

“Not By Many”

1 Samuel 14:1-23

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Introduction:

As we look around us, we would probably agree that many people tend to measure success by size. Studies have shown, for example, that tall men tend to have an advantage over shorter men in the business world. Large companies are often seen as being more successful than those that are small. And in a similar way, large churches are often viewed as successful, while smaller congregations are not. In fact, as members of a rather small congregation, we may be tempted to think that God cannot really use us, that perhaps God has forgotten about us.

This morning, however, I would like for us to consider a situation from the Old Testament where God used an extremely small number to do some amazing things—a situation where size definitely was not an advantage. As Silas read from **1 Corinthians 1:27**, ***“...God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.”*** This morning we will see an illustration of this concept in the Old Testament.

The passage is found in **1 Samuel 14**. In our pew Bibles, the scripture is found starting on **page 457**. By way of background, the story takes place not long after a man by the name of Saul was appointed as the first king of Israel. You might remember that the people had been governed by a series of Judges—men like Gideon and Samson—but over time, the people demanded a king, so they could be like the large and powerful nations surrounding them. God gave in and appointed Saul. And right away, God allowed Saul to rally 330,000 Israelite soldiers, and God gave Saul an amazing victory over the Ammonites. But for some reason, Saul sent a vast majority of the soldiers home and only kept about 3,000—2,000 for himself and 1,000 for his son Jonathan. This is despite the fact that the Philistines were occupying the land of Israel. The Philistines had been a thorn in their flesh for many years, Saul seems to ignore the problem, and so it appears in **1 Samuel 13:3** that Jonathan picks a fight. Jonathan attacks a garrison of the Philistines, and the Philistines start bringing in backup.

By the time we get to **1 Samuel 13:5**, we find that the Philistines had brought in 30,000 chariots (the modern equivalent of tanks), six thousand horsemen, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Well, when the Israelites see this, the Bible says in **1 Samuel 13:6** that, ***“...the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits.”*** The next verse says that some of them ran away into surrounding nations, and that those few who continued to follow Saul

were literally ***“trembling.”*** Others actually cross over and join up with the enemy—they surrender and turn themselves in and join the Philistines.

As the Philistines continue to bring in this overwhelming force, they establish several large bases, and then they send out what we would describe as “special forces.” They send out their elite soldiers, described in the Bible as ***“raiders,”*** and these raiders basically kept their thumb on all of the blacksmiths of Israel. With that, we come to **1 Samuel 13:19-23**, where the Bible says, ***“Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, ‘Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears.’ So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe. The charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the hoes. So it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan. And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.”*** I hope we understand how serious this is. The Philistines had the only blacksmiths, they would only allow the Israelites to have a little bit of farming equipment, and even then, the Philistines were charging outrageous rates to sharpen those implements. It was so bad, in fact, that there were only two swords with all the soldiers in Israel—one with Saul and one with his son Jonathan.

At this point, I would suggest that a lot of us can identify with the situation of the Israelites here. The church is so small compared to the world, our finances are not quite where we would like them to be, and our building is not something to brag at, and so hopefully there are some lessons we can learn from what is about to happen. It finally gets to the point where Jonathan has had enough—he can’t stand God’s people hiding from their enemies, and so Jonathan (the son of King Saul) takes matters into his own hands. This is where we come to **1 Samuel 14:1-23**. **»PPT»**

¹ Now the day came that Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man who was carrying his armor, “Come and let us cross over to the Philistines’ garrison that is on the other side.” But he did not tell his father. ² Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron. And the people who were with him were about six hundred men, ³ and Ahijah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod’s brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the LORD at Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. ⁴ Between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines’ garrison, there was a sharp crag on the one side and a sharp crag on the other side, and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. ⁵ The one crag rose on the north opposite Michmash, and the other on the south opposite Geba. ⁶ Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, “Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few.” ⁷ His armor bearer said

to him, "Do all that is in your heart; turn yourself, and here I am with you according to your desire."⁸ Then Jonathan said, "Behold, we will cross over to the men and reveal ourselves to them."⁹ "If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you'; then we will stand in our place and not go up to them."¹⁰ "But if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hands; and this shall be the sign to us."¹¹ When both of them revealed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, the Philistines said, "Behold, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves."¹² So the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor bearer and said, "Come up to us and we will tell you something." And Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hands of Israel."¹³ Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor bearer behind him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer put some to death after him.¹⁴ That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor bearer made was about twenty men within about half a furrow in an acre of land.¹⁵ And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling.¹⁶ Now Saul's watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude melted away; and they went here and there.¹⁷ Saul said to the people who were with him, "Number now and see who has gone from us." And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armor bearer were not there.¹⁸ Then Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God here." For the ark of God was at that time with the sons of Israel.¹⁹ While Saul talked to the priest, the commotion in the camp of the Philistines continued and increased; so Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."²⁰ Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and came to the battle; and behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion.²¹ Now the Hebrews who were with the Philistines previously, who went up with them all around in the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan.²² When all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines had fled, even they also pursued them closely in the battle.²³ So the LORD delivered Israel that day, and the battle spread beyond Beth-aven.

This morning as we ask ourselves the question, "So what?", I would like for us to consider several lessons that we can learn from what Jonathan decided to do.

- I. **And one of the first ideas we see here is that JONATHAN (DESPITE THE NUMBERS AND DESPITE THE CIRCUMSTANCES) EXPRESSED HIS FAITH IN THE POWER OF GOD.** ▶▶PPT▶▶

We need to remember here: There were two swords in all the land of Israel! King Saul had one, and Jonathan had the other—that was it! It is interesting to see how these two swords are used. In **verse 2**, King Saul was apparently resting under a pomegranate tree, but Jonathan could not stand it any more. Jonathan could not stand seeing God's people oppressed by the Philistines. Jonathan, then, was not hiding, but he took his sword and he used it. His faith is seen in **verse 1** as he says to his young armor bearer, ***"Come and let us cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side."*** There is no hesitation. There is no wavering. He does not take an inventory. But he says, ***"Come let us cross over."*** We know from the New Testament (in **Romans 10:17**) that faith comes from hearing the word of God. With that in mind, there is an interesting statement in **verse 6** as Jonathan says, ***"Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised."*** The first time I read through this I missed it. I thought Jonathan was just throwing out a little insult there. But we need to remember that circumcision was a sign of God's covenant. Jonathan was saying, then, ***"These people (according to the word of God) do not belong in this land!"*** Jonathan was saying, ***"God has told us about these people. Let us go and let us take care of business."***

It is interesting that several years later the young man David would come up and see Goliath causing God's people to cower, and David also got mad. In **1 Samuel 17:26**, David said, ***"For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?"*** When I was a kid, I thought, ***"Well, how did David know that Goliath wasn't circumcised."*** And for a while I thought, ***"Well, maybe that's a question I really don't want to have answered."*** But when we think about it, David was not making a statement about Goliath's physical appearance—he was making a statement that Goliath did not have a covenant relationship with God and that Goliath had no right (according to the word of God) to do what he was doing.

I think we can see why David and Jonathan ended up as such close friends—those two great minds were thinking alike. They were upset that the Philistines dared to mess with God's people, and they were not going to let it happen. In fact, some time later as David was approaching Goliath on the battlefield, David (as perhaps a 17-year old young man) said this, ***"You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands"*** (**1 Samuel 17:45-47**). We understand, then, why Jonathan and David would end up as such close friends. In fact, it seems that Jonathan would make a pretty good king. But as it becomes clear that he would not inherit the throne from his father (because of Saul's disobedience to God), Jonathan is one of the first Israelites to support David as the king, and he does so with no jealousy or hesitation whatsoever. David and Jonathan had a lot in common. Jonathan wanted God's will to be done.

Like David would do a few chapters later, Jonathan, then, was putting his trust in the word of God. Many years earlier, Joshua had said, ***“One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you” (Joshua 23:10)***. As a student of God’s word, Jonathan would have known this. And so he took this information and he stepped out in faith. His decision to act was ultimately based on the word of God. From a human point of view, they were at a terrible disadvantage—they were completely outnumbered. But the great lesson here is that greatness in the eyes of God does not depend on numbers, or weapons, or strategic position—but greatness in the eyes of God depends on how strong our faith is. As the Bible says in **Zechariah 4:6**, ***“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”***

And so we come back to **1 Samuel 14**. Jonathan and his armor bearer are facing a garrison of the Philistines. Some scholars tell us that a garrison could have been around 250 soldiers. And here these two men were sharing a sword—only one sword between the two of them, and the Bible says that they climbed up to the garrison and killed twenty enemy soldiers within about a half acre of land. When faced with a situation that seemed impossible, Jonathan put his faith in God. Jonathan knew that the battle was the Lord’s, not his. Jonathan knew that the Lord could deliver Israel just as easily by using a huge army as He could by using only two soldiers sharing a single sword.

This morning we are so thankful for Christians with the faith of Jonathan—men and women who step out in faith regardless of the circumstances. And regardless of our size, we know that God can change the world with only one or two who are willing to put their faith in the word of God. First of all, then, Jonathan teaches us to put our faith not in numbers but in the power of God—we are not limited here by our budget, by our attendance, or by the size of our building.

II. As we look for other practical lessons in 1 Samuel 14, we also discover that JONATHAN HAD THE COURAGE TO ACT—AND HE ACTED DESPITE THE INACTIVITY OF OTHER PEOPLE. **▶▶PPT▶▶ We could almost say that he had the courage to act *because* of the inactivity of other people.**

Remember: In **verse 2**, we find that King Saul is camping out under a pomegranate tree. So here we have the king of the nation hanging out under a luxurious tree as his nation is being ravaged by the Philistines. The man who should have been leading the charge was hiding. And so we discover here that Jonathan’s faith was personal. He did not wait for his own father. He did not wait for his fellow soldiers. He did not wait for the nation to get mad enough to rise up and revolt on their own. Jonathan waited on no one, because he knew that he had to personally act regardless of what everyone else was doing.

In the same way today, let us not be held up by what those around us are or are not doing. Several years ago, I remember having brother Jerry Jenkins up here from the Roebuck Parkway congregation in Birmingham. He told about some criticism he had received from someone who tried to convince him that going door-to-door was not

very effective as a tool for evangelism. And brother Jenkins responded by saying, **“I like the way I’m doing it better than the way you’re not doing it.”** Very interesting—a pretty good answer! We can disagree about the method, but no one can disagree with the fact that brother Jenkins sees people who are lost and tries to do something about it. In the same way, Jonathan did not wait, but he stepped out in faith regardless of what others might have said.

When it comes to outreach, then, do not wait for the preacher. Do not wait for someone to start a program. Do not wait for someone else to get things going. Just do it! Take a brochure to someone at work and do it. When we see someone who is despondent, offer a listening ear—offer a shoulder to cry on. When someone talks about evolution at the lunch table, just ask, **“Do you buy that?”** There are so many things we can do. Think about those men in the book of Mark who brought their friend to Jesus. They forced their way through the crowd, they overcame obstacles, they climbed up on top of the house, they dug a hole in the roof, they lowered their friend through the hole, and they did whatever it took to see that their friend was healed. People with the courage of Jonathan make things happen and do not wait around to see what others might do. He did not slow down for any criticism. He moved forward with courage.

I have read that every baseball team could use a man on the team who plays every position perfectly, who never strikes out and never makes an error. The trouble is, there is no way to make him lay down his hot dog and come down from the stands. It is so easy to criticize what other people are doing without actually getting out there and doing it ourselves.

Nolan Bushnell, the founder of Atari, once said that, **“Everyone who’s ever taken a shower has had an idea. However, it’s the person who gets out of the shower, dries off and does something about it who makes a difference.”** Now certainly it is not wrong to make plans and ask for advice, but there comes a time when we actually have to do something.

Several years later, King Solomon would write an interesting proverb in **Ecclesiastes 11:4**, **“He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.”** And the point of that is: If we spend all of our time waiting for the perfect conditions to do something, we will never get it done. Or put another way: If we go out looking for an excuse not to do something, we will find it. That is a guarantee! If we spend all of our time waiting for circumstances to come together just right, we will never get anything done. If we go out to plant but always focus on the clouds and the wind, we will never get that seed in the ground.

The lesson from Jonathan then, is: We may be small in number, but we can do something! We may have questions, we may not know the whole plan, but God needs people who have the courage to do something regardless of what others may be doing. Jonathan, then, had the courage to take action on his own.

III. As we come to an end here, we notice something else from Jonathan's example in 1 Samuel 14, and that is: JONATHAN HAD THE POWER TO INSPIRE OTHERS BY HIS EXAMPLE. »PPT»

From all outward appearances, this appears to be a suicide mission. And yet as Jonathan puts his faith in God, as he steps out on his own regardless of what others may think, he inspires his armor bearer to go along. As we look at the text itself, we discover that this is not something Jonathan forced the young man to do, but it is something he does willingly. In fact, in verse 7, the young man says to Jonathan, ***"Do all that is in your heart; turn yourself, and here I am with you according to your desire."*** Or, as the New International Version puts it, ***"Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul."*** Jonathan, then, is the definition of spiritual leadership. He has faith in God, he acts on that faith, and he motivates others to follow him in that obedience. King Saul was not a spiritual leader, but Jonathan certainly was.

Jonathan's ability to inspire is especially clear for us when we remember that these two men only had one sword to share between them. How many of us would have signed on for such a mission—to go into battle sharing a single sword? And yet the young armor bearer signed on willingly. This was above and beyond his job description! ***"Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul."*** I would say: Thank God for Christians today who have the same attitude! We are so thankful for modern day armor bearers who are always ready to pray, and help, and give, and for those who do everything in their power to advance the cause of Christ.

But even beyond the armor bearer, Jonathan's example continued to inspire. As word got out that the battle was going well, as Saul got wind of what was happening, Israelite soldiers started coming out of their holes. According to verse 20, Saul's soldiers rallied together. And according to verse 21, even the Hebrews who had crossed over to the Philistines came back. Jonathan welcomed them back, and the battle continued as the Philistines ran for their lives. That is how we end our passage for this morning. We started with Jonathan standing up for his faith, taking action, inspiring others to follow, and we end with the Philistines on the run.

Conclusion:

As we think about the Lord's church here in Madison, let us not get discouraged! Through human eyes, this congregation should not even be here. We have been through so much over the past 13 years. And yet we are here! We remember **Romans 8:31**, ***"If God is for us, who is against us?"*** Let us take courage from Jonathan and his armor bearer. They could have made excuses, they could have given up, but they did not—they worked together—and those two young men (through their faith and through their courage) changed the history of the nation of Israel.

The lesson this morning is that God does not really look at numbers. All it takes is one or two people who are willing to take a stand for what is right. Certainly we need more people to be inspired by the example of Joshua. The question for us is this: Are

we more like king Saul (sitting there under a pomegranate tree moaning and groaning and waiting for something to happen), or are we more like Jonathan (a young man who was willing to step out in faith and put his life on the line for God)? I would simply suggest that we go out and be Jesus to someone this week—that we do something good and that we explain that we are doing it in the name of Christ. Be Jesus to someone tomorrow!

As a congregation, we are looking for people who love God. We are looking for people who want to make a difference. We respond to the sacrifice of Christ by doing a u-turn—that is, by turning our lives back toward God. We confess our belief that Jesus is the Son of God. And then we allow ourselves to be briefly buried in water for the forgiveness of sins.

If you are already a Christian but you need the prayers of the church, you can let us know about that as we sing the next song. Write it down and pass it forward—we can pray about it together. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org