

HE DID THIS TODAY WITH GOD'S HELP

1 Samuel 14:24-52 (Key verse 14:45)

"But the men said to Saul, "Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God's help." So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death."

In today's passage we are going to learn how Saul caused trouble in the country for the people of Israel. This is after God had granted Israel victory over the philistines through Jonathan and his armour bearer's bravery and faith. Saul left the men of Israel in distress and caused them to sin against the Lord. In the midst of all this mess, God intervened through the people of Israel. From the key verse the people said to Saul that Jonathan brought victory in Israel "...today with God's help." Through today's message we are therefore going to learn why Saul caused this much trouble in the country of the Israelites, we are also going to learn in detail about God's intervention, and what it meant to Saul and to us today. I pray that God may help us to receive one word from today's passage, be transformed and not cause trouble in our lives and our country.

Part 1: Saul causes trouble in Israel (24-35).

From last week's message we learnt about the Israelites victory against the Philistines. Through Jonathan and his armour bearer's faith we saw God who struck down the Philistines with great panic, they were in confusion and began slaughtering each other. In **verse 23a** it says: "So on that day the Lord saved Israel..." However just after this great victory, when we expect the people of Israel to be filled with great joy and a sense of victory, something very unexpected happened. In **verse 24** it says: "Now the Israelites were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, "Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" So none of the troops tasted food." Instead of being filled with joy and a sense of victory, the people of Israel were in distress. Why? Did the Philistine finally catch a wake up and started defeating the people of Israel? No, the Lord had still given the Philistine over to the people of Israel. The Israelites were in distress because of Saul, Saul bound them under an extremely hard oath. The people of Israel were in battle throughout the day, they were exhausted and needed some energy, to keep going and finish their battle with the Philistine. But Saul bound them with an oath saying: "Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!"

The situation became worse for the men when they entered the woods and found honey on the ground, they were tired, hungry, and exhausted and in **verse 26** it says: "they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out; yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath." The men of Israel were really in a hard spot. But now why did Saul bind the men in this way? He did this because he was only concerned about his name, he said: before *I* have avenged **myself** on **my** enemies (**I, me, myself and my**). Saul was only concerned about himself; he was concerned about his reputation; he was only concerned about his name being spoken about that he has won the war. When he did this, he lost sight on his duty to take care of his people as their leader, as their king. When Jonathan his son who was not aware of the oath came into the woods, he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb, he raised his hand to his mouth and his eyes were brightened. He was refreshed by the honey, it gave him just the energy to go on and finish the battle. The men of Israel were in a terrible state. God had planned everything so perfectly for the battle to be completed, but Saul because he was only concerned about himself, on only concerned about his agenda, he could not see this. Saul could not see this because he thought, this was his battle rather than God's battle. Saul's self-centeredness interfered and left the men of Israel faint.

In **verse 29-30** it says: "Jonathan said, "My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey. /How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?" Because of Saul's selfish ambitions, he brought trouble to the country of the Israelites, he made the man of Israelites weak. Had Saul allowed the man of Israel to eat, and not bind them with his selfish ambitions they would have brought more glory in the house of the Lord. Jonathan said: "Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?" What Saul did is exactly what we observed from the Israelite leaders during Jesus' ministry, instead of taking care of the people and teaching them words of God and lead them God. They oppressed the people with their man-made laws. Because of the Pharisees and the Israel leaders, the people could come not to God and bring glory to him, but wondered around with meaninglessness and no sense of joy in their lives. The Pharisees brought trouble in the lives of the people of Israel.

As the day continued, it says in **verse 31-32**: "That day, after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines from Mikdash to Aijalon, they were exhausted. /They pounced on the plunder and, taking sheep, cattle and calves, they butchered them on the ground and ate them, together with the blood. At the end of the day, the Israelites finally defeated the Philistines, they fulfilled what Saul had commanded them, they held on and did not touch any food until they had struck down the Philistines. Though this might seem like a great victory to Saul, before the eyes of the Lord he had brought more trouble in the country, because of him and his self-centred ambitions, the men of Israel sinned before the Lord. In their exhaustion and loss of self-control from near death tiredness, they pounced

their enemies plunder, they butchered the meat of the cattle, sheep and calves and ate it with blood in it. In **Leviticus 17:10-11** God said: *"I will set my face against any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who eats blood, and I will cut them off from the people. /For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."* Because of Saul, the Israelite men disobeyed the command of God.

Saul, their leader did not do anything about this sin the man had committed, it is only when someone went to him and said: *"Look, the men are sinning against the Lord by eating meat that has blood in it."* Even then Saul, did acknowledge the great trouble he had caused in the country of Israel. Instead of repenting and sincerely coming before God for forgiveness, Saul only blamed the people. He said to them, *"You have broken faith,"* when it comes to things going wrong, Saul said **you**, he did not include himself in the mess that has been created, he said **you**. Before he said, **I me, myself and my** because he thought it is something positive, it was something that will bring him glory and respect. Furthermore, in **verse 33b-35** it says: *"he said. "Roll a large stone over here at once." /Then he said, "Go out among the men and tell them, 'Each of you bring me your cattle and sheep, and slaughter them here and eat them. Do not sin against the Lord by eating meat with blood still in it.' " So everyone brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there. /Then Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first time he had done this."* Here it seems Saul is coming to his senses, firstly he commanded the men to roll a stone and bring the cattle to the slaughter and drain the blood and eat the meat in the right way. Furthermore he built an altar to the Lord for the first time. However, in actual fact Saul did this because he saw that the people were beginning to realise that there is something off with him. Saul did this to show the people that he is still a man God, he did this to show them that he is the right man for the job, equipped in all spheres. And so we see him encouraging the men not to sin, we see him building an altar to the Lord. But deep down in his heart, he had no God. Deep down he was consumed by the desire to be recognised, to be praised, to be respected, he was burdened by the load of self-centeredness and hence he could not lead properly, he could not take care of his people and lastly, he was far from God.

Part 2: God intervenes in Israel's troubles (36 – 46).

After Saul had built an altar to the Lord, and he had enjoyed the braai with the men of Israel, he said to them in **verse 36**: *"Let us go down and pursue the Philistines by night and plunder them till dawn, and let us not leave one of them alive."* This seemed like a great idea, for the men of Israel were full, and filled with energy after they had eaten, and so they said to him: *"Do whatever seems best to you"*, they were ready to do whatever Saul commands them. The priest on the other hand said to Saul: *"Let us inquire of God here."* Saul wanted to do things as he saw fit, he did not enquire with the Lord, but just ordered the men of Israel to pursue the Philistine in battle. Before when Saul did this, he brought trouble to the country of the Philistine, brought distress to the people of Israel.

And so the priest, moved by the spirit of God urged Saul to enquire with the Lord. And Saul listened to the Priest and enquired with the Lord. In **verse 37** it says: *"So Saul asked God, "Shall I go down and pursue the Philistines? Will you give them into Israel's hand?" But God did not answer him that day."* When Saul enquired, God did not answer him, he was silent. Why did God not answer Saul? Saul's enquiry was concerning the pursuit of the Philistine, he wanted to know if God will grant the Israelites victory. But to God, this was not an urgent matter for Israel and Saul. God did not answer because there was an issue that needed to be resolved in Saul's life, in the life of the Israelites. God wanted to address the trouble that Saul had caused in the land of Israel, and so he did not answer Saul concerning the pursuit of the Philistine. Sometimes, we might wonder to ourselves why does it seem like God is not answering our prayers, this is not because God does not care about us, but it is because he cared much more that he wants to resolve our most urgent issues. To us getting a job might seem like an urgent matter, but actually our sin problem is the most urgent matter, knowing God deeply is the most urgent matter.

When God did not answer, Saul assembled the leaders of the army, and said sin had been committed today. Saul instructed the men of Israel to stand on one side, and he and Jonathan his son stood on one side. Saul prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel in **verse 41** saying: *"Why have you not answered your servant today? If the fault is in me or my son Jonathan, respond with Urim, but if the men of Israel are at fault, respond with Thummim."* Now the use of Urim and Thummim was a very sacred practice, in ancient times this was reserved for great decision making such as going to war. And today when God did not answer, Saul prayed to God and introduced this sacred practice to resolve the matter in Israel.

When the practice was exercised, Saul and Jonathan were taken by lot and the Israel men were cleared, when they took lot between Saul and Jonathan, Jonathan was taken. When this happened, Saul said to Jonathan, what have you done? With a loud and rebuking voice, Saul said to Jonathan, what have you done. Saul was very quick to react to people's faults, and very slow to react to his wrong doings. Israel was in trouble because of him, but he did not even once sincerely acknowledge and repent. Despite his reaction, Jonathan came clean to him before the men of Israel and said: *"I tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now I must die!"* Jonathan did not go around justifying his actions saying things like I did not know, he did not try to save himself, but sincerely revealed his actions to his father before the men. When Saul heard Jonathan's confession on what he had done he said: *"May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan."* Even at the cost of his own son, Saul did not realise that he had caused trouble in the land of

Israel, but rather he was adamant that Jonathan must die. Because of self-centeredness, self-seeking and worldly ambitions Saul was going to let his son die. Instead of repenting for causing trouble in Israel, Saul signed off for his Son to die. We saw this behaviour in the Pharisees, because of their selfish political ambitions, they let an innocent man Jesus Christ to death on the cross, even when they saw his innocence, they continued to condemn him to save their political position.

After Saul had finally signed off on his Son's death, something amazing happened. Let us look at **verse 45**: *"But the men said to Saul, 'Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God's help.' So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death."* The men of Israel bravely stood up to their king Saul and rescued Jonathan from death. What happened? Where did these men get this bravery and courage to stand up before Saul whom they feared so much? The men got their courage from God, they were moved by the work of God in their lives. Unlike Saul they recognised that their victory against the Philistines was because of God. When the men considered God, looked at their surrounding environment from God's perspective they could be courageous, and were no longer intimidated by Saul. When we started today, these men of Israel were in distress, they were exhausted and weak, and now they are filled with bravery, they are filled with faith in God. This is what God wanted to establish in Israel, he did not answer Saul to resolve this very matter, to restore the men of Israel into men of bravery and faith. God wanted to restore the men from the trouble that Saul caused in Israel.

Furthermore the men of Israel rescued Jonathan saying, he brought great deliverance in Israel **with God's help**. Through the men of Israel, God revealed to Saul his fundamental problem. Unlike Jonathan, Saul did not seek God's help, he did things as he saw fit for his own man made reasons. Jonathan on the other hand was very humble and recognised that he is God's creation, that his life is under God's rule, care and authority and so he sought God's help, and God could grant him great success. Through Jonathan, God brought great deliverance in Israel. Through God's help, Jonathan brought great deliverance in Israel. Through this event God restored the men of Israel's faith, he rescued Jonathan's life, I believe God used this event to move Saul's heart as well, revealing his fundamental sin problem. Even though Saul had caused so much trouble in Israel, God loved him and wanted to help him to come to repentance, just as Jesus loved the Pharisees and continuously used every opportunity to teach them. God loved Saul and gave him one word through the men of Israel who said about Jonathan: *"for he did this today with God's help"* Through this word, God challenged Saul. The question to Saul was, *"Did you seek God's help today?"* Saul was not perfect; he was limited and deep down he knew this. When we studied the Bible during the week Shepherdes Becca said, Saul had an imposter syndrome (Self-doubt that he cannot do the job). So because he was concerned about his image, his reputation, respect from people he brought trouble in Israel trying to compensate. Actually imposter syndrome is not an uncommon thing, a study was conducted, and it was discovered that about 80% of leaders suffer from it. This does not mean they are weak; this is just evidence that with our own strength we cannot lead, with our own strength we cannot bring glory to God. We need God's help, Jonathan brought about great deliverance in Israel with God's help. I pray that God may help us to repent from self-centeredness, from the illusion that we can do it on our own even when we see we are incapable. I pray that God may help us to come to him and ask for his help.

Conclusion

In **verse 52** it says: *"All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service"* Saul lived a bitter life, because he did not seek the help of God in his life, but depended on his physical strength and his army's strength. Even when he knew deep down that he was weak and incapable, Saul did not come to God, but rather acted irrationally and brought trouble to the country of Israel. Because of self-centredness and lack of faith Saul did not seek God's help and brought trouble to himself and the whole of Israel.

How about you? Are you in the midst of bitterness? Are you wondering around trying to fix your life and nothing seems to be going right? Are you acting as if things are okay even though they are not? Is life frustrating for you? Are you in the middle of a crisis? Spiritual crisis? Academic crisis? Career/financial crisis? Or family crisis? God is inviting you today, to come to him for his help. On our own Life is hard, the work environment is hard, University is hard, serving ministry is hard, taking care of family is hard, we need God's help. When Jonathan was in a crisis, he sought God's help, and God delivered Jonathan and the people of Israel from the hand of the Philistine. I pray that God may help us to truly repent from self-centredness and lack of faith, and come to him, to help us so that we can live a joyful life and bring glory to God like Jonathan.