

“By Many or Few”
1 Samuel 14:1-6
(Preached at Trinity, March 19, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last time in **Chapter 13** we saw Israel's great predicament before the Philistines. Saul's great predicament was not really the size of the Philistine army, nor the weakness of his own army. Saul's great predicament was the absence of God. This is the effect of sin. God demands obedience of His people. Saul and Israel were not willing to comply.
1 Samuel 13:13 NAU - "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you"
2. As we saw last time, sin always has its consequences. The chapter ended with Saul and his army in what would seem like a hopeless condition.
1 Samuel 13:22 NAU - "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."
3. But then we come to **Chapter 14**. Regarding Saul things haven't changed a great deal. He is still suffering from the absence of God's presence.
 - A. With Samuel gone he employed Ahijah, the grandson of wicked Phinehas, who was wearing the ephod. The ephod contained the Urim and Thummim (pronounced Too-meem) which was used to determine the will of God.
 - B. During the early days Israel used the Urim and Thummim to seek Divine direction. But Saul wasn't really interested in Divine direction. For Saul they were more like a crystal ball to see into the future.
 - C. You can see how sin causes ever increasing spiritual decline. Saul was interested in deliverance but he wasn't interested in obedience. He had a form of religion but it was powerless. Saul was like the Church of Sardis described centuries later:
Revelation 3:1 NAU - "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."
4. But then our attention is once again turned to Jonathan, the son of Saul. He is a remarkable character during this period of Israel's history. He is Saul's son but would never become king, but even though he would not become their king Israel benefited greatly from his leadership. Richard Philips writes of Jonathan: "Jonathan places an important role in so many different situations that we get to know him well. In none of these accounts does Jonathan display the least vice; always he acts according to bold faith and a keen devotion to the Lord and his servants. We know that Jonathan must have been a sinner, yet in his biblical portrayal we see a shining model of Christian manhood, faithful friendship, and devoted service to the cause of the Lord."¹

¹ Philips, Richard. *1 Samuel, Reformed Expository Commentary*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2012, Page 207.

5. In all the distraction in Saul's tiny camp no one noticed that Jonathan had slipped out with his armor bearer. The narrator tells us no one noticed—most likely displaying the great contrast between Jonathan's boldness and Saul's faithlessness. The suggestion is if Saul had known he would have prevented Jonathan from leaving.
 6. Standing between Saul's camp and the Philistine camp Jonathan makes a bold declaration of faith to his armor bearer:
1 Samuel 14:6 NAU - "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. What a statement of absolute confidence in the almighty power of God. Tonight I want us to consider this statement.
- I. God often works through the small and insignificant so that His infinite greatness might be magnified.
- A. Consider Moses
1. Before God called him Moses was a man full of pride and self-sufficiency. He was raised with wealth and affluence. He was the adopted son of Pharaoh.
 2. When he was grown, knowing his ancestry, he acted as Israel's self-appointed deliverer. He killed an Egyptian who was mistreating one of the Israelites. The next day he quickly learned that self-appointed deliverers are not easily accepted.
Exodus 2:14 NAU - "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"
 3. Moses was proud, impulsive, and given to fits of anger. God would humble him. It took 40 years. Moses became a humble shepherd until he was 80 years old.
 4. When God called Moses he had been thoroughly humbled
Exodus 4:10 NAU - "Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."
 5. Later it would be said of Moses:
Numbers 12:3 NAU - "(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)"
 6. How foolish it is for men to think they have some ability. Even the greatest of men are but dust.
- B. Consider Gideon
1. He complained that his army was tiny and weak. What possible chance would they have in battle against the Midianites?
 2. He was underestimating the power of God. God took Gideon's tiny army and made it even smaller. He took Gideon's army of 32,000 and trimmed it down to 300.
 3. Without God Gideon was tiny, weak, and insignificant. With God Gideon's strength became infinite.

C. Consider Peter

1. He was proud and impulsive, quick to speak, quick to act. He was rugged, bold and outspoken. It was Peter who drew the sword when Jesus was arrested.
2. Peter didn't know his weakness. He was reduced to trembling before a servant girl
3. It was after Peter's failure that he became the mightiest. It was only after he was humbled that he understood God's mighty power.
Peter would later write:
1 Peter 5:5-6 NAS - "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time"
4. Can you see in all of these men how God took supposed greatness and reduced it to smallness that His power might be demonstrated.

II. Jonathan understood the mighty power of God

A. God doesn't need great armies or mighty men

1. God doesn't need mighty men. In God's eyes all are weak, frail, helpless
2. God uses poor helpless pieces of clay that He shapes according to His purpose.

He reminded Moses:

Exodus 4:11-12 NAU - "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?
¹² "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

B. This is the danger of Arminian theology.

1. It glories in freedom of the will and in human ability. Faith is reduced to the insight and prerogative of man. The great distinction between one man and the other is his personal inclination to turn to Christ.
2. This is exactly what God will not allow
Ephesians 2:8-10 NAU - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."
1 Corinthians 1:30-31 NAS - "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."
3. We aren't saved because of any strength in us. We are saved because we have no strength! God has mercy upon dead men. And He saves us after He humbles us!
Matthew 5:3 NAU - "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

- C. As Jonathan stood before the Philistine army it must have been an impressive sight
1. **Chapter 13** described the size of their force
1 Samuel 13:5 NAU - "Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven."
 2. Chariots were considered the modern marvel. They were a formative weapon on the battlefield and greatly feared by foot soldiers.
 3. God isn't restrained by chariots or giants or anything we might face. Our greatest enemies are fear and doubt
 4. Jonathan demonstrated bold, fearless confidence in God.
 - a. But notice Jonathan was not being presumptive. Faith still recognizes the sovereignty of God. Strong faith must still be a humble faith.
1 Samuel 14:6 NAU - "perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few."
 - b. It reminds us of the words of our Lord:
Mark 14:36 NAU - "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."
 Oh God, You are able—but have Thy way!
 - c. And notice that although Jonathan trusted God he knew he had to fight valiantly. There is always the great balance between God's sovereignty and our responsibility.
 Oliver Cromwell commanded his army, "Trust the Lord, and keep your powder dry."
 5. Faith knows absolutely that God is able and can do His holy will regardless of the earthly situation – He can save by many or few, but He often uses small things to His glory.
- D. There is great contrast between Jonathan and his father
1. Saul worked on the level of reason – of what he could see. In **Chapter 13** he had his focus upon the size of the Philistine army and the size of his army.
1 Samuel 13:5 NAU - "Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven."
 - a. It was when the people were scattering from Saul that he took upon himself to offer the offering.
 - b. By the time he numbered his troops they had been reduced from 3000 to 600
1 Samuel 13:15 NAU - "And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men."
 - c. It would be fair to say that Saul had no intention of engaging the Philistines.
 2. Jonathan's force consisted of two, himself and his armor bearer. And yet he knew if God fought for him it was enough.
1 Samuel 14:23 NAU - "So the LORD delivered Israel that day"

- III. Have you come to the place in your life where you can appreciate small things?
- A. Do you understand your smallness?
1. Are you looking for some great thing? Are you seeking that which will receive the greatest recognition of men, the loudest applause? The greatest Christians upon the earth are most likely those who are unknown.
 2. Christians in our day are guilty of celebrity worship. The internet has encouraged this. This isn't God's way!
 - a. The Church of Corinth had this problem. Paul condemned them for being fleshly and immature.
1 Corinthians 3:1-6 NAU - "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not *mere* men? ⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."
 3. There are no great men!
Mark 9:33-35 NAU - "They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which *of them* was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."
Matthew 19:30-20:1 NAU - "But many *who are* first will be last; and *the* last, first."
- B. What about our church?
1. We are a small congregation. What can we do? The question should be what can God do with a group of faithful people.
1 Samuel 14:6 NAU - "the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few."
 2. Did not God use a tiny group of disciples to begin His church?
- C. The charge to us is to humbly serve Him.
1. Don't despise our smallness or the greatness of the task – God is honored by your willingness to serve Him
 - a. We used to have a man that planted flowers in large pots outside our church building and kept them watered throughout the hot summer. Few knew who was responsible. He considered it an honor.
 - b. We had a member take the project of sanding and priming and painting all of the doors in the courtyard.
 - c. We've had ladies prepare countless meals for the sick.

- d. As we honor God in small things He blesses us with greater things
Luke 16:10-12 NAU - "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. ¹¹ "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you? ¹² "And if you have not been faithful in *the use of* that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"
Matthew 25:21 NAU - "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'"
2. Don't fear the greatness of the task
- It was William Carey who said, "Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God."
 - Does the task seem impossible? Great! This is where God's glory shines the greatest.
 - Cast your fears upon the one who is all powerful
3. The great lesson of Jonathan is to simply put yourself at God's disposal.
- Our heart must be that of Isaiah.
Isaiah 6:8 NAU - "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"
 - And then to have full confidence that God is able.

Conclusion:

- Cast aside everything upon which you glory in yourself or your own ability. God will not be robbed of His glory.
 Cast your self-confidence upon the only one upon whom we can truly trust.
- In all humility cast yourself upon His mercy. He will see you through every trial and deliver you from every enemy.
1 Peter 5:6-7 NAU - "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."