
The King's Folly

1 Samuel 13¹²

Russ Kennedy

It is my normal practice to provide a full manuscript. However, for this sermon this is what I preached from and it is more than I originally intended. We will post a transcription as the full manuscript at a later time. Thanks – Pastor Russ

In the early days of what become World War II, the situation for Britain looked terribly hopeless. Faced with an overwhelming enemy and little promise of help and assistance, Britain faced the very real possibility of extinction. London was being bombed regularly. The nights were often lightless and dark. In the midst of this chaos, carnage and confusion, a voice was raised. A strong and stern voice, the voice of a leader. And England rose on the strength of that voice to endure and eventually receive help for achieving victory.

But what about us as Christians. How do we handle the times when God's promises and commands don't seem to resolve our situation?

Will we trust?

Will we obey?

Of will we seek to resolve things our own way in our own wisdom?

This is the theme of our text. How will God's people respond in overwhelming adversity when patience and wisdom are needed?

The Gathering of Israel's Army

(v.1-4)

We open with a very unusual sentence.

¹ Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel, ² Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent.

Saul's Reign

(v.1)

What can such a sentence mean? Since Saul was not born king, this opening shows that he had two beginnings as king. He was anointed and then was accepted a year later which we have seen in the texts.

But oh such a short time between his anointing as king and his great folly.

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If John Woodhouse is right, then the actual legitimate rule of Saul is very short. He may have sat on the throne for 20 years. But he lost the kingdom very, very early.

If this is right, the tragedy of Saul's kingdom is already indicated in this opening summary. After all the preparation, after all that had happened to circumvent the disastrous proposal of chapter 8 and to ensure that Israel's king would not be "like all the nations," after the promising start in chapter 11, after the real possibility held out in chapter 12, it really lasted only two short years. On this understanding, 1 Samuel 13, 14, and 15 cover these two years. (Woodhouse, pp. 228-229)

Israel's Army

(v.2)

Finally begins to do what he was appointed to do. (1 Samuel 9:16)

Has done very little to accomplish this task.

Jonathan's Victory

(v.3-4)

³ Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." ⁴ And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.

Here is our first introduction to Jonathan. Though we are not here told that he is Saul's son, every reader of 1 Samuel knows that.

He has the first victory over the Philistines. It is a small victory. And it incites a massive response by the Philistines.

Ah, but small successes are victories none the less. So it is trumpeted all across the land as a recruiting tool. But, it does leave a question. Is Saul here taking credit for Jonathan's achievement?

The Rise of the Philistine Might

(v.5-7)

The Philistines are not going to take this lying down...

⁵ And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. ⁶ When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, ⁷ and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

In a Powerful Display

(v.5)

The author is stretching limits to describe the vastness of the Philistine gathering... It is a vast army with both infantry and the armor of the day, chariots.

With a Terrified Fear**(v.6-7a)**

The abject terror of the Israelites is graphically described. Like mice and rodents they crawl into hides and holes.

Against a Rookie Leader**(v.7b)**

Saul may be towering over the people, but he does not appear to be inspiring confidence or courage...

Against the long war craft of the Philistines, what chance does this rookie leader have?

The Folly of Saul's Impatience**(v.8-15)**

Here is the heart of the book - the moment where Saul's kingdom begins to decline.

In his Actions**(v.8-9)**

⁸ He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. ⁹ So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering.

He is waiting. Seven days is a long time as you watch your army melt away. Samuel is a no show...

He does not respect God's Word or will. He disobeys Samuels command to wait. Samuel's command is God's Word to Saul.

He intrudes into the priesthood in offering up the burnt offering. He does only what has been reserved for Christ.

One commentator has helpful written:

Feel the weight of this as this episode presents it to us. To obey God, for Saul, was an extraordinary thing to ask, considering the circumstances. We might reasonably say that it was close to impossible. Why? Because to obey God in those circumstances would have required him to trust God against every instinct, against every evidence, and against every aspect of his experience at that moment. The Philistines were coming in massive numbers, the Israelites were slipping away, and everyone was terrified! (Woodhouse, pp. 234-235)

What a huge mistake it is to think that to obey God is an easy thing to do. Trusting God is neither straightforward nor simple

In his Explanation**(v.10-12)**

¹⁰ As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. ¹¹ Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, ¹² I said,

'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering."

He is desperate...

He can see no alternative...

He forced himself to do what he knew was foolish and wrong...

Frankly, most of us would have done the same...

In his Consequence

(v.13-15a)

¹³ And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." ¹⁵ And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal.

God is rejecting a disobedient man...

God is seeking out a different kind of person, "a man after God's own heart..."

Samuel leaves and heads to Gibeah. Will Saul follow?

The Weakness of the Israelite Army

(v.15b-23)

Yes he will but how dispiriting this must have been.

The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.

And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. ¹⁶ And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash. ¹⁷ And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual; ¹⁸ another company turned toward Beth-horon; and another company turned toward the border that looks down on the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

In the Smallness of the Israelite Army

(v.15b)

Less than 600 of the original 3,000 are left. This over against a vast Philistine encampment.

Against the Strategy of the Philistines

(v.16-18)

The Israelites come to Geba (Gibeah) with Samuel and Saul within sight of the Philistine. The Philistines were sending out raiding parties to the north, the west and the east. Israel could do nothing about it.

In the Weakness of Israelite Arms

(v.19-23)

¹⁹ Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears." ²⁰ But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle, ²¹ and the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. ²² So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them. ²³ And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

The Philistines had effectively disarmed the Israelites. They had not metal implements of war. And they had no way to sharpen the metal implements they had.

The situation frankly looks hopeless.

The enemy is large, powerful, ruthless and crafty.

God's people are small in number led by a disgraced king.

God's people do not have the power implements that the world uses.

From whence comes deliverance?

Reflect and Respond

What does it mean to be "a man after God's own heart"?

A man inclined to obey God regardless of the situation. He understands who God is and who he is and is not

Is David that man? Or are we waiting for another?

How will the seemingly insurmountable power of our soul's enemies of the devil and death be defeated?

What schemes of man?

What dreams of utopian government?

What follies of religious self-salvation projects?

God's King and Priest will come and bring the victory.

Now we must live in power of that victory.

Requires that we believe it is true...

Requires that we submit to its providences...

Requires that we live in patience until the Lord comes and our salvation is full and final.

Do not be foolish and turn to other solutions. Rest and rely on Christ, our Savior and Sovereign.

We are not looking for a man after God's own heart. Neither are we to strive in our own flesh to be what we are not. No, the man after God's own heart has already come. He has already fully pleased the Father God. He has granted to us that heart because He has given us the Spirit and a new heart in the New Covenant. Praise God. Having believed, we are all people after God's own heart.

