

1st Samuel

Lesson 27

(a) The Prayer

What happened next? For some reason, rightly, the priest in the camp called for prayer to see if Saul's plan was God's will. Verse 36b.

"So the priest said, 'Let us draw near to God here.'" 37 Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into the hand of Israel?" (14:36b-37a)

We need to follow this sequence. Early that day, Saul had ordered his men to pledge that they would not eat until he was victorious over the Philistines, at least the Philistines that were headed east, and he was following. They failed to be victorious, and his men were in the camp, weary and starving, afraid to eat. Word came of Jonathan's breaking of Saul's command. Saul cannot allow himself to allow his hungry men to eat until his pledge is fulfilled. Saul orders the men to pursue the Philistine camp in the dark, kill every Philistine in the camp, and return to eat on the altar at Beth-aven, even if it takes all night. Then comes the prayer. It seems that Saul should have prayed first before he made the new order. Saul agreed to the prayer. What could he do next?

(i) The Pause

The answer to what Saul could do next once he had approved the prayer was simple. All he could do was pause his order to send the army out that night and wait for the answer from the LORD. Verse 37b.

"But He did not answer him on that day." (14:37b)

Saul waited and waited for the answer from the LORD. But the LORD did not answer that day. Saul had sinned a great sin.

(ii) The Probe

When the answer did not come from the LORD, Saul called for a probe of the sin. An investigation had to occur. It was Saul's sin, but he blamed it on his son Jonathan. Verse 38.

"Saul said, 'Draw near here, all you chiefs of the people, and investigate and see how this sin has happened today. 39 For as the LORD lives, who delivers Israel, though it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die.' But not one of all the people answered him." (14:38-39)

Let us review the case. Jonathan and his armor bearer had slipped off from the Israelite camp at Geba to do a great thing – defeat the Philistines camped at the pass of Mishmash. The LORD approved of Jonathan's plan and participated in the attack. Jonathan and his armor bearer did their part by killing about twenty men. The LORD did his part by trembling the earth and striking such great fear in the Philistines that they began to fight against each other in the camp. Once Saul felt the trembling of the earth, his watchmen reported that the Philistine camp was in turmoil. Saul demanded the Ark of the Covenant to be brought. But then, Saul heard for himself that the Philistine camp was dwindling. Saul canceled the command for the Ark and ordered the army with him at Gibeah and the army that was with Jonathan at Geba to be numbered to see who was missing in hopes of discovering why this great feat was happening to the Philistines. The census revealed that everyone was in the camp except Jonathan and the armor bearer. Saul decided to order both companies of his army to attack and chase the Philistines to destroy them. However, in the order, he forbid the soldiers from eating anything until he had won the victory over the Philistines. Saul's company chased the Philistines as far as Beth-aven in eastern Benjamin. Jonathan's company chased the Philistines as far as Aijalon in western Benjamin. Jonathan, nor his armor bearer, never heard Saul's command to sustain from food. When Jonathan's company stopped in Aijalon, he was

hungry, and he took a bite of honey. The men made Jonathan aware of Saul's order, and Jonathan expressed his opinion that it was foolish and detrimental to the success of the battle. In addition, Jonathan expressed that the order, which caused the men to starve, was probably the reason neither he nor Saul were successful in defeating the Philistines once and for all time. Jonathan's men agreed. They followed Jonathan's logic, ate, and regained their strength. A tattletale reported the news to Saul, and Saul became angry.

Did Jonathan sin against the order of his father? Why is it that in the midst of a great God-approved victory, the victor, approved by the LORD, becomes the guilty sinner facing death? Had Jonathan known of the order, surely, he would have followed the order. How could his eating a bite of honey be a sin punishable by death? The order had not gone out to the nation. The order was not in the Mosaic Law. The order had not been posted. No clarion had traveled through the land to declare the king's order. Only the soldiers heard the order that morning and fought all day faithfully. They, too, were hungry. When they saw Jonathan eat, they acted appropriately and made Jonathan aware of the order. Did he sin in his response? That may have been a sin. He spoke against the king. But let us investigate that too.

Is questioning an order of the king a sin? We have two problems when we address that question. We must ask, "is there a difference between the questioning by a royal and the questioning by a commoner?" Jonathan was the king's son, and for most of his life, his father was not the king. In fact, his father had only been king for about two years of his life – the last two years. When Saul was not the king, did he and his son have frank conversations through the years? I dare say yes. Why would they not? Nothing has changed in how humans think. Today, fathers and sons have frank conversations just like they did in Bible days. Dare we mention the frank conversation between the father and the prodigal son? Dare we mention the loving father who accepted the prodigal son back after he had sinned so terribly and wasted his father's money? Dare we pull that example and apply it to Saul. The father loved his prodigal son regardless of his opinion and his actions. Did Saul love his son Jonathan?

Back in chapter 13, we learned that Saul had four-character flaws. He was impatient. He was not faithful. He did not have self-control. He did not exhibit goodness since becoming king. The person who truly trusts in the LORD with all his heart will be patient and faithful with self-control and goodness, meaning he is willing to wait on the LORD before he acts. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...."* (Galatians 5:22–23.) Saul did not possess four of these characteristics until this point in the story. Only love, joy, peace, kindness, and gentleness remain. In chapter thirteen, I told you to watch because before we end the story of Saul, he would be guilty of having none of these remaining characteristics either. Saul knew that his son Jonathan was why the Philistines were on the run. He knew that his own men were fearful of attacking under his kingly command until they saw the victory inspired by Jonathan's decision and approved by the LORD. Yet, he was so incensed by his own victorious son's breaking of his command and questioning of his command that he wanted him to be punished with death for his sin. Dare we say that since Saul had become king, his previous state of possessing love, joy, peace, kindness, and gentleness no longer existed in his soul. There we have it. At this point in the story, Saul has not one fruit of the spirit exhibited in his life. He does not love his son. He is not joyful about his son's accomplishments. He contains no peace in his heart for the faithful intent of his son and the rest of his men. He has no kindness in his eyes for Jonathan. We can now turn to the other list in the book of Galatians and see a picture of Saul.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like

these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Ga 5:19–21)

We have not heard about Saul's character flaws of immorality, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, drunkenness, or carousing yet, but hang on. Before we end the story of Saul's life, all these deeds of the flesh will apply as well as those which apply to this story. In this story, in this judgment on Jonathan, his own son, Saul shows his enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, and envy. They all apply to Saul. He is out of the will of God, operating in his own fleshly desires as king.

Can you question the king? Yes. Should you question the king? Yes. Why Solomon will say it this way. *"The first to plead his case seems right Until another comes and examines him."* (Proverbs 18:17) Saul has pleaded his case with his order to probe into the sin of his son, but he is about to get a heaping helping of backlash when the people support Jonathan instead of Saul.

At this point in the story, Saul had blasted his son and ordered him to die even though he had delivered Israel from the Philistines now two times. Saul had not been victorious over the Philistines, although he had been victorious over his cousins, the Ammonites in Jabesh-gilead. But the number of Ammonites he defeated there did not even constitute a drop in a bucket to the number of Philistines that Jonathan and his armor bearer just defeated in their instigated attack, with the help of the LORD, and scattered the Philistines in shame. Saul was envious of Jonathan's earned loyalty from the troops. He was a threat to Saul's authority. Let us project forward into the modern Church and the philosophy inherent in new pastors dripping in the model of the damaging emergent church movement currently spearheaded by the cultic Acts 29 organization. When a new pastor comes to a good Church that is not part of the movement, he will be intent on changing it to the Acts 29 model. In that model, the pastor is to be the supreme head of the church, and his word is basically the word of God, even though God has nothing to do with it. If a staff member questions the leadership of the decision of the pastor, the staff member is immediately deemed as an enemy. He will be terminated regardless of his tenure at the Church and the love and admiration of the people. The people have absolutely no say in the matter – no recourse. The pastor will proceed to change the policies of the Church. Most will instill the elder system of governing, which puts all the decision making in the hands of a few men, most of whom are selected by the pastor because of their loyalty to him, not because they are influential among the people as is the way the word elder is used throughout the Bible. Then, at that point, all decisions are made by the elders, and the congregation has no vote in any matter. The staff member will be fired congenially. But once he is gone from the Church, the pastor will order that something be found to shame the fired staff member. Whatever it takes. Whatever twisting of the truth is needed, the fired staff member must be shamed. It is the plan of the godless Acts 29 movement whose picture of the Living God does not match the God found in the Bible. The whole plan has to do with establishing authority and dominance over the people. The pastor must not be questioned. The pastor's need to be consistent in his plan overrides the need to be accurate to the Word of God. He cannot be moral. Even his messages layout trash. His mind is so set on the thing found in the gutter of sinful lives, and he flaunts his own moments in the gutter. The problem seems innocent. The examples seem applicable for the day. But in reality, story after story after story about these pastors are recorded on the internet as to how these pastors never got their minds out of the gutter and eventually fell into its grave sin. Then, the same elder system that they put in place to protect them from the people in the Church that they so desired in the first place must handle the pastor in a vain attempt to save the integrity of the Church. In some cases, they are allowed to quietly find another place of service as a pastor in a different Church, thus exporting their problem to another congregation to handle. But that, too, does not work. The pastor carries with him his sinful style of leadership and demanding

orders and abusive treatment of the people. Then, he sins again. Then the elders of the old Church are questioned if the pastor did the same thing while he was there. The congregation of the old Church is horrified. Many leave the Church swearing never to enter the doors of a Church organization again. Oh, they love Jesus, but they hate the Church organization because it was so deceptive about the pastor. In many cases, they were so hurt personally and abusively by that pastor. These pastors damage lives and families forever. Saul, as the new king of Israel, might as well be compared to these godless pastors that are destroying the Church, the Bride of Christ. If you hear any of these words spoken in your Church, investigate it on your own and then fight it with all your strength and every time you have the opportunity to vote. In 1981, in a Church in the Bay Area, an associate minister was terminated by a pastor. What was the reason? The true reason was that he had garnered the people's loyalty through his righteous ministry to the people in the four years he was on staff. Come to find out, the pastor had joined a newly formed group called the Gospel Coalition. He had bought into their dreadful doctrine. He was trying to move the Church to their model. But over a decade in the new group, the pastor had struggled to successfully move the Church in the new direction and new theology. Now, the example of this Church's story that applies to our Samuel passage goes like this. The deacons were called to a Sunday afternoon meeting in the pastor's office. There the pastor presented his case for firing the associate minister. Yet, among the deacons were men who knew better because they were part of what the minister was accused of. In fact, many of the things were their ideas, and they implemented them, not the minister. By some chance, the minister happened to come to the office and saw the meeting because the door was open. He waved to the men and proceeded towards his office, not thinking a thing about it. One of the deacons decided to defend the minister and called him to the meeting. The minister sat in shock at what he was hearing. The deacons demanded that the pastor repeat the accusations once again, and the deacons defended the minister. The minister did not say one word during the whole process. The deacons repeatedly called the pastor a liar. You see, the deacons had been in this situation with this pastor eight times with eight past ministers who lasted only a year or two. This current minister had lasted more than four years. When all had been said. All accusations had been spun and defeated, the young minister said to the pastor in the hearing of the deacons, "If I have caused you so much trouble, if I have ever failed to do what you have asked of me, if I am such a burden to you, I am no longer on staff as of this moment." He rose and walked to his office, cleaned out his belongings, left the key on the desk. Before he could shut the door on his last trip from the office, the pastor came and said to him, "You have just destroyed my ministry in front of my deacons." The minister did not answer, but reached over, took the keys from the desk, and handed them to the pastor on his way out. I was privy to this event because I was extremely close to the minister. I was also extremely close to many of those deacons through multi-church events, camps, etc. Now, forty years later, I am still close to some of those deacons and their families.