[24 : 08] Surely, in the grand scheme of things, surely, God is not going to turn me away. I can think of many people who God should turn away. These are the murderers and these are the people who live in darkness and people who have no clue about what it means to be good.

Is that the way you look at yourself tonight? Because if it is, then you are entirely wrong. wrong. You are tragically wrong.

And you have a long way to go before you are right with God. I say a long way to go. If you carry on trying to be right with God by doing the right things and being a good person, you'll never get there.

we'll never get there until we see that there is no hope for us. And we are lost, bankrupt, and our only hope is what God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So no amount of legalism, no amount of self-righteousness will ever bring you to heaven or bring you to faith in Jesus Christ.

[25 : 35] The day you see yourself as God sees you is the day that you will begin to see the reality of who you are and why you need God the way you do.

And by God's grace, may he bring you to that place of faith in Jesus Christ that rests alone in what he has done and in what he has done for your sin.

And so Saul was tragically once again wrong in his attempts to think that he could win God's favor and God's victory by his own actions.

sins. And in a strange way this evening, he is a symbol if you like of many other people who think they can work their way into heaven and end up in a place of outer darkness where Jesus says that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

God forbid that any one of us should go on that road, continue on that road, but that we should come and turn and trust in what Jesus has done for us, surrendering ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 04] Well, there are so many complexities in this chapter. You have all these questions being asked. Well, for example, the advice that the priest, it seems to me that this priest was a bit of a dodgy priest in any case that Saul put his trust in.

He was a son of, he was Ichabod's brother, and that, if you know anything about the history of their going back to the first chapters of Samuel, well, you'll know that they were not known for their faith in the Lord.

Nevertheless, Jonathan was exposed as being, somehow or other, Jonathan was exposed as being the person who had broke the curse or broke the vow, and it opens up the question about a vow in any case, which is very, very interesting in this case because the people stood for Jonathan and they defended Jonathan.

They said, shall Jonathan die who has worked as great salvation in Israel, and they ended up ransoming Jonathan. We don't know how they did that. They must have sacrificed to the Lord, knowing that the Lord is merciful and gracious.

And knowing that the vow under which Jonathan had come was ill conceived, one that he didn't know of in any case, he was ignorant about in any case.

[28 : 24] There's loads of questions to that extent, and I didn't want to go into them this evening. I wanted to keep it very simple, and I hope I've done that, and we'll leave it there.

Let's pray. We'll bow our heads in prayer. Father in heaven, we give thanks this evening for the knowledge that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

And we pray that on that basis, and on that basis alone, we will go forward to the Lord's table, remembering what he has done for us, conscious of our sinfulness, conscious of our weakness, and conscious that every step we take, we take trusting in what you will do for us, just like Jonathan, trusting with that simple childlike faith, laying hold upon what you have said to us.

May we do so, may we do so all the more, and may each time we sit at the table be a strength to us to trust in Jesus more and more in his name.

Amen.