

(1 Samuel) a Foolish Oath and Consequences

by David Guzik

David Guzik's sermon explores Saul's foolish oath and its detrimental consequences on Israel's battle against the Philistines, contrasting it with Jonathan's faith and actions.

Duration: 36:53

Scripture: 1 Samuel 14:18

Topics: "Pride And Humility", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on a passage from the Bible about Saul and his son Jonathan. The speaker highlights the difficulty of pronouncing some of the Bible names but emphasizes the more important theme of Saul's strength. Saul establishes his sovereignty over Israel and gathers mighty soldiers for himself. However, the speaker criticizes Saul for exalting himself with a false spiritual image and not doing any good for the nation. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the importance of avoiding pride and legalism in order to allow God to work in our lives.

Transcript

On Sunday mornings, we've been making our way through this book of 1 Samuel, and I don't know if it's like a mini-series or a soap opera or whatever, but week follows after week, and this story builds upon story, and we see, as we left it off last week, that the people of Israel were battling against the Philistines. The Philistines had held the Israelites under a severe domination and oppression for years and years, and in the midst of all this oppression, Israel seeks a king, and God gives them a king, a man named Saul, and as this king Saul comes forward, he seeks to lead the Israelites under the domination, or from under the domination, of the Philistines. Well, in the midst of all of this going on, God raises up an army for Saul.

There's 3,000 men, and part of it's led by Saul's son, Jonathan. Last week, we saw how Jonathan was really used of God. One man battling against tens of thousands of Philistine troops, and he really routed them.

He disrupted their whole camp. Philistines were killing Philistines. Jonathan was killing as many as he could, and the bottom line from it, the Philistines were on the run.

They were panicked. They were in full retreat. They were heading out of the area and just moving away as fast as they could, but in some ways, now was the most critical time of the battle, because when an army is in retreat, the best thing you can do, and I hate to sound crude about this, but kind of the goal of a war is

you try to kill as many of the other troops as you can, and when they're in retreat, if you let that army retreat without striking down as many of them as you possibly can, well, then they've sort of preserved something for themselves, and that army can come back and fight against you another day.

It was critical that now that the Philistine army was routed on the field of battle, that they be struck down in retreat, and it was the job of Saul and his army to pursue the Philistines and strike down as many of them as is humanly possible or divinely possible with the help of the Lord, and so that's where we come here to 1 Samuel 14, verse 24. It's on this day of battle when they're trying to kill as many of these Philistines as they can in retreat that we read in verse 24, and the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under an oath, saying, Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies, so none of the people tasted food. Well, you read that there in verse 24, it says very plainly, Saul had placed the people under an oath.

Now Saul's son Jonathan, in his bold trust in the Lord, had just struck a mighty blow against the Philistines. God had totally routed and confused the Philistine army, and as I said before, now was the job of the army of Israel under King Saul to finish the job by striking down the fleeing Philistine army, and on this day of battle against the Philistines, Saul declared a curse, and he said, Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies. You get the picture here, don't you? Saul puts the army of Israel under a forced fast.

Nobody here eats until sundown, because we want to separate this day unto the Lord. It's going to be a fast unto the Lord. On the surface, this sounds so spiritual, doesn't it? What could be more spiritual than saying, Let's all fast together.

Let's set the whole army aside and we'll fast unto the Lord. That sounds like a very spiritual thing to do, and we could just see Saul saying, Let's set today aside as a special day of fasting unto the Lord. We want God to do a great work, so we should fast today.

And I should enforce this among the whole army, and I'll enforce it with a curse. If you don't fast with us, you're cursed today. What could be wrong with something so spiritual like that? Well, there was a lot wrong with it.

Isn't it funny how something so spiritually sounding can be so wrong? You say, Well, what was wrong with it? Well, I'm glad you asked. First of all, it was wrong because Saul's focus was wrong. Look at what his focus is in verse 24.

He says, Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies. Do you see where his focus is? It's on himself. As if we want to say to Saul, Saul, don't put the army of Israel under an oath so that you can take vengeance on your enemies.

If that's how you regard the battle, your battle, your enemies, your vengeance, then Saul, why don't you just fast all by yourself? You see, Saul shows that even in the midst of doing something spiritual like fasting, Saul's focus is on himself. It's not on the Lord. To put it bluntly, Saul's desire is not the glory of God.

It's the glory of Saul. He was not the first one, nor the last one, to command religious or spiritual acts for his own glory. Not the glory of God.

The focus here is not on the Lord. It's not on the Lord's victory. But it's on Saul's commanded fast.

Friends, I don't know about you, but I've seen people do this. I've seen people do this in a very solemn, almost pompous way, where they say, let us pray together. And their whole timing and manner and focus is, let me show you how spiritual I am as I pray right now, so you can admire my great spirituality.

It's the same kind of thing Jesus talked about with the scribes and the Pharisees. He says, you stand on a street corner at a pointed hour, and you show everybody how spiritual you are when you pray. Why don't you go home and set yourself aside in your closet and pray? This is what Saul's focus was on himself.

It wasn't on the Lord. Secondly, Saul's commanded fast was wrong because his motive was wrong. I believe two things were motivating Saul here, and we pick them up from the previous part of the chapter.

It's almost too bad that we have to split this chapter up between last week and this week, because they really flow together. Last week, we saw that Saul was displaying a false spirituality when the news that the Philistine army was being routed came to him. Instead of saying, let's follow on it, let's go, let's wipe them all out and retreat, let's get on this battle for the Lord.

You know what Saul did? He said, let's call the Ark of the Covenant together and have it come here so that we can pray. Saul, it wasn't time for a prayer meeting. It was time to mount up the horses and to flee after that Philistine army and to strike down as many of them as you could.

It wasn't time to pray. But oh, it can sound so spiritual to say it's time to pray. I believe Saul was motivated by a false spirituality, but I also believe that he was also motivated by insecurity.

Why would he make such a bold pronouncement to show everybody how spiritual he was? Because Saul was so insecure in himself, he wanted to paint this image before the people, look how spiritual I am, look how spiritual I am. Now do you respect me? Now do you respect me? You see, when we first saw last week, when Saul learned about the news of this Philistine rout in the camp of the Philistines, his first question wasn't, how are they retreating and how can we cut them off and how can we strike them down on the field of battle? You know what his first question was? Who's doing this? Because he was afraid someone else would get the glory instead of himself. Saul was a very insecure man and by making this curse, let me tell you something, nobody's thinking about the victory of Jonathan, their hungry stomachs are making them think about the curse of Saul and his commanded fast.

So it was wrong because his focus was wrong, it was wrong because his motive was wrong, it was also wrong because Saul's sense of authority was wrong. Look at what he says in verse 24. Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening.

Oh, says who, Saul? What, are you the guy going around pronouncing curses on people now just according to your own authority? Since when did you have the authority to proclaim a curse, Saul? Are you now the spiritual leader of the nation? After all, think about it, if anybody should have been calling for a fast and putting a penalty on those who did not fast, shouldn't it have been the prophet Samuel? No, but Saul doesn't mind stepping into Samuel's sandals now. He's taking a spiritual authority that's wrong. It's also wrong because Saul's promised punishment was wrong.

Look at it again, verse 24. Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening. That's a little heavy handed, don't you think? I mean, it's one thing if Saul wants to call a voluntary fast, and if he wants to stand before the army of Israel and say, Man, I'm fasting today.

I'm not going to eat any food until evening, until I've taken vengeance on my enemies. And if anyone wants to join me, they're welcome to do it. But instead of leading by example and inviting the army to follow behind him, he placed the people under an oath.

And I have to say that that in and of itself, it just has a bad taste to it. We can imagine Saul standing before the whole army of Israel, saying, well, I'll show them how spiritual I am. All right, everybody, raise your right hand and repeat after me.

And he leads them in this oath. We will not eat any food until evening. And he makes them make this religious promise.

He forces it. He manipulates it. He coerces it out of them.

Can I tell you something? That has no goodness before God. Sometimes pastors and preachers try to do that. For a good cause.

Is there anything wrong in fasting in and of itself? No. But if you manipulate or force a promise out of somebody to do it, that's wrong. I've seen pastors do this.

I've seen this approach. Shouldn't we all be reading our Bibles? All right, everybody, let's take an oath before the Lord. We're going to read our Bible for an hour every day, for the rest of, you know, all the way through next year.

Let's do it every day. Let's make an oath before God. And because I'm pressuring you, and because nobody wants to look unspiritual, right? Okay, we'll all take the oath.

Friends, it would be better if the oath was never made. Because it's forced out of you. It's manipulated out of you.

It's not welling up from the movement of the Holy Spirit in your own heart. You see, friends, if it isn't on your heart to put yourself under an oath, then it's not going to do any good to force you under it. But that's what Saul did to the people.

He thought he had done something really spiritual. Well, look, I got the whole nation to fast. No, Saul, you forced them into it.

I mean, you manipulated them into it. It was wrong. And his timing was all wrong.

Friends, was this a day for fasting? A day when you're going to be chasing Philistines over hills and valleys, where you're going to be fighting in hand-to-hand combat, when you need all your energy, all your focus for the job at hand? Is that a time to be distracted by a growling stomach? Look, you know how it is when you've tried to fast, right? About midday, you're thinking, Yeah, about ten o'clock, you're going, Oh, this is great. I feel so close to you, Lord. About one o'clock, it's, I can't get any work done.

All I can think about is food. And, you know, you're just doing your thing every day. Think about if you're fighting hand-to-hand combat, and running over hills and valleys, trying to chase down troops.

You don't need to be distracted by an empty stomach, and you don't need to be physically weakened by a lack of food. This was no day to fast. But Saul thought, Wow, it seems so spiritual.

And look at the result among the army of Israel. Verse 24 starts out by saying, And the men of Israel were distressed that day. Saul, you're doing no good for the nation.

You're just exalting yourself with a false spiritual image in front of the people. This is going nowhere. Well, you're going to see how it did go nowhere also.

Verse 25, Now all the people of the land came to a forest, and there was honey on the ground. And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey dripping. But no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the earth.

This was torture to the soldiers of Israel. There they are, a contingent of soldiers going through the forest, and there they see it. And there's honey dripping from the trees.

They can see it. I don't know if you can smell honey, but if you can smell it, they smelled it. Now there they see it and they go, Oh, that would be so good.

Oh, I need that quick sugar rush of energy. Oh, I need that. There it is.

I'm so hungry. I'm so tired. I need it.

And God was providing that honey for them. God was providing it for them right there. But they couldn't partake of what God was providing and what they really needed, because Saul had made a silly oath and had forced the army of Israel to be under that oath.

And so what happened? You saw it there in verse 25 and 26. It says there that no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. So this foolish legalist, the command from Saul, kept what God had provided and what they needed right in front of their eyes.

It kept them from enjoying it. So look at it now, verse 27. But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath.

Well, he had not indeed. You see, where was Jonathan when Saul was coercing the whole army under this oath? Saul was out fighting a bunch of Philistines. Jonathan was out there winning the battle.

And Saul gives this great, big, spiritually proud, pompous speech. Nobody's going to eat until sundown today because we're going to take vengeance on my enemies. Jonathan wasn't there.

He was out there in the midst of the battle. So when he comes back and joins all the troops, I bet Jonathan, why isn't anybody eating? What's wrong with them? He goes, man, I'm hungry. I'm going to get something to eat.

You know, this is funny, because I wonder, and I get to heaven, and I'm going to ask Jonathan this one. When I get to heaven, I'm going to say, Jonathan, did you really know that your father Saul had not made that promise or not coerced the people into that? I think he might have known. I think he might have, you know, well, why aren't you eating? Your dad made us take this oath and so we can't eat.

I wouldn't be surprised if Jonathan said, listen, man, I wasn't there. He didn't put me under that oath. I'm eating.

I don't know. Maybe he didn't hear about it. Maybe he knew.

I don't know. When you get to heaven, we'll have to ask Jonathan about that and find out one way or the other. It doesn't really matter, because you see what the bottom line of it was.

Verse 27, Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and he put his hand to his mouth and his countenance brightened. That sugar rush, him having the food in his stomach, it was good. It helped him.

It was something positive for him, fighting the battle on an exhausting day. Look what happens here. Verse 28, then one of the people said, Your father strictly charged the people with an oath saying, Cursed is the man who eats food this day.

And the people were faint. Jonathan said, My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance is brightened because I've tasted a little of this honey.

How much better if the people had eaten freely of the spoil of their enemies which they had found. For now, there would not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines. Well, do you see what Jonathan says there at the beginning of verse 29? He says, My father has troubled the land.

Friends, maybe Jonathan shouldn't have said this. Maybe it was insubordination. Maybe ideally, if he had a criticism to make of a decision his father had made, he should have taken it straight to King Saul.

Having said that, everything Jonathan said was exactly true. Saul was hurting Israel that day. He was troubling the land.

He was not blessing the land. On a day when the people should have been strong, when they should have been active, they were weak and they were distracted because Saul had commanded them to fast. You can't say it any better than Jonathan did.

How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they had found. For now, would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines. We could have been so much more successful if my father would not have forced the nation under this silly oath.

Friends, do you see the kind of damage that legalism does? And that's what we're talking about here. Legalism can express itself in many different ways. Let me tell you two ways that legalism can express itself.

One way that legalism expresses itself is in a performance-trapped kind of Christianity. And if I could just summarize what performance-trapped kind of Christianity is, it's this, where you perceive your standing before God or the standing of other people before God based on their performance. Let me put it to you this way.

When you're a good boy or girl, God loves you. When you're a bad boy or girl, God's not so sure. Right? That's legalism, my friends.

You think that your standing before God is based on your performance. Now what's wrong with that? What's wrong with it is that it's not true. If you are in Jesus Christ, your standing before God is based on what Jesus Christ has done for you and on what He has accomplished on the cross.

That we give Him our sin and He gives us His righteousness and we stand righteous before the Lord. Not of anything we've done, but because of what Jesus has done on our behalf. That's our standing before God.

So, legalism can express itself in performance-trapped kind of living, but it can also express itself in the manner in which people take the laws and the rules and the traditions of men and elevate them up to the commandments of God. Friends, you can search high and low throughout the Bible. You will never find a place in the Bible where it says, and the Lord God commandetheth that on the day of battle, Israel should not eateth until sundown.

You're not going to find it in there. That was not God's command. That was Saul's command.

And what Saul did was he took his own tradition, his own rule, his own law, and he elevated it to the place of the law of God. And let me tell you something, legalism will not work in your life. You see what happened here? Legalism made the victory less than it could have been.

They could have had a much greater victory had it not been for Saul's legalistic attitude. Friends, that's not all. You know what else legalism does? Legalism, check this out, legalism actually leads people into sin.

Isn't that funny? I mean, that's why a lot of people embrace legalism. They look around at the sinful state of the world and the church around us and they say, listen, we better clean things up here. Let's get a little legalistic.

And they don't put it like that, but that's essentially what they do. Let's make the list of rules. And instead of the rules coming up spontaneously in a person's heart by the Holy Spirit, it's like, let's impose this and this and this and we'll clean things up and that's how we'll do it.

It's defeating. Legalism arouses sin within us. It did here.

Look at verse 31. Now, they had driven back the Philistines that day from Mekmash to Ahilan. And so the people were very faint and the people rushed on the spoil and took sheep, oxen and calves and they slaughtered them on the ground and the people ate them with the blood.

Now you say, well, is that sin? Yeah, it was sin because God very specifically commanded in the law of Moses that you should not eat meat without the blood having been properly drained. You see, kosher food and kosher meat, it's not just the kind of animal you eat. You might all know that pork isn't kosher and you can't eat pork.

But you might think, well, beef is kosher. You can eat a steer. That's fine.

But it isn't just the animal. It's how it's prepared. And for an animal to be butchered in a kosher way, the way that they would do it is they would butcher the animal so that they could drain as much of the blood as possible from the animal.

And what was to be done with the blood? It was to be poured out on the ground. Listen to this from Deuteronomy 12. God says, Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life.

You may not eat the life with the meat. You shall not eat it. You shall pour it out on the earth like water.

You shall not eat it, that it may go well with you and your children after you when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord. See, the whole idea there is that blood is a picture of the life of the animal. And life doesn't belong to us.

Life belongs to God. So you shouldn't eat the blood. Instead, what you should do is you should return the life to God, the blood that is, by pouring it out on the ground as much as possible.

Obviously, you're not going to be able to drain every last bit of blood out of the animal, but you do the best you can. And that's a kosher way of eating. Now, what the Israelites did in this situation where they were so hungry, they said, Forget this full row of draining out the blood.

We're starving to death. We're going to eat this meat. And so they did it and they sinned against God's specific command because they were keeping Saul's silly rule.

Do you see how legalism led them into sin? Legalism will make you forsake the clear command of God to keep man's petty rule. Jesus said it so well in Mark chapter 7. He said, For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of man. All too well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition.

Well, fine. They kept Saul's commandment of man, but they sinned against the Lord's commandment. You see how legalism can lead you into sin? Friends, we oftentimes think that legalistic rules will keep us from sin, but actually the opposite is true.

Legalistic rules will lead us into sin because they'll either provoke our rebellion. Do you know how legalism does that? You want an example of this? Go home and if you have children, go take your children, take them to a closet in your house and say, Kids, don't go in this closet. Don't look in this closet.

I'm laying down a rule right now. Don't you look into this closet. Now I'm not saying that your kids will do it, but they'll want to.

Right? If your kids are good, obedient children, and they don't do it, that's fine. But they'll want to do it. They'll want to see what's in that closet.

Why? Just the laying down of a rule can excite something rebellious in our nature. And that's not reflective on the evil of the law or anything. It just shows how evil we are.

So legalism can lead us into sin because it provokes our rebellion. But you want to know how legalism can lead us into sin in another way? It can turn us into legalistically proud people. You know what I was talking about, that performance trap kind of thing? And maybe some of you are caught up in the performance trap on the negative end.

You come here to church on a Sunday morning, and you sit down, and you think, man, all these people are really right with God, and I'm not. I'm not walking very well with God. I didn't have a very good week.

I only read my Bible once this last week, or I didn't read it at all. All the rest of these people seem to really love the Lord. Look at how they worship the Lord.

They must really be right with God. I'm not. That's performance trap Christianity on the negative end.

You want to know performance trap Christianity on the positive end? It's this. God loves me more than He loves you, because I'm so good. And nobody would ever say that, would they? But they think it.

They really think it. They think, you know, I'm so right with God. I'm His special person, because I do all these things.

You come to church and say, I read my Bible every day this week. I think God really wants to bless me. That's performance trap Christianity.

And let me say something. That's worse than on the weak end. I'd rather have somebody come out on the weakness end of all this and say, oh, I guess I'm really miserable for God, than have that legalistic pride before the Lord.

And so all this legalism, it just comes to no good. Notice what happens here as it continues on here, verse 33. Then they told Saul, saying, look, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood.

And he said, you have dealt treacherously. Roll the large stone to me this day. Yeah, Saul, blame the people.

Look at the people you have dealt treacherously. No, Saul, you have. It was your legalism that provoked this.

But Saul wants to set it right. Verse 34, and Saul said, disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, bring me here every man's ox and every man's sheep. Slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood.

So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and slaughtered it there. Then Saul built an altar to the Lord. This was the first altar that he built to the Lord.

And Saul said, let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light and let us not leave a man of them. And they said, do whatever seems good to you. Then the priest said, let us draw near to God here.

Now, this is interesting. Saul realizes that the Philistines are getting away. And so he says, listen, OK, now that we've eaten, let's go out after them at night and we'll chase them down and get them because he realizes that they are escaping from the Israelites' grasp.

And so the priest says, OK, fine, Saul. Sounds like a good plan. Let's seek the Lord about it.

So they seek the Lord. Look at verse 37. So Saul asks counsel of God.

Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he did not answer him that day. Oh, isn't that interesting? God did not answer Saul when Saul sought of the Lord. Shall we go chase them down at night? Shall we go finish this business? Saul realizes that the battle did not go as it should have because the people were weak.

But now that everybody's had a good meal, maybe we can go out and finish it. Should we do this, Lord? God's not answering. So when God doesn't answer, what do you have to do? Well, you have to blame somebody, don't you? And who's Saul going to blame? Himself? Not in your life.

Look at this. Verse 38. Saul said, come over here, all you chiefs of the people, and know and see what this sin was today.

You think he's talking about his own sin? No way. Verse 39. For as the Lord lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die, but not a man among the people answered him.

Saul's basically saying this. I know there's a sinner in the army of Israel. There's somebody who ate today.

I commanded that nobody eat. We took an oath. We put a curse on whoever eats.

Somebody ate. That's why the Lord won't answer me. Who did it? And even if it was my son Jonathan, we're going to execute him.

Now, as he said that, the people had a chill run up their spine because a lot of them knew that Jonathan was the one who was eating. You know, Saul didn't really mean that. He's just speaking in a very strong way to show how tough he is.

I'll show you how tough I am. Why, even if it was my own son Jonathan, we'll execute him. Who is it? Well, how are they going to find out? They're going to cast lots.

Look at it here in verse 40. And he said to all Israel, You be on one side, and my son Jonathan and I will be on the other side. And the people said to Saul, Do what seems good to you.

Therefore Saul said to the Lord God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. So Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped. Do you see what they're doing? They put the people into two groups, right? Okay, there's the whole army of Israel, and here's Saul and Jonathan.

Okay, Lord, who's guilty between us? And you know what Saul's doing. Yeah, I know how this is going to turn out. Those people, they're the ones who are guilty.

So they cast the lot, and it turns out that, well, Saul and Jonathan, one of them is the guilty one. Saul's going, Wow, I didn't expect this. They're supposed to be the people.

Well, very well then. Take a look here at verse 42. And Saul said, Cast lots between my son Jonathan and me.

So Jonathan was taken. Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what you have done. And Jonathan told him and said, I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand.

So now I must die? And Saul answered, God do so and more also, for you shall surely die, Jonathan. Two things to see here. First of all, isn't it amazing? Saul is now Mr. Oath and Mr. Curse.

Isn't this like the third or fourth oath that he's taken here in this chapter? By the way, that's a sign of a weak man before the Lord, isn't it? You know, any time you see somebody out there, you know, oh man, I promise. I super-duper-duper promise. I swear on a stack of Bibles, man.

You know that there's something wrong with their word because they feel like they have to back it up with a lot of oaths and curses. Saul now becomes Mr. Spiritual, Mr. Oath, Mr. Curse, Mr. Spiritual Authority. It all stinks to the Lord.

See what he says? He looks at his son Jonathan square in the eye and he said, You ate when I told the nation not to eat. And you're going to die. Do you understand what's happening here? Do you understand that Saul is in such a state of mind, so filled with pride, so far from humility that he's willing to kill his son rather than admit that he was wrong.

Saul should have stopped at this point and said, whoa, wait a minute. You know what? I'm sorry that it took this to make me see it. But I was wrong.

I should have never made this oath. I should have never been this legalistic. I should have never pronounced a death penalty on whoever ate that day.

That's way out of line. That's way exaggerated. I'm sorry.

Just forgive me and let's move on. Instead of doing that, he would rather kill his own son. Now think about this.

Is this false spirituality or what? Oh, he makes a big deal about not eating. He makes a big deal about obeying his oath. He makes a big deal about not eating blood.

But the murder of his son, oh, that's nothing to him. Friends, let me tell you something. This is the way that pride works in a person's heart.

And Saul, who started out humble, he really did start out humble. Now he's overtaken with pride. But thankfully, the Lord's not going to leave it up to Saul.

Look at what happens here in verse 45. I love this. But the people said to Saul, shall Jonathan die who has accomplished this great salvation in Israel? Certainly not.

As the Lord lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground for he's worked with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan so that he did not die. The people just kind of say, okay, enough, Saul.

Forget it. You've gone on enough. This is it.

We let you go on and on. We didn't eat all day today. You know, you made us so hungry.

We ate on coach. You did this. We're just sick and tired.

Forget it, Saul. You're not going to touch one hair on his head. I guess they said it so strongly that Saul said, man, if I touch him, they're all going to mob me and kill me.

Forget that business. And you never hear any more of the matter. Oh, friends.

You see, God was looking out for Jonathan. Saul's heart is far, far from God. You want to know the upshot of it all too? Look at verse 46.

Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place. You know what it means that they went to their own place? A lot of them got away. Look, God won a great victory for Israel that day, but it could have been much greater if not for Saul's pride and legalism.

My friends, I trust that God's doing a great work in your life. How much greater it could be if you laid aside that pride and legalism. Let's finish up the chapter here.

Verse 47. So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed them.

And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites and delivered Israel from the hand of those who plundered them. Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Joshua, and Malachi, and these were the names of his two daughters. The name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger, Michael.

And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner, the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner, the father of Abner, was the son of Abiel.

And there was a fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took them for himself. Now these last few verses have something very, very important to communicate to us.

Two things, I would say. The first thing is the difficulty of pronouncing some of these Bible names. Good heavens! I have no idea if I said some of those names correctly.

I just did them fast and hoped that you wouldn't notice. The far more important theme through these last few verses of this end of the chapter is it's all about Saul's strength. Did you notice that? Look at verse 47.

So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel. He fought. He battled.

He had a big and influential family. He got himself soldiers, mighty soldiers, wherever he wanted. He battled against the Philistines.

This whole chapter is all about Saul's strength. Saul's strength was broad over many areas. Yet if Saul's strength was broad, it was shallow.

Saul was not a man after God's own heart, because his own relationship with God was more about image than substance. His kingdom cannot last. The weakness of Saul, we've seen it here and there, now it's crystallizing in pride, in legalism, in insecurity, in a trust in his own strength.

We're going to see the weakness of Saul exposed in the next chapter. Friends, would that describe your walk with the Lord? People look at you on the outside and they see a broad strength in your Christian life. They look at you, well, yeah, they've got their Christian life together.

Maybe you and only you know that it looks broadly strong, but it's really very shallow. I can say one thing to every person in this room here this morning. It doesn't matter.

Every person I can say this to. You need to go deeper with Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter.

You could be the highest saint, closest to God of everybody in this room. I still say to you, you need to go deeper with Jesus Christ. And it's that continual progress, that continual going deeper, that will keep you from the pride, that will keep you from the legalism.

I would hope that at the end of my days and at the end of your days, nobody's writing this that talks about all our strength. I'd much rather hear it talk about the strength and the goodness and the greatness and the glory of God. Let's ask God to do this in our lives, to take us deeper and deeper with Him.

We don't want to be broadly strong, but not very deep at all. Let's pray. Father, we need that in our lives.

We need to be preserved from the pull to legalism and pride. We need to go deeper and deeper with Jesus Christ. And so, Lord, I pray that You'd do a sovereign work and a sovereign calling on hearts here this morning to draw us deeper and deeper with You.

We want to be overwhelmed and filled over and over with Your presence, with Your power, with Your goodness in our lives. Won't You do that work in us, Lord? We need it. We need it so desperately.

Pour out Your Spirit upon us, Lord God. I pray that You'd humble hearts before You this morning, that You'd rescue people caught up in the performance trap, that You'd let us see Your greatness, Your glory. It's not all about our strength, Lord.

It's not all about what we accomplish, but it's all about You. Help us to see it, Lord, and to really latch on to that this morning, we pray in Jesus' name.

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