

THE LORD WILL ACT ON OUR BEHALF

1 Samuel 13:16-14:23 (Key verse 14:6b)

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

Last week we learned about what it means to be a man after God's own heart through Saul's reaction and situation. We saw how his heart was revealed under the heat of the moment. Which easily brings us these questions for ourselves. What or who are our hearts after? Under difficult situations what/who do we trust more, our feelings and human logic or do we place our hope in the word of God? In today's passage we shall learn of the faith of Jonathan under a critical and difficult situation. Moreover, may God help us learn and accept in our hearts that he is the one who saves irrespective of the situation, whether by many or by few. I pray that the Lord may raise us to be men and women of courage, willing to stand up and do something. May we learn from Jonathan the power of faith in our living God. Amen.

In verse 16, we learn that Saul and his son Jonathan and the men with them were staying in Gibeah in Benjamin, while the Philistines camped at Mikdash. After Saul's foolish act of making a sacrifice that should have only been conducted by a priest. The situation with the Philistines worsened. Firstly from verse [17-18], we learn that the Philistines were getting closer and positioning themselves. The Philistines went out from their camp in three detachments. One turned toward Ophrah, the other toward Beth Horon and the third toward the borderland overlooking the valley of Zeboiim [17-18]. Secondly from verse 2 chapter 14, not only were the Philistines strategically positioning themselves for an attack, Saul's fighting men had also dropped to 600 men [14:2]. Thirdly, there was no blacksmith within Israel who could be found, and so Israel could not make swords or spears [19]. So on the day of battle only Jonathan and Saul had a sword or spear [22]. In fact I read somewhere that archaeological evidence points to iron artefacts dating from the period of the Philistines' power and leading to the general consensus that metal was introduced into Canaan by the Philistines. They were technologically advanced and way far ahead compared to Israel. Israel even relied on them for making and sharpening their agricultural metal works [20-21]. In other words Israel had no chance, not only were they outnumbered, their men had low esteem and practically they had no weapons to fight the Philistines. Worse part we read in verse 23 that, a detachment of the Philistines had gone out to the pass at Mikdash. The situation had become urgent and life threatening.

Look at Chap 14:1, One day Jonathan son of Saul said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side." But he did not tell his father. Jonathan decided to do something. It is as though Jonathan wanted to see what the Lord would do. He went silently without telling anyone including his father. He was not after man's praise or man's opinion, he knew that Israel including his father were paralyzed by fear and would have probably said no. Though Saul was supposed to be brave and lead Israel, verse 2a, tells us that he was sitting on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. Saul positioned himself on the outskirts so that if the war was to erupt he would quickly escape. He sat comfortably under the pomegranate tree while Israel was in terror of the Philistines. When he looked further in the distance, he could see the vast army of the Philistines, he could see their vast weaponry and but when he looked close by, he could see his own men in great terror and some scattering away in fear. In this critical situation Saul was fearful, he lost courage to fight in the frontlines. It was as though Saul never experienced the saving work of God. As though the only thing he could recognize in this critical situation was what he saw and felt. Saul lived by sight and not by faith, as though he was an unbeliever. He now became a victim of the obstacles and was ruled by fear. When we have this kind of fear we lose spirit to do anything, all we can do is sit under the tree. We become no different from unbelievers. Verse 3 continues to reveal Saul's spiritual condition, we read that he was with Ahijah who was a son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord's priest in Shiloh. Eli was known to be a priest whom the glory of the Lord had departed. So, it is interesting that the Bible goes into much detail to reveal who Ahijah was. Saul was not with Samuel, but rather was with a priest who was a descendent of Eli, a man whose glory of the Lord had departed. One only wonders what they were talking about, probably all fatalistic talk.

However Jonathan could not sit under the tree, they went to the Philistine's outpost. We read in verse 4-5, that on each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez and the other Seneh. One cliff stood to the north toward Mikdash, the other to the south toward Geba. Though these appeared to be obstacles, it was actually a good area to fight the Philistines and we shall see later on how Jonathan and his armor bearer used these cliffs to win over 20 men of the Philistines. So because Jonathan decided to do something based on His convictions of God (as we shall see later), God could then guide Jonathan's path into this strategic position.

Let us read the key verse 6, Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "**Come, let's go over** to the outpost of those **uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or**

by few. Jonathan firstly said, “**come lets go over...**” he wanted to see what God would do through two men who step forward courageously in faith. Often times we feel restrained by our circumstances. And because we feel restrained, we then also box God and think God is also restrained. However, the only thing that is restraining God is our unbelief and to a greater degree courage. Jonathan says, “**Perhaps the Lord will act on our behalf...**”, Jonathan had personal conviction that the Lord will act on behalf of Israel. He knew that God wanted to use someone. And so he was willing to be the humble vehicle that God would use to act in favour of delivering Israel. According to Jonathan God was not boxed by our circumstances but rather looking out to see who will go.

Let us look once again at the key verse 6, there are three things we can think about from here. **First, Jonathan understood that the fight was the Lord’s and not his.** He said, **let’s go over** to the outpost of those **uncircumcised men.** He called the Philistines the uncircumcised men. If you remember that great story between David and Goliath, David also when he faced Goliath, said he was an uncircumcised man. What is the significance of identifying the Philistines as the uncircumcised men? Circumcision was a symbol of an established covenant with God. God called Abraham and promised to turn him into a father of many nations and be a source of blessing for all people. God then commanded Abraham to be circumcised and circumcise all his offspring as a sign of the covenant. Those then circumcised from God’s command had accepted to be committed to God and be God’s chosen people. That means a people set apart to live for the glory of God. These are then People who had accepted God as their personal saviour. However, the Philistines were not circumcised and thus the phrase “uncircumcised men” signifies that the Philistines had no covenant with God, and God was not on their side. In this way Jonathan understood that the fight was the Lord’s, that God would fight for His people.

Secondly, Jonathan was convicted that the Lord will save Israel, look at the second part of the key verse, he said, “...Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by few or by many.” Knowing that Israel was God’s nation, it has always been God’s desire to save Israel and reveal his glory through Israel. This was also a way of glorifying God, that nothing could hinder the lord from saving whether by few or by many. It did not matter the situation, how big the Philistines were and their military capability, Jonathan new that, nothing and absolutely nothing could prevent the Lord from saving. Nothing means nothing. And so he could gain courage to do something.

Thirdly, though Jonathan was sure about God’s desire to save Israel, he was not sure whether he and his armour bearer were the ones to be used of God to save Israel. Look at the key verse once more, Jonathan said, “...**Perhaps the Lord will act on our behalf...**”, though convicted that the Lord will deliver Israel he was not sure whether the lord would act through them in saving Israel at this time. However, not being sure of this did not make Jonathan sit under the tree and do nothing, he knew the heart of God to save Israel, and based on that he could act and do something. This reminds of younger self, I used to pray the Lord to make his calling for my life clear so I can give my life to his will. So since I was not really getting a clear calling from God, I too will just sit under the tree. I would justify myself that, those who were busy in God’s work could be like that because they had a clear calling from God. However, through our bible studies, Sunday messages, I could be challenged to at least do something. In fact I remember one young pastor, Francis Chan, who challenged me and said, the bible is clear on what God desires. Whether my life calling is clear or not from God, what is clear in the bible is that, God desires to save everyone through the gospel of Jesus. God promised in Acts 1:8, “And that through the Holy Spirit he will give us power to do what God wills. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” B. Katlego at our Easter Conference also delivered a message on this, from Mark 16:15-16], where the risen Jesus said to them, Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Jonathan was not sure how God will use him, however one thing what clear to him about God, God’s desire was to save Israel, and nothing would prevent God from saving. This key verse is also alive today, nothing can prevent God from saving anyone. We all have the gospel of Jesus in our hearts, we recently celebrated Easter, we believe Jesus died and rose from the dead for our sin. Are we going to sit under the tree and wait for the calling of God to be clear? Or are we going to do something based on what Jesus has commanded us, to go and preach the good news to all creation.

Look at verse 7, “Do all that you have in mind,” his armor-bearer said. “Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.” His armor bearer was moved by the faith of Jonathan. He was even willing to give his life for the mission Jonathan had decided to take. They then crossed over toward the Philistines to let them see them [8]. However, Jonathan prayed, look at verse 9-10, if the Philistine say to them wait there until we come to you, then they will not go up to them. However if they say, “come up to us” Jonathan and his armor bearer will know that the Lord would have given them into their hands. Jonathan was not puffed up with ego or zeal to overcome the philistines. He humbly prayed asking for the Lord’s guidance and will. To really know if the Lord was with them in this decision.

Look at verse 11-12, 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." 12The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson." So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb up after me; the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel." After the Lord answered Jonathan's prayer, he and his armor bearer did not waste time. They climbed up and the Philistines fell before Jonathan and his armor bearer. They killed about 20 men that day [13-14].

God used the 20 men whom Jonathan and his armor bearer had killed to casue great panic, the lord even sent an earth quake and the Philistines got so confused that they started to kill each other [15, 20]. The Israelites who had been hiding came out of the hiding places to fight [21, 22]. Suddenly the tables where turned and Israel got all the army of the Philistines on the run, non could even found in a pair, they were all melting away [16]. **Here we can see and learn that one man of faith is mightier than the entire army of the Philistines.** God indeed blessed the faith of Jonathan. One courageous man of faith convicted of the word of God can bring deliverance to the nation. It does not matter how big or small are the obstacles, or how big or small you are, whether by many or by few nothing will hinder the lord from saving or doing His will. God only needed the faith of one person who could say, Lord please use me, please guide me along the way, help me know you are with me. So on that day, the Lord saved Israel, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven [23].

In conclusion, I see myself in Saul, circumstances and situations easily discourage me. I find myself like Saul seated under the tree. My job also as an academic at wits is so demanding. It is very difficult to switch off from it even from home. All these make me just want to sit under the tree like Saul and wait for the moment to run away. Though I have bible studies, deliver Sunday messages and lead a fellowship, many times they can become a routine and just duties to be fulfilled. Instead of relying on God easily relying on my feelings, human logic and human effort. They are good activities that can make me look like I am not sitting under a tree with Saul. However, the truth is I am sitting under a tree feeling defeated. We say we have challenges reaching out to students, yet I have access on campus but am sitting under a tree instead of going to share the good news with campus students. I thank God that through delivering this message, I am reminded that, God's word is clear. He says, go and make disciples of all nations. God is the one who saves and nothing can prevent him from saving. May God help me serve Maranatha fellowship with love and compassion believing that the lord will act on my behalf and rise His disciples. My prayer is that, I may repent and be convicted of Jesus command, to go and make disciples of all nations, to go and share the gospel at least with one new student on campus. After our bible study last week, one of the brothers, mentioned that his prayer was to at least have one bible student whom he could teach the bible each week. I happy to see God plant such desire in his heart. Same time, I also felt the Lord say, I can be a good armor bearer for him by being his helper in obtaining one bible student. I pray the lord may use me to go out and do something by faith. Because it is the Lord who saves and nothing can prevent the Lord from saving, whether we are many or we but few. The Lord will act on our behalf. Amen.