

Jonathan: A Word on Working With God 1 Samuel 14

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores Jonathan's unwavering faith in God amidst Israel's confusion and highlights the importance of acting in faith rather than relying on human wisdom.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 14:1

Topics: "Faith in Action", "Trusting God's Power"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the faith and courage of Jonathan amidst Israel's confusion and lack of faith. While the people sought a king and relied on human strength, Jonathan acted on his faith in God, deciding to confront the Philistines without consulting Saul, who lacked spiritual insight. His boldness and reliance on God's power led to a significant victory, demonstrating that true faith does not depend on numbers or circumstances but on God's faithfulness. The contrast between Jonathan's faith and Saul's carnal leadership highlights the importance of acting in accordance with God's will rather than human reasoning. Ultimately, Jonathan's actions saved Israel, showcasing the blessings of working with God.

Transcript

In the doings of Jonathan, we get energy of faith in the midst of sad confusion in Israel.

The people of God had sought in a carnal way to establish themselves against their enemies. A people of no faith to lean immediately upon God, they had asked for themselves a king; and whilst testifying to His own rejection by them, God had instructed Samuel to hearken unto their voice in all that they said, and make them a king (chap. 8). "Give us a king, to judge us like all the nations," their cry, as again (even after the prophet had warned them as to consequences, in accordance with the divine testimony), "Nay, but we will have a king over us; that we may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles"; the carnal desire is met, and Saul set up to war against Israel's enemies.

Such is the state of things in the midst of which we find Jonathan. And though he enters not into the full mind of God, he is able to act in the energy of faith,

It is hard for faith to endure the afflictions of God's people, and the dishonour done in it to God Himself. Jonathan endures it not. He has faith in the God of Israel, and he makes up his mind to attack the Philistines. He calls to his armour-bearer, and says, "Come let us go over unto the Philistines' garrison,

that is on the other side," v. 1. The sin of the people of God may have subjected them to the power of the "uncircumcised," but this cannot subject the rights of God. Such is faith's reasoning. And nothing is more simple. The moment there is separation unto God, a standing with Him, there is zeal for God and strength in His service. But he confers not with flesh and blood, "he told not his father." There was no faith in Saul; and had he consulted him, Saul would most probably only have discouraged - with faith he would have gone himself. He would either have stopped or hampered him; when he does act, it is only to trouble. Faith has to act on its own responsibility. One way in which we very constantly fail is in asking counsel of those who have not the faith or the light we ourselves have; we thus sink down to their level.

376 All that could give authority, or accredit it, in the eyes of the people religiously too, was with Saul. The king, the priest, the ark were all there. But Jonathan waits not for the people. He has none but his armour-bearer with him; and so much the better for him, for he is not troubled with the unbelief of others. Where there is a single eye, there is ever confidence in acting and not hesitation. The flesh may be confident, but its confidence is in self, and therefore only folly. Faith makes nothing of circumstances, because it makes God all. It is not that difficulties in themselves are lessened, but that God fills the eye.

The Philistines' position is a strong one amidst precipitous rocks: what could human energy avail? Jonathan has to climb up upon his hands and feet (v. 13). The oppressors too are there in great numbers, and well armed. But faith with a single sword counts God sufficient. "Come," is the unhesitating word, "let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that Jehovah will work for us," v. 6. The uncircumcised "have no strength when looked at thus they have not the God of Jacob for their help: their hope is not in Jehovah. Little matter as to the condition of His people, if He be with them: "there is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few." The enemy may be as the sand on the sea shore for multitude: that is nothing - and faith knows it. He can give strength to one sword to subdue a host.

Jonathan seeks not other help. Happy in his companion, a man of a kindred spirit (his answer bearing him the witness "Do all that is in thine heart; turn thee, behold I am with thee according to thy heart," v. 7), he at once discovers himself to the Philistines (v. 8).

We have already remarked on the strong simple confidence of Jonathan in Jehovah's power. Another thing that characterises his faith is the consciousness of the impossibility of the link between God and His people being broken. Sad as the condition of that people is - the Philistines in power in their midst, pillaging a defenceless land; no means of resistance left to them, not a sword or a spear (except with Saul and with Jonathan) found in Israel (chap. 13 : 19, 22); the very king they have in their midst, one they have sinned in setting up - this touches not His faithfulness. The Philistines are delivered into the hand of Israel* (not into his own) in the judgment of the man of faith (v. 12). In isolating itself with God, faith identifies itself with His people. It loses sight of self, passes over their desolations, and recognizes all that is theirs in God. Jonathan is as Jehovah's hand. And see what boldness! Though Israel be not able to sharpen a mattock, in the name of the God of hosts, Jehovah, God of Israel, he goes straight on his way.

{*Saul's summons of the people (chap. 13:3) is by their national name of "Hebrews," the name a Philistine would have called them by.}

377 But then, whilst he goes forward thus, conferring not with flesh and blood, there is nothing of boastfulness, no acting in fleshly haste and excitement. His expectation is from God. He can discover himself plainly to the garrison of the Philistines, telling them as it were, "Here am I, an Israelite"; but he will wait and see; - if they say, 'Tarry until we come to you,' he will stand in his place, and will not go up to

them. But if they say, 'Come up unto us,' he will go up; Jehovah hath delivered them into their hand. There is to be the sign (v. 9, 10). In other words he will wait for them to come to him, or he will go and throw himself into the midst of their camp, just as Jehovah may bid. He will not make difficulties for himself; but he will not turn away from difficulties which meet him in the path. His is the real dependence of faith.

Having done this, the very haughtiness and scorn of the hostile power instruct him as to what to do. "Behold," say the men of the garrison one to another, "the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves"; and then indolently and with fleshly confidence taunt these true Israelites, "Come up, and we will shew you a thing!" v. 12. It is the sign for Jonathan; "Jehovah hath delivered them into the hand of Israel."

In the energy of faith he goes forward and climbs the rock, his armour-bearer following. The Philistines fall before him; it is comparatively easy work for the armour-bearer to slay after him. The power that inspires Jonathan acts for him. Jehovah is really there; He uses Jonathan as an instrument, He puts honour upon the arm faith has strengthened, but He manifests Himself. The terror of God falls upon the enemies of Israel (v. 13, 15).

378 But what of Saul? He has been left tarrying under a pomegranate-tree in Migron, whilst God is triumphing over the Philistines through Jonathan (v. 2). "And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another. Then said Saul unto the people that were with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us," v. 16, 17. All that is regular as to form is with Israel, but not faith. "And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armour-bearer were not there." That is all they know about it.

"And Saul said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God," v. 18. Here again there is form - the form of honouring Jehovah in seeking His guidance. It seems all right, yet it is but the form. (God, if we may so speak, has left with Jonathan.) Saul will have the ark brought; but while he talks with the priest, the tumult of defeat in the host of the Philistines still going on and increasing, he bids him stop; "Withdraw," he says, "thine hand," v. 19. There is no simplicity of dependence upon God, but the uncertainty and bewilderment of unbelief.

He joins the battle (v. 20). But it is not as entering into the spirit of the thing, - he has no sense of that on which Jonathan had counted, the secret of Jonathan's strength: "there is no restraint with Jehovah to work by many or by few." He calls the people around himself, and adjures them saying, "Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies," v. 24. "So none of the people tasted any food." There is great apparent energy, it is true, but it is not of the Spirit of God; so that when he gets into the tide of victory, he is in reality only a troubler, distressing Israel and hindering the pursuit. It is a carnal and selfish zeal. We may get into the path of faith, but we shall find there that nothing but faith can walk in it; let the flesh mix itself up in the work of faith, it is only for weakness.

The people come to a wood, there is honey upon the ground, yet no man puts his hand to his mouth, for they fear the oath (v. 25, 26). Jonathan has not heard that oath; wherefore he puts the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dips it in an honeycomb, and puts his hand to his mouth and his eyes are enlightened (v. 27). And when made acquainted with the curse, and seeing the people faint around him, he at once exclaims, "My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more if haply the people had eaten freely to-day of the spoil of their enemies which they had found; for had there not been now a much greater slaughter

amongst the Philistines?" v. 28-30.

379 Happy Jonathan! Faith is so occupied with its work, and has so the sense of God's love and grace, that it has full liberty, and whatsoever God presents in the way it can thankfully avail itself of, taking it and going on; whilst the carnal zeal of that which is but an imitation of faith, and which never works with God, makes a duty of refusing it. Had Jonathan not been occupied heart and soul in Jehovah's work, he might have stopped to think about the honey; as it is, he merely takes it for refreshment and passes on. Through the energy of faith he is carried clean out of the knowledge of the oath (v. 27). Out of the reach of this unbelief, he can avail himself of the kindness of his God with joy and thanksgiving, and pursue his course refreshed and encouraged, whilst the people (who had not the faith to go with him) are under the curse and cannot. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Saul has put both himself and the people under this miserable restraint (if the flesh puts itself under bondage, it must keep its oath), and in result they are led into sin; for they are so hungry, that when the time of the oath is expired, they fly (v. 32) on the cattle taken as spoil, and slay them, and eat the flesh with the blood thereof, thus violating a direct command of God (Deut. 12:22, 23).

The effect of all this is that of making faith guilty for acting in liberty. Such is ever the way of the flesh in its mixing itself up with faith.

At a moment of manifest outward blessing Saul must build an altar, and make much of Jehovah's name, just as previously he had professed to seek counsel at the ark. He builds his altar (v. 36). But let us mark the emphatic comment of the Holy Ghost, "this was the first altar that he built unto Jehovah." Then, through the priest, he consults God as to pursuing the Philistines; - "but he answered him not that day," v. 37. On this he seeks, by an appeal to the "God of Israel," to discover the hidden and hindering sin (v. 36-41). Jehovah indeed acts, yet it is only to manifest the folly of the king; the "perfect lot" is given and Jonathan is taken (v. 42).

"Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo, I must die. And Saul answered, God do so and more also: thou shalt surely die, Jonathan," v. 43, 44.

380 The people do not allow this. They interfere and say, "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as Jehovah liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground: for he hath wrought with God this day." That is self-evident. "So the people rescued Jonathan that he died not," v. 45.

He had "wrought with God." His was the simple happy path of unhesitating faith which counts on God, on His faithful connection with His people, and walks in the blessed liberty of taking the refreshment He may give by the way - liberty for refreshment, not for licentiousness; while the flesh is making its solemn resolutions not to touch, nor to taste, nor to handle, and then, the occasion serving, it sets aside the authority of God. Faith of this sort confers not with flesh and blood; it acts from God, and it acts for God.

All the religious actings, all the forms of piety, are with Saul. He has the ark and the priest. He makes the vow to abstain from food; manifests zeal for ordinances; prevents the people eating flesh with the blood; builds his altar when others have got the blessing, and takes the credit to himself. He can be religious, when he has comfort and blessing; but there is no reference to God in faith, so as to go through difficulties with God. There is energy, but it is energy in the flesh; deliberation when God is acting; and action, when he does act, in haste and bewilderment.

The Lord preserve His people from the guidance and help of unbelief in the work of faith, blessed in the simplicity which acts with Him.

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