

Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we continue our sermon series titled, □ “Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift.” It is a study through the book of 1 Samuel.

Our big idea from last week was: □ Trust not in the wisdom of this world, but in the wisdom of the Word. That is to say, we should not rely on what the world says is true and good; rather, we should rely on what God says.

We drew this idea from 1 Samuel 13, where Israel’s first king, Saul chose to rely of the wisdom of the world, forsaking the wisdom of the Word.

Let me briefly recap.

Saul found himself in a situation that seemed utterly hopeless from a human wisdom point of view. Saul was leading a tiny, fearful Israelite squad against a Philistine army that was vastly superior in size and weaponry.

By the Spirit of God, the prophet and priest Samuel had directed Saul to go to Gilgal and to wait seven days for him to arrive. Samuel promised that he would arrive at Gilgal within the seven-day period to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings to God. And then Samuel would reveal to Saul what God wanted him to do.

The wisdom of the Word was to wait for the full seven days, to wait for Samuel to arrive, to wait for Samuel to give the offerings that only he as priest should give, and to wait for God’s instructions that would follow.

That was the wisdom of the Word: to wait.

But waiting seemed utterly foolish—foolish according to the wisdom of the world.

Every day Saul waited, he lost more men to desertion.

Every day he waited, he gave the Philistines more time to prepare and position their massively superior army.

Every day he waited, the murmuring about his indecisive leadership grew louder.

Every day he waited brought more fear, more sleeplessness, more doubt, more hopelessness.

Finally, on the seventh day, Saul is done waiting. Before the seventh day is fully completed, he takes matters into his own hands, forsaking the wisdom of the Word. Saul attempts to gain God's favor by assuming the role of priest, offering the sacrifices himself.


Saul's disobedience is multi-layered. He does not wait the full seven days as he was commanded. He goes against God's Word by offering sacrifices only a priest should give. And he dresses up his disobedience with religiosity, seeking God's favor, but in the wrong way.

As Saul finishes the sacrifices, Samuel arrives just as he said he would, and he denounces Saul for his disobedience. Then Samuel leaves.

Our text for today is □ 1 Samuel chapter 14:1-23. This text picks up the story before the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines begins.

From this text, we are going to learn how God uses another man, a difference-maker named Jonathan, Saul's son, who provides a sharp

contrast to his father, Saul. Jonathan is going to model for us a frame of mind that is a game-changer, particularly when things do not seem to be going our way and we're feeling overwhelmed.


Here is a  map showing the battlefield in our text. Saul and the Israelites are on the northern outskirts of Gibeah, near Geba. Most of the Philistines are in Michmash, but a garrison of Philistines is stationed just south of Michmash in the direction of Gibeah.

So, the armies are in close proximity to one another, perhaps only a couple of miles apart.

The battle has not yet begun as our story opens in  1 Samuel 14:1.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:1 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.

Why Jonathan did not tell his father is not revealed. Perhaps Jonathan knows that his father would not approve, and this is intended to highlight the differences between them.

 Verse 2 continues.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:2 Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave at Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men,

The original Hebrew term translated "pomegranate" is typically used for a pomegranate tree, and most English translations render it that way. Nevertheless, near Gibeah is a cave by the name of "pomegranate." So, we don't know for sure if verse 2 describes the tree

or the cave.¹ Also, we don't know for sure if Migron is town or a region.² But these are unimportant ambiguities.

We are reminded here that the sum total of the Israelite army with Saul is only 600 men, which calls to mind the previously mentioned Philistine army, which numbers 30,000 men in chariots, 6,000 men on horseback, and a multitude of men on foot. According to the wisdom of the world, the Israelites have no chance of prevailing.

□ Verse 3 provides some significant details about the composition of the 600 Israelites. It is described as . . .

ESV 1 Samuel 14:3 including Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone.

Ahijah is a priest. That a priest or chaplain would be with the troops is not unusual. And that he would be wearing an ephod would not be unusual either. An ephod is an ornamented vest that included within it the Urim and Thummim—something like a pair of dice—that would be consulted to solicit God's guidance and favor in battle.

What is interesting is the genealogy that traces Ahijah's lineage to Phinehas and Eli. In the early chapters of 1 Samuel, we learned that Phinehas and Eli were priests rejected by God—Phinehas, for his corruption and his father Eli, for his failure to deal with it.

¹ Omanson, Roger L., and John Ellington. *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 2001, p. 272.

² Freedman, David Noel, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000, s.v. "Migron."

Since losing Samuel as a spiritual advisor, Saul apparently has replaced Samuel with Ahijah, thus turning from a priest approved by God to a priestly line that has been rejected by God.³

These details are included to show that Saul has lost his way.

In contrast, the focus now shifts back to Jonathan, the hero of our story. Verses □ 4 through 6 advance the story.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:4 Within the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side. The name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh.

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:5 The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba.

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:6 Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, “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.”

Here in verse 6 we see that Jonathan is not merely intending to spy out the Philistines; rather, he is of a mind to engage them, if the Lord wills.

According to the wisdom of the world, this is a foolish death wish. How are two men going to prevail against countless Philistines? The □ mathematics of the world point to a massacre:

³ Arnold, Bill T. *1 & 2 Samuel, The NIV Application Commentary*. p. 209. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003, p. 209.

The sum of one Jonathan plus one armor-bearer is clearly less than the sum of 30,000 men in chariots plus 6,000 men on horses plus a multitude of men on foot.

Nevertheless, Jonathan's faith is not in his own ability to fight, but in God's ability to save. Back in \square verse 6, he says, "nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few."

From this we get the big idea of this sermon: \square Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving. There is no enemy too strong, no force too powerful, no obstacle too big.

Given this big idea, Jonathan's \square math adds up differently:

The sum of one Jonathan plus one armor-bearer plus one God is vastly greater than the sum of 30,000 men in chariots plus 6,000 men on horses plus a multitude of men on foot.

Jonathan is absolutely convinced that God is able to save them from the Philistines. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving.

Nevertheless, Jonathan acknowledges an important reality. God is not required to save them. God is not obligated to save them or us from every circumstance from which we think we need saving. God's ability to save is never in question, but sometimes his willingness is.

Back in \square verse 6, Jonathan says, "It *may be* that the LORD will work for us." He may or may not.

But Jonathan has a plan to discern God's will for them in this moment.

Jonathan's armor-bearer seems to share his faith. Verse \square 7 says,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:7 And his armor-bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul.”

In □ verses 8 though 10, Jonathan unveils his plan.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:8 Then Jonathan said, “Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:9 “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.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:10 “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.”

This is reminiscent of Gideon’s fleece used to determine the will of God. Here’s the plan.

When Jonathan and his armor-bearer approach the Philistines, if the Philistines tell them to stay put, it’s a no-go. Mission aborted.

But if the Philistines tell them to come on up, it’s go time. The dynamic duo has the green light to from God strike.

The story unfolds in □ verses 11 and 12.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:11 So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, “Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:12 And the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor-bearer and said, “Come up to us, and we will show

you a thing.” And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.”

The Philistines are utterly unconcerned about these two Israelites approaching. They are well aware of their overwhelming advantage. According to the wisdom of the world, two men should be powerless against a vast army of Philistines. So, the Philistines mockingly bid them to come on up, saying “We will show you a thing.”

Little do they know that God is about to show them “a thing.” □ Verses 13 and 14 continue.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:13 Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him.

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:14 And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow's length in an acre of land.

Clearly, God was with Jonathan and his armor-bearer. They mow down 20 Philistines in a short distance, and the earth quakes as they advance, sending the Philistines into a full-on panic. Verse □ 15 says,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:15 And 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.

Carefully notice the extent of the panic among the Philistines. There is panic □ “in the camp, in the field, and among all the people.” That is to say panic has spread throughout the entire Philistine army and all its detachments stationed in Michmash and the surrounding countryside.

And the phrase, □ “a very great panic” testifies to not only the magnitude of the panic, but also the cause of it. The words “very great” are a translation of a single Hebrew word, *elohim*. When paired with a noun, such as “panic” the term, *elohim* can be taken as a superlative. That’s the way the *English Standard Version* understands it, rendering the phrase, “a very great panic.”

But the term, *elohim* can also be a designation for God. Taken this way, the phrase could be rendered, “a panic from God.” Indeed, the *New International Version* renders it, “a panic sent by God.”⁴

Regardless of how it is translated, the original Hebrew audience would have likely understood the presence of the word *elohim* as corroborating what the text otherwise makes clear: God is behind this. The Lord is fighting for his people. The great panic is caused by God.

So great is the panic that the other Israelites notice the Philistines dispersing. And surely, they must have noticed the earth quaking. □ Verses 16 and 17 say,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:16 And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude was dispersing here and there.

The Philistines are running for their lives as if they are under attack from an unstoppable adversary. Two guys plus one God. Saul wonders who on earth could be attacking the Philistines. Verse □ 17 explains,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:17 Then Saul said to the people who were with him, “Count and see who has gone from us.” And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there.

⁴ Omanson, Roger L., and John Ellington. *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 2001, p. 280-281.

One nice thing about having so few men is that they are easier to count. Saul discovers that his son Jonathan and his armor-bearer are missing.

Saul decides to inquire of the Lord as to whether he should lead the Israelites into the battle against the Philistines while they are dispersing. Verse □ 18 explains,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:18 So Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring the ark of God here.” For the ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel.

The ark symbolized the presence of God. Saul is likely ordering the ark to be brought so that the priest, Ahijah could stand before the ark and inquire of the Lord using the Urim and the Thummim from his ephod.⁵

But as the Philistine furor increases so does Saul’s impatience. Verses □ 19 and 20 record,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:19 Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand.” 20 Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. . . .”

The command “withdraw your hand” is the functional equivalent of “never mind.” Saul is no longer interested in what the Lord has to say. He is going to join the fray, regardless.

And this presents another contrast. Jonathan advances against all odds, but only when he receives confirmation from the Lord. In contrast, Saul

⁵ Tsumura, David Toshio. *The First Book of Samuel. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007, p. 365-366.

ignores the Lord, advancing on his own initiative when circumstances seem favorable.

Nevertheless, the Lord continues to fight for his people. Indeed, the battle appears to have been largely won before Saul ever gets there.⁶ Verse □ 20 says,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:20 . . . And behold, every Philistine's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion.

The Philistines are so panicked and confused that they fight and kill each other.

Moreover, some Hebrews who had defected and others who had deserted, now join in fighting against the Philistines as explained in □ verses 21 and 22.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:21 Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan.

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:22 Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle.

The last verse, □ verse 23 of our text gives credit where credit is due.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:23 So the LORD saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.

⁶ Arnold, Bill T. *1 & 2 Samuel, The NIV Application Commentary*. p. 209. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003, p. 210.

The Lord saved his people. The initiating instruments in God's hand were two brave men, Jonathan and his armor-bearer, who believed in the big idea: □ Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving. Nothing.

Many of you already believe this. It's a familiar idea. Maybe too familiar. It is like background music that rarely rises to our consciousness. We believe it. We just don't retrieve it. We need to cease striving for a moment and reflect on this life-changing idea.

Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving.

Think long enough about his idea and a nagging question will probably arise with it.

If nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, why doesn't he always save us? After all, sometimes the good guys lose. In our story, Jonathan acknowledges the possibility: "It *may be* that the LORD will work for us." The unspoken alternative is: Maybe he won't.

When the odds seem stacked against us, when we are feeling overwhelmed, how can we trust a God who is all-powerful but not always predictable?

That we cannot always predict what God is going to do is understandable. Finite creatures cannot always fathom the workings of the infinite Creator, any more than an infant can always understand the workings of a loving parent on its behalf. A child cannot always understand that delivering a shot full of antibiotics or a spoonful of vegetables, or withholding a bowl full of candy are acts of salvation from bad bacteria or bad health. God explains, "My ways are higher than your ways" (Isaiah 55:9).

The question is: Can we trust God's heart? Sure, his hand can save us, but does his heart want to? To what extent does he *desire* our wellbeing? How much does he *want* what is best for us?

If we could trust both his hand and his heart, then our souls could rest secure. Then we wouldn't have to worry about circumstances turning out okay because we could know for sure that we will be okay no matter how things turn out.

While God does not provide an explanation for everything he does, he does provide overwhelming proof that he not only has the power but also the heart to provide for our wellbeing. The apostle Paul explains it this way in □ Romans 8:32.

ESV Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Here's the logic. If God loved us enough to die in our place and on our behalf in payment for our sins, and if he did all that to provide for our greatest need of eternal salvation, then will he not also provide everything else we truly need?

Of course.

Will we always understand or like the way our heavenly Father provides for our needs?

Of course not. We are children after all.

But the truth is: Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving. And nothing can separate us from his love.

The choice is ours to trust him. To live by faith.

This life of faith begins by believing in Jesus for eternal life. When we believe in Jesus, we are born again as adopted children of God in his forever family. This adoption can never be undone.

For the born-again child of God who has already believed in Jesus, the life of faith in God's forever family continues as we trust our heavenly Father to take care of us as we follow him day by day, just as Jonathan did, even when the odds are stacked against us.

The Lord helps us in our faith journey by providing communion. Communion was instituted by the Lord Jesus himself as a way to remember his great love for us on the cross and to reflect on our faithfulness in response to that sacrificial love.

Two identically prepared tables are at the front of the auditorium. Both contain two elements. The bread represents Christ's body given for us on the cross in payment for our sin. The juice represents Christ's blood shed for the forgiveness of sin.

We could also think of the bread and the juice as representative of the Lord's hand and heart, his power and love to save us on the cross.

As we eat the bread and drink the cup, we affirm our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. We remember and cherish what he has done for us. And we are encouraged: Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving.

In a moment, I will pray. After I pray, some music will be played during which you are free to come to the tables in the front and partake of the elements. You can take the elements anytime you want, immediately at the table or back in your seat, whenever you are ready. There is no need to wait for everyone to be served.

If, for any reason, you would prefer me to serve you the elements right where you are seated, that would be my privilege. Just raise your hand when you're ready, and I will bring the elements to you.

Let's pray. Lord, we praise you that nothing can hinder you from saving. And we thank you that your heart is to save. For those who may not yet believe in Jesus, I pray that you would draw them to faith right now. For those of us who have already believed, help us to fully entrust our wellbeing to you, day by day. May this communion be a fresh start. Amen.