1 Samuel – Week 14 – A Victory Secured – Bible Study Helps

Title: A Victory Secured:

Faith, Foolishness, and the God Who Overcomes

Sermon Summary: Drawing from 1 Samuel 14, this sermon contrasts the bold, God-trusting faith of Jonathan with the self-centered foolishness of his father, King Saul. Jonathan, accompanied only by his armor-bearer, steps out in faith against a Philistine garrison under impossible military conditions, trusting that God is not restrained by numbers or circumstances. God responds by sending an earthquake that throws the Philistines into confusion and causes them to destroy one another. The victory belongs entirely to God, secured through one man's willingness to act in faith. Saul, meanwhile, sits under a pomegranate tree, arrives late to the battle, and then compounds his failure by placing a foolish, self-serving oath on his soldiers that weakens them physically and leads them into sin. The sermon draws a sharp contrast between leadership that burdens and leadership that builds, calling believers to trust God by faith, take initiative, and refuse to place unnecessary obstacles on those they lead or parent. The chapter closes with Saul nearly executing Jonathan for unknowingly breaking the oath, only to be stopped by the people. Despite flawed human leadership, God's purposes are not thwarted.

Key Points:

- Faith does not require favorable conditions before it acts; Jonathan stepped out against impossible odds because he trusted in God's unlimited ability

- True faith takes initiative, acts with confidence in God rather than in personal resources, and gives God full credit for any resulting victory

- Jonathan's armor-bearer illustrates the value of faithful companionship in ministry and the contagious nature of God-trusting faith

- God can accomplish His purposes through very few people, and often reduces human strength so that He alone receives the glory

- Saul's self-centered oath placed an unnecessary and harmful burden on his soldiers at the moment they needed strength, weakening them and leading them into sin

- Poor leadership does not excuse personal disobedience, but leaders are accountable to God for the burdens they impose on others

- Good leaders remove obstacles, encourage those under their care, and celebrate what God is doing through others rather than making circumstances about themselves

- Despite Saul's repeated failures, God continued to work His purposes, demonstrating that His will is not ultimately dependent on human faithfulness

- The contrast between Jonathan and Saul points forward to the contrast between Christ, who serves and gives life, and leaders who burden and take for themselves

1 Samuel – Week 14 – A Victory Secured – Bible Study Helps

- Believers are called to cry out to God in impossible situations, rest on Him entirely, and trust that there is no restraint on what He can do

Scripture Reference:

- 1 Samuel 14:1-52 (primary passage)

- Hebrews 11:8 (faith of Abraham, who obeyed without knowing the details)

- Ecclesiastes 11:1-4 (those who watch the wind will not sow)

- 2 Chronicles 14:8-12 (King Asa's prayer and victory over the Ethiopians against overwhelming odds)

- 2 Chronicles 20:5-17 (Jehoshaphat's prayer and God's declaration that the battle belongs to Him)

- Zechariah 4:6 (not by might nor by power, but by God's Spirit)

- Matthew 23 (Jesus warning against leaders who bind heavy burdens on others)

- Acts 15 (Peter rebuking those who placed unnecessary yokes on disciples)

- Matthew 11 (Jesus declaring His yoke is easy and His burden is light)

- Philippians 2:5-7 (the humility and servant nature of Christ)

- 1 John 1:9 (God's faithfulness to forgive confessed sin)

- John 3:16 (God's love and the gift of salvation through Christ)

Stories:

- Jonathan and his armor-bearer crossing treacherous terrain to attack the Philistine garrison, trusting God for the outcome, with God responding through an earthquake that caused the Philistines to destroy one another

- Saul sitting under a pomegranate tree while his son fought in faith, then arriving after the victory and imposing a fasting oath on his exhausted soldiers

- Jonathan unknowingly breaking Saul's oath by tasting honey, being refreshed, and Saul declaring his own son must die, only for the people to intervene and rescue Jonathan

- King Asa of Judah facing an Ethiopian army of one million soldiers and crying out to God, who routed the enemy entirely (2 Chronicles 14)

- King Jehoshaphat standing before God with his entire family and declaring he had no might and did not know what to do, but his eyes were on God, who then told him the battle was His (2 Chronicles 20)

1 Samuel – Week 14 – A Victory Secured – Bible Study Helps

- Gideon's army being reduced to 300 men so that God alone would receive glory for the victory (Judges 7, referenced)

- Jephthah's rash vow, briefly referenced as an example of foolish and costly oaths made in moments of zeal

- The pastor's personal illustration of leading people in a corporate setting, prioritizing the wellbeing of those under his care over the demands of detached leadership focused only on numbers

- The Good News Club ministry going into local schools, used as a contemporary illustration of stepping out in faith without knowing all the details, trusting that God is not restrained by circumstances

1 Samuel – Week 14 – A Victory Secured – Bible Study Helps

Discipleship Questions

Jonathan chose to act in faith without waiting for his father's approval or for conditions to improve -- in what areas of your life are you waiting for circumstances to be more favorable before trusting God, and what would it look like to take a step of faith right now?

Jonathan said 'it may be that the Lord will work for us' while also affirming that there is no restraint to what God can do -- how do you maintain the balance between humble uncertainty about God's specific plans and firm confidence in His unlimited power?

The armor-bearer's response to Jonathan -- 'do all that is in thine heart, I am with thee' -- reflects a deep commitment to follow someone who is following God; who in your life plays that role for you, and for whom are you playing that role?

Saul sat under a pomegranate tree while Jonathan was scaling cliffs in faith -- what comforts or habits in your own life might be keeping you spiritually passive when God is calling you to advance?

God brought the victory through just two men, and then others who had been hiding in caves came out to join the battle once they saw God at work -- what does this reveal about the contagious nature of genuine faith, and how might your own step of obedience encourage others?

Saul's command that no one eat food was rooted in self-interest ('that I may be avenged on mine enemies') rather than care for the people -- how do leaders, parents, or even well-meaning believers sometimes place burdens on others that reflect personal ambition rather than genuine concern for those they lead?

Jonathan said 'my father hath troubled the land,' recognizing that foolish leadership had weakened the very people it was meant to strengthen -- how should a person of faith respond when those in authority over them are making decisions that are harmful or unwise?

The people rescued Jonathan from Saul's rash vow, refusing to allow an innocent man to die for a foolish oath -- what responsibility do communities of faith bear when leadership goes unchecked, and what does godly accountability look like in practice?

Saul doubled down on his vow to execute Jonathan rather than humbling himself and repenting, even after it was clear God had worked through his son -- what is it in human nature that makes it so difficult to admit we are wrong, especially when our pride is publicly on the line?

Jonathan, who had every earthly reason to claim the throne after Saul, would later give his loyalty and even his royal garments to David -- how does Jonathan's willingness to surrender his own position and future challenge the way you think about ambition, legacy, and trusting God with outcomes that are not in your control?

Small Group Guide

"A Victory Secured" | 1 Samuel 14

Before You Begin

Open your time together in prayer, asking God to open your eyes to what He wants to teach your group through His Word. Encourage members to have their Bibles available throughout the discussion.

Overview

This chapter presents a striking contrast between two men: Jonathan, whose faith in God led to an impossible victory, and Saul, whose pride and selfishness burdened the very people he was supposed to lead. Together, their stories challenge us to examine our own faith, our leadership, and the kind of influence we have on those around us.

Key Takeaways

- Faith does not require favorable conditions before trusting God. Jonathan stepped out with confidence not in himself, but in a God for whom nothing is impossible.
- One person's faith can be contagious. When Jonathan acted, others followed. God often uses a single willing person to move many.
- Foolish, self-centered leadership places unnecessary burdens on people and can hinder the work God is already doing.
- Poor leadership does not excuse personal disobedience. We are each accountable to God for our own choices.
- Despite flawed leaders and failing people, God still accomplishes His will. He is not dependent on perfect circumstances or perfect people.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Think of a time when the odds seemed completely against you. How did you respond? Did your faith grow or shrink in that moment?

Part One: Faith That Advances

1. Jonathan said in verse 6 that it "may be" that the Lord would work for them, and yet he also declared there is "no restraint to the Lord." How do these two statements work together? What does this tell us about the difference between genuine faith and presumption?
2. Jonathan did not wait for his father's permission or for the conditions to improve before he acted. What is the difference between being reckless and stepping out in faith? How do we know when God is calling us to move?
3. The armor-bearer's response to Jonathan was immediate and wholehearted. Who in your life plays that role for you? Who are you playing that role for?
4. God brought the victory through Jonathan and his armor-bearer, but the Bible credits the Lord, not Jonathan, with saving Israel that day. Why is it important to make that distinction? What happens when we start taking credit for what God has done?
5. When God brought the earthquake and confusion among the Philistines, people who had been hiding in caves came out and joined the battle. What does this tell us about how God uses the faith of one person to inspire others?

Part Two: Foolishness That Hinders

6. Saul was sitting under a pomegranate tree while Jonathan was scaling rocks to face the enemy. In what ways can comfort, fear, or pride cause leaders and parents to be absent from the battles that matter most?
7. Saul's oath cursing anyone who ate food was described as foolish, unnecessary, poorly timed, and extremely self-centered. The result was that the soldiers were distressed and faint. Can you think of situations where a rule, expectation, or demand placed on others was more about the person giving it than the people receiving it? What damage can that kind of leadership cause?
8. Jonathan said plainly, "My father hath troubled the land." He saw clearly what Saul could not see about himself. How do we develop the wisdom to recognize when we are the ones placing burdens on others rather than lifting them?
9. The sermon drew a distinction between personal preferences and biblical principles. Why is it important not to confuse the two? How can mixing them up cause harm in families, churches, or workplaces?
10. The soldiers ultimately sinned by eating meat with the blood, in part because Saul's oath had left them so famished. The sermon noted that poor leadership does not excuse personal disobedience. How do we hold both of those truths at the same time without excusing sin or ignoring the responsibility of leaders?

Part Three: Family Battles and Conflict

11. Jonathan's faith and courage went largely uncelebrated by his own father. Have you ever done something right and had it go unacknowledged or even criticized by someone close to you? How did that affect you, and how did you respond?
12. Even when the lot fell on Jonathan and Saul had every reason to humble himself, he doubled down and declared that Jonathan must die. The people had to intervene to rescue Jonathan. What does it cost a person, a family, or a community when a leader refuses to humble himself and repent?
13. Despite Saul's failures, God still worked through Israel during his reign. What does this teach us about God's faithfulness and sovereignty when the people around us are not living as they should?
14. Jonathan eventually stood with his father in battle even after everything Saul had done. And when David rose to prominence, Jonathan willingly stepped aside and supported him. What does Jonathan's life teach us about remaining faithful to God even in the middle of deeply imperfect relationships and circumstances?

Practical Applications

This week, consider taking one of the following steps:

- Identify one area of your life where God may be calling you to step out in faith but you have been sitting under the tree. Write it down, pray over it, and take one concrete step forward this week.
- Ask God to show you whether there is any burden you have placed on a spouse, child, friend, or coworker that is more about your preferences or pride than about what is genuinely good for them. If He brings something to mind, go to that person and make it right.
- Find your armor-bearer. If you do not have someone in your life who will walk alongside you in faith and say, "I am with you," ask God to bring that person, and ask yourself whether you are being that person for someone else.
- Spend time this week in Psalm 19, where the Word of God is described as sweeter than honey and as that which enlightens the eyes. Let it refresh you the way the honey refreshed Jonathan.
- If there is a relationship in your life where pride or selfishness has caused damage, take a step toward reconciliation. Do not double down. Humble yourself before God and before that person.

Closing Reflection

The sermon closed with this question: Are you more like Jonathan or more like Saul right now?

That is not a question meant to condemn. It is a question meant to help us see ourselves clearly in the mirror of God's Word. Most of us carry a little of both. We have moments of genuine faith

and moments of selfish pride. The good news is that God is still at work. He brought the victory through Jonathan. He still brings victory through imperfect, willing people today.

Close your time together by praying for one another. Ask God to give each person in your group the faith of Jonathan, the humility that Saul lacked, and the courage to trust a God for whom there is no restraint.

Scripture for Further Study

- Hebrews 11:8 -- Faith that obeys without knowing all the details
- 2 Chronicles 14:9-12 -- King Asa's prayer before an impossible battle
- 2 Chronicles 20:12 -- "We have no might... but our eyes are upon thee"
- Zechariah 4:6 -- Not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit
- Matthew 11:28-30 -- The yoke of Christ compared to the burdens men place on others
- Philippians 2:3-8 -- The humility of Christ as the model for all leadership

5-Day Bible Reading and Devotional Guide

Based on 1 Samuel 14: A Victory Secured

Day 1: Faith That Takes the First Step

Reading: Hebrews 11:1-8

Devotional: Jonathan did not wait for perfect conditions before trusting God. He looked at sharp rocks, impossible terrain, and an overwhelming enemy, and said, "It may be that the Lord will work for us, for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." This is the posture of genuine faith -- not presumption, not recklessness, but confident trust in a God whose ability is never limited by circumstances. Abraham left without knowing the details. Jonathan climbed without knowing the outcome. What step is God calling you to take today that requires you to move before you can see the full picture?

Day 2: God Fights for Those Who Trust Him

Reading: 2 Chronicles 20:1-17

Devotional: When Jehoshaphat stood before God and declared that he had no might against the enemy and did not know what to do, he added five words that changed everything: "our eyes are upon thee." God's response was immediate and clear -- the battle was not theirs, but His. In 1 Samuel 14, Jonathan and his armor bearer climbed the rocks in faith, and God shook the earth beneath the enemy's feet. The Philistines destroyed each other. God does not need your strength to accomplish His purposes. He needs your surrender. Where in your life are you still trying to win a battle that belongs to God?

Day 3: The Danger of Foolish Leadership and Unnecessary Burdens

Reading: Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 23:1-4

Devotional: At the height of a God-given victory, Saul placed a reckless oath on his own soldiers -- weakening them, burdening them, and ultimately leading them into sin. Jonathan saw clearly what his father could not: "My father hath troubled the land." Jesus Christ stands in complete contrast to this kind of leadership. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He builds

up rather than tears down. He removes obstacles rather than creating them. Whether you lead a family, a team, or a congregation, examine the weight you place on others. Are you strengthening those around you, or are you making the journey harder than God intended?

Day 4: The Armor Bearer -- The Power of Faithful Companionship

Reading: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Proverbs 17:17

Devotional: When Jonathan said, "Come, let us go," his armor bearer did not hesitate. He said, "Do all that is in thine heart. Behold, I am with thee according to thy heart." This is one of the most beautiful pictures of faithful companionship in all of Scripture. Ministry, faith, and the Christian life were never meant to be lived alone. God places people in our lives who will follow us into difficulty, cover our backs in battle, and stand firm when the terrain is treacherous. Are you that person for someone else? And have you thanked God for the armor bearers He has placed beside you?

Day 5: Despite Our Failures, God Accomplishes His Will

Reading: Romans 8:28-39; Lamentations 3:22-23

Devotional: Saul was prideful, reckless, and self-centered. His soldiers were faint and stumbled into sin. Yet the Bible declares plainly in 1 Samuel 14:23 that the Lord saved Israel that day. God's purposes are not derailed by human failure. His mercies are new every morning. If you have been more like Saul than Jonathan -- making decisions driven by pride, burdening others with your selfishness, or refusing to humble yourself before God and family -- today is the day to repent and return. God's redemptive work does not depend on your perfection. It depends on His faithfulness, which never fails.