

1 Samuel 14:24-52 — Snatching Defeat From The Jaws Of Victory

May 22, 2022

Good morning CrossWinds! I am Kurt. I am one of the pastors. It is good to be back with you after taking a week off for graduation. I am thankful Pastor Kris was able to fill in for me last Sunday. That gave me a free Saturday to pick up my daughter, Deanna, from college. It is great having her home.

Before we get to our study, I have a few quick updates.

1. Pastor Jordan will be leaving for Sabbatical. He will be off from June 3 to August 14. For that period of time, the other and I pastors will cover the Spencer pulpit. That will mean a lot of rotating pastors to different campuses. While Pastor Jordan is gone, we will pause our studies in 1 Samuel. During that time the pastors will preach on answers to some of the most popular questions you had from the preaching topic survey that was on the church app a few weeks ago. The series is called, "What Does the Bible Say?" We will see what the Bible says about those topics of greatest interest to our church family.
2. Next Sunday we move to summer hours. The first service will stay at 8:15 a.m. The second service will move to 10 am. If you arrive at 11 a.m. next week, you will be here just in time to leave so make sure you remember the time change.
3. I want to give a quick update about the work on the new campus in Spencer. Most of the walls are framed. We have to put up one big wall that is a little tricky. It is the wall around the worship space and the back wall is curved. That will be tricky. We were able to get electrical contractors. They should

begin work either this week or the beginning of next week, so we are making good progress.

With those updates out of the way, let's turn our attention to the Bible.

This morning, we are in 1 Samuel 14:24. Take out your paper Bibles or your phone Bibles and turn to that verse. Also, get out your sermon handout. We need to remember this is part 3 of the story that began in chapter 13. Let's take a few minutes to quickly recap parts 1 and 2 so that when we jump into the text what happens makes sense.

Background

After Saul was established as king, he hadn't done what the prophet Samuel told him to do. He never attacked and destroyed the Philistine outpost that was deep in the heart of Israelite territory. Saul's son, Jonathan, did what his father should have done. He attacked and destroyed the Philistines. As you would expect, the Philistines weren't happy. They declared war against Israel. They showed up for battle with a sizable army --- 30,000 chariots, 6,000 in the cavalry, and foot soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They were beyond counting.

Saul had a much smaller army. Israel only had 3,000 soldiers. In addition, the Israelites only had sticks and stones as weapons while the Philistines were equipped with iron swords, spears, and shields. When Saul's army realized they were completely outmatched not just by the size of the Philistine army by also by the sophistication of the Philistine's weapons, most of Saul's army ran for cover. They went AWOL. Soon Saul was left with only 600 soldiers. Saul and his puny army left the front lines of the battle and traveled to Gibeah in the south where

last week we found Saul sitting in the shade of a pomegranate tree eating fruit snacks while the Philistines ravaged the land and terrorized the people. Saul was not a fearless leader. When he saw the Philistines, he cowered in fear and ran for cover.

But Saul's son Jonathan was different. First, Jonathan did what his father should have done when he attacked the Philistine garrison. Now we see Jonathan become the man his father should have been. Jonathan was not content to relax and eat fruit snacks miles away from the front lines of the battle and cower in fear of the Philistines. He knew it wasn't the size of the army that mattered. It was the size of the God behind the army that mattered. He knew that nothing could hinder the Lord from saving his people either by many or by few. Jonathan knew his Bible history. He knew God had a habit of saving his people when they faced overwhelming odds. He expected God would save his people again. Who would be the one with courageous faith to begin the battle? Jonathan said, "Maybe it should be me."

Jonathan and his armor-bearer snuck away from his father and the rest of the discouraged soldiers at Gibeah. They traveled to a deep valley that was on the edge of Michmash where the Philistines were encamped. There, Jonathan and his armor-bearer climbed a sheer rock cliff. The name of the cliff in Hebrews is "Slippery." It didn't appear scalable. Yet when Jonathan and his armor-bearer made it to the top, they surprised the Philistines who couldn't imagine that anyone would climb the rock cliff. At the top, they began slicing and dicing the Philistines. Soon the Philistines were in a panic. They trampled one another. In

their panic, they began killing one another. God even sent an earthquake to further freak them out and their killing of one another turned into a slaughter.

When King Saul's lookouts reported what was happening, Saul and his army ran to join the battle. The men who had gone AWOL also returned to join the battle. God was in the process of snatching victory from the hands of defeat.

As we pick up the story in verse 24, the author did something biblical authors often do. He broke into the story with a flashback to something that happened earlier when Saul and the rest of the military ran to join the battle. What we will find is Saul had a way of messing things up. He snatched defeat from the hands of victory and ruined much of the rescue God planned. Let's see how that happened.

So the Lord saved Israel that day... And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day... 1 Samuel 14:23a–24a (ESV)

Last time, we left off in verse 23 with the words, "The Lord saved Israel that day." This all came about because of Jonathan's bold military assault against the Philistines when he climbed the sheer rock wall to attack their blind side. God showed up and saved Israel.

If that is the case, why were the soldiers hard pressed? This phrase "the people were hard pressed" showed up earlier in chapter 13. It was used to describe the reaction of Saul's army to the massive Philistine army that showed up to defeat them with iron weapons. It means to be majorly stressed out. It means to be discouraged or depressed. What made the army so discouraged and stressed when God was fighting for them and giving them the victory? The

Philistines were killing one another. All the Israelites needed to do was to show up, finish them off, and take all their stuff. The next verse gives us the answer.

...so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, “Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies.” So none of the people had tasted food. 1 Samuel 14:24 (ESV)

Saul put his entire army under an oath that they were not allowed to eat anything that day in the battle. They couldn't even drink a Gatorade. This was a hard and long battle. Later we will see the army traveled almost 25 miles that day over rugged, mountainous terrain, but they couldn't eat or drink anything to regain their strength. No wonder the men in the army were stressed. An army marches on its stomach. Multiple times in the rest of this chapter we will see that the army was faint. They were weak. They were exhausted.

If you are like me, you can't help but wonder why Saul would put his army under this silly oath. I don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us but it hints at his motivation. Nobody could eat until Saul was avenged on his enemies. For Saul, the battle against the Philistines was not about God rescuing his people. It was about Saul building his ego. It was about getting revenge on his enemies. He didn't care about his soldiers. He didn't consider the needs of his soldiers. Now that Saul was king, his primary concern was himself, his ego, and his reputation. He was using his army to serve his purposes. He was not using the army to serve God and protect the nation. All Saul cared about was the person staring back at him in the mirror. He was drunk on his own power.

We know the motivation in Saul's heart that inspired this silly oath. What series of events brought this poor leadership to the surface? Here is how I think things went down. When Jonathan was courageously battling the Philistines and

God gave him victory, I think the attention of Saul's army turned to Jonathan and away from Saul. Saul came up with this silly oath to make himself the center of attention again and exercise his power and remind everyone that he was king and in charge.

This silly oath was only the first poor leadership decision Saul makes in this chapter. The rest of the chapter is a study in what poor leadership looks like with Saul making one bad leadership decision after another.

As we study the rest of the chapter, we will look at it through the lens of leadership and see what poor leadership looks like, not just in Saul but in ourselves.

Let's look at the first poor leadership principle we have already covered.

1. Poor leaders use their position to serve themselves instead of others.

When Saul witnessed the attention leaving him for his son, he made himself the center of attention by issuing the silly order that people couldn't eat until *he was avenged*. He made himself the center of attention. He used his authority not to serve God or people but to serve and bring attention to himself.

Isn't it easy for us to do the same? I am sure all of us can think of examples of this in government where politicians use their authority to serve themselves instead of the people who elected them. That is proud leadership. It is poor leadership. None of us are immune to this. Before we focus on poor leadership in others, we need to see how this kind of poor leadership shows up in ourselves.

Sometimes I counsel husbands who think their wives exist to serve them. They think their children are there to serve them. While a wife is to be a

husband's helper, that doesn't mean he should treat her as his slave. In the Bible, we find that a husband is to love his wife like Christ loved the church. Christ gave up his life for the church. A husband is not to be about making his wife serve him, but he is to love, serve, and cherish her!

So far we have Saul's troops grumpy. They were stressed out because they were marching on empty stomachs because of Saul's ego problem. This sets us up for what happens next.

Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. 1 Samuel 14:25–26 (ESV)

It is one thing to be starving but it is another thing to be starving and walk through a candy store. When chasing the Philistines they went through a section of the forest that had a number of beehives in the trees. The beehives were so full of honey it was just dripping to the ground. Of course, nobody could enjoy any of it because of Saul's silly commands. That is a loyal army.

Not everyone knew about Saul's silly self-centered oath. Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not around when Saul uttered this oath. They were busy fighting the Philistines.

But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright. 1 Samuel 14:27 (ESV)

Jonathan didn't take much time but he used the tip of his spear to get some honey and then used his hand to put the honey in his mouth. This was not a lot of honey but it was enough to make difference. Jonathan's eyes brightened. He perked up. He had a sugar buzz. Remember that by the end of the day

Jonathan and the army had traveled almost 25 miles without food, so a little honey helped. When people saw what Jonathan had done, they were horrified.

Then one of the people said, “Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, ‘Cursed be the man who eats food this day.’” And the people were faint. 1 Samuel 14:28 (ESV)

At this point, the people told Jonathan about Saul’s self-serving oath. Notice the people were faint. They were exhausted. They were starving. Jonathan was ready to go from a quick sugar snack.

Jonathan heard about his father’s silly oath. The entire army was weak and exhausted for no reason other than his father’s pride. Even though God provided an abundant supply of honey for quick energy, nobody could enjoy it. After seeing the foolishness of this moment, Jonathan couldn’t help but speak his mind.

Then Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great.” 1 Samuel 14:29–30 (ESV)

Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land.” When I am studying, I like to see if there are key phrases used in a passage that are used earlier in the Bible. This gives me a better idea of their significance. This phrase, “...has troubled the land” is used earlier in the Bible. It is used in the book of Joshua. It was used to describe when Achan brought trouble to Israel by stealing items from Jericho in Joshua 7. As a result, the army was defeated at Ai and many men lost their lives. Achan brought trouble to God’s people when God was in the process of blessing his people. Troubling the people meant taking God’s blessing on God’s people and ruining it for God’s people. That is what Saul did with his rash

decision to starve his army while God was providing food and nourishment. This brings us to our second application of what poor leadership looks like.

2. A poor leader creates rules that take life from God's people instead of giving life to people.

Did God require his people to not eat that day? Absolutely not. It was an extra rule added by Saul. What Saul required was beyond what God required, and it resulted in the needless suffering of the army when God was providing honey.

We see people creating pointless rules that take life from people all the time today as people create them to exercise their power. Before we look at this in politics, let's look at how we do this in the Christian world.

Last week, I was in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, studying the books of Colossians and Philemon with other graduates of my doctoral program. One evening we had a chance to hear from an ecologist who talked to us about Christian ethics and the environment. In one part of the presentation, the presenter talked about turning his heat down to 65 degrees in the winter to save the environment. Another guy talked about turning the heat in his home down to 55 degrees in the winter to avoid using fossil fuels and save the environment. I kept picturing these guys eating Christmas dinner with their families dressed in snowsuits.

If you want to turn your heat down to 55 degrees in the winter, go have fun. Following Christ does not mean Christians need to keep their heat at 55 degrees in January. Jesus doesn't want you to freeze to save the planet. Maybe a better idea is to better insulate your house this summer and turn the heat back

up this winter. It is poor leadership to suggest that to be a good follower of Jesus that saves the planet you should keep your heat at 55 degrees. It is a rule that takes away life from people. It doesn't give life to people.

Let's get back to the text.

They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. [And the people were very faint.](#) 1 Samuel 14:31 (ESV)

Here we see the complete exhaustion of the soldiers again. They were very faint. I won't put up a map, but it was 20 miles over mountainous terrain to go from Michmash to Aijalon. The soldiers also traveled another 5 miles earlier in the day to travel from Gibeah to Michmash. No wonder the troops were exhausted. This was all because of Saul's silly command to make himself the center of attention.

How do you think the troops felt about Saul right then? How confident do you think they were in Saul's leadership right then?

When evening fell and they were allowed to eat, you can guess what happened.

The people pounced on the spoil and took sheep and oxen and calves and slaughtered them on the ground. [And the people ate them with the blood.](#) 1 Samuel 14:32 (ESV)

The troops were famished. They took the sheep, oxen, and calves they found and slaughtered them on the ground. They were eating their steaks raw. The steaks were so raw the blood wasn't even drained from the animal when they ate them. They did this because they were famished.

For you and me, eating a steak that is rare and still has some blood in it may be gross, but there is nothing wrong with it. For the Israelites, that was not

the case. Going all the way back to Noah in Genesis 9:4 God's people were not to eat meat with the blood of the animal not being drained away. The book of Leviticus also talks about this.

Moreover, you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwelling places. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people. Leviticus 7:26–27 (ESV)

Blood was a symbol of life. The blood of the animal was the part of the animal that was used for the atonement of sin in the tabernacle so it was important to properly drain the blood from the meat before you ate it if you were a Jewish man or woman in Old Testament times. Right now, the people were so faint and hungry they didn't care to drain the meat properly or even cook it. They were so weak they just needed something to eat. Have you ever been at the place where you are so hungry that you ate food before cooking it? Did you eat the soup cold out of the can because it would take too long to heat it in the microwave? That is what the soldiers were feeling.

This gives us our third application point on poor leadership.

3. A poor leader encourages unintentional sin.

If it wasn't for Saul's silly oath, the people wouldn't have been famished. They wouldn't have sinned by eating meat that was not properly drained if Saul didn't starve them half to death. It was Saul's leadership that put these people in a position where they were likely to sin. That is what poor leadership does. It stresses people out and encourages them to sin.

Sometimes we can do this. As a parent, I sometimes did this with my children. When my sons were driving and in high school, they needed to be home by 10 p.m. Sometimes they came home too late so we became harsh with

them. "You must be home by 10 p.m. I don't care about excuses. It is home at 10 p.m., no questions asked or you are in trouble."

That resulted in times when they were speeding to get home because they were afraid of being a minute or two late. It was my hard-headed, no-excuses-allowed rule that put them in a position that encouraged them to sin. That doesn't justify their sin but if they were going to be a few minutes late, I should have told them to just give me a call and not speed across town.

Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here." And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and 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 they slaughtered them there. And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD. 1 Samuel 14:33–35 (ESV)

I love Saul's reaction when he heard the soldiers had eaten meat with blood in it. Look how he reacted, "You have dealt treacherously." That means "How dare you?" All he could do was berate his troops and throw them under the bus. He was completely oblivious to the fact that he was the cause of much of this problem. If he didn't have the loony idea that his troops needed to chase Philistines for more than 25 miles through the mountains to bolster his ego, maybe they wouldn't have been so hungry. Maybe they would have taken time to cook the steaks rather than eat them raw.

Here we have another window into Saul's poor leadership.

4. A poor leader is quick to see the sin in other people but is blind to the sin in himself.

Saul was completely oblivious to how he contributed to this problem. In many ways, it was his silly, self-centered oath that gave rise to the problem. All

he could see was what his troops had done wrong, not what he had done wrong. Instead of showing compassion, he made them feel small and stupid.

Saul had no room to talk. He was the same man who did not obey God. He offered sacrifices without Samuel in chapter 13 and lost his dynasty. He was the same man who had no confidence that God would rescue Israel from the Philistines. He was a coward while Jonathan was the hero. Now he was looking down on his famished troops for eating meat that wasn't adequately drained of blood. He had plenty of issues in his own life. He should have worried about his own issues before berating his troops for their issues. Isn't that poor leadership?

Let's continue the story.

Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." 1 Samuel 14:36a (ESV)

Put yourselves in the shoes of Saul's soldiers. After a 25-mile chase through the mountain without drink or food, the soldiers were exhausted. They were weak. Evening fell and they pounced on the food because they were famished. Everyone was laying on the ground, holding their stomachs, trying to recover.

While everybody was exhausted and waiting for their meal to digest, Saul suggested they attack the Philistines all night long. The soldiers replied with a predictable lack of enthusiasm. "Do whatever seems good to you."

If you were in the army, wouldn't you think Saul was nuts at this point? He was completely out of touch with the condition of his soldiers. He was using them and making harsh demands on them. This is another window into Saul's poor leadership.

5. A poor leader makes excessive demands on people.

I realize the job of a leader is to call people to action. The job of a leader is also to know the people he or she is leading and to know the limits of those people. The Philistines were not moving at night and neither were the Israelites. The only reason Saul suggested this was for his own vainglory. He just wanted to get his plunder early. He couldn't wait until morning.

The same can be true of us in the way we lead. When we are leading people, we need to know the limits of the people we are leading, not just the goals we are trying to achieve.

...But the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?"... 1 Samuel 14:36b-37 (ESV)

I may be wrong but I think Ahijah the priest asked Saul to check with God about a nighttime attack on the Philistines because he was trying to help the soldiers get some much-needed rest. Even if it was just an extra hour of rest, I am sure they needed it.

There was a problem.

...But he did not answer him that day. 1 Samuel 14:37 (ESV)

Imagine this if you were a soldier in Saul's army and God was refusing to answer your king about a nighttime pursuit of the Philistines when you were exhausted. You were probably wondering if God was refusing to answer Saul because God was as frustrated with Saul as you were.

And Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today. For as the LORD lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die."... 1 Samuel 14:38-39 (ESV)

Saul had no sense that maybe he was the source of the problem, that his crazy leadership was the reason God was silent. Immediately Saul assumed God was silent because someone had committed a great sin. He made another rash decision to show off his ego. Whoever sinned must die.

Here we see a principle of poor leadership.

6. A poor leader makes rash decisions.

"I don't care who has sinned. I don't care what they have done. If they have sinned in any way they must die, even if it is my own son." What a great leader.

...But there was not a man among all the people who answered him. 1 Samuel 14:39 (ESV)

Do you sense a growing distance between Saul and his army? Nobody would talk to him. Nobody would confide in him. Nobody would say anything to him. They were giving Saul space and letting him have his fit. His rash oath of not eating for the entire day got him in trouble the first time, now his rash oath of killing anyone who may have sinned would get him in trouble the second time.

As a leader, Saul had lost the confidence of his army.

Then he said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." Therefore Saul said, "O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken. 1 Samuel 14:40–42 (ESV)

This introduces us to the Old Testament practice of casting lots. The Urim and Thummim were two stones in the chest piece of the priest that were rolled like dice to determine God's will. While we don't know for sure, it appears that

one side of them was white and the other was black. Two whites were a yes. Two blacks were a no. One white and one black was no answer. We don't know that definitively but in my research that is the best I found.

Why did they use lots like this to determine God's will? They believed God determined the outcome of all events, even seemingly random events. This was one way God revealed his will at this time.

Some of you are wondering why we don't cast lots or roll dice to determine God's will today. We have things they didn't. We have the Holy Spirit guiding us into all truth. They didn't have the Holy Spirit in them this way. We also have the complete Word of God which tells us everything we need to know to live a life pleasing to God. They didn't have that available to them, so God directed them to cast lots for him to reveal his will.

It turns out the lot fell to Jonathan, the hero of the day. Saul was sure that Jonathan had done some great sin. Let's see what happens.

Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die." 1 Samuel 14:43 (ESV)

Jonathan answered in a way that highlighted the whole absurdity of the situation. He tasted a little honey from the tip of his staff. He never even knew about his father's silly oath when he did it. Then Jonathan said, "I will die." That was obviously a capital offense deserving death.

Jonathan, the man who had the faith his father lacked to fight the Philistines. Jonathan, the man who attacked and destroyed the Philistines at Gibeah and did what his father should have done. He was slated to die because he tasted a tiny bit of honey and he didn't even know about his father's silly oath

when he did it. Do you see the complete absurdity of the whole thing? Don't you think Saul needed to snap out of it and get a grip on the foolishness of his leadership? Let's see if Saul wisened up.

And Saul said, "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan."
1 Samuel 14:44 (ESV)

Saul is a man drunk on power. He has to be the center of attention. He has no forgiveness, no compassion, no understanding. He was willing to kill his own son for this silly minor violation of his word. This gives us another principle of poor leadership.

7. A poor leader cares more about protecting his position than his people.

Saul didn't care about his son. He didn't care that his son was the man with faith he should have been. He didn't care that Jonathan was used by God to deliver a nation. All Saul cared about was that when somebody disobeyed his word, that person deserved to die. Isn't that the height of arrogance?

We see leaders caring more about protecting their position than their people today. We see it in politics. We see it in the home when a mother or father has no patience with children who disobey. We see it in families that are broken when one person in the family refuses to forgive and restore a relationship with someone else in the family. They don't care about people. All they care about is protecting the power of their position.

At this point, the army had enough. Somebody had to put his foot down to stop Saul as he was drunk with power and ego. Whom would it be that had the courage to risk his lives and finally say to Saul, "Enough is enough."

Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his

head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. 1 Samuel 14:45 (ESV)

The entire nation stepped to the plate. They refused to let Saul kill his own son. "Enough is enough. Stop acting like a bully. Stop acting like a tyrant." What we see is that in 1 Samuel 12, Saul started out well when he had victory over the Ammonites. He gave glory to God. He was humble. After that, when he walked away from God, he became more and more of a tyrant with no compassion.

This is a principle that still holds true today. The further a leader gets from God, the more like Saul he or she will become. Bad leaders will continually see leadership as all about themselves and along the way they will become tyrants and they will have a gift for snatching defeat out of a God-given victory.

In essence, God was done with Saul at this point. Saul's attempt at killing his own son for violation of his silly oath was enough for God to lose patience with him. At this point, even though Saul would remain alive until chapter 31, the author of 1 Samuel gave Saul's obituary at this point.

When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them. And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them. Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. 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. There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself. 1 Samuel 14:47–52 (ESV)

What is a shock about this obituary is how it described Saul's military career. He was very successful. We just read about him as an utter failure. How do we reconcile these two statements?

On the outside, when people looked at Saul's military career as a king, he was a success. He defeated many armies, but when you look at Saul on the inside in his relationship with God, his character, and how he treated people, he was an utter failure. What a great reminder to us that success in God's eyes is not the size of our bottom line or the greatness of our stock portfolio. It is our relationship with God, our character, and how we treat the people around us. In the areas where it matters, Saul was a failure.

Conclusion

If you are like me, when studying this chapter, it was easy to critique Saul's poor leadership. The truth is, the more I thought about this chapter, the more I began to see some of Saul's poor leadership skills alive and well in me. Maybe you felt the same way. To that end, this message was good. It helped me see my leadership sin so I can repent and live a life more pleasing to Jesus.

The other thought that came to mind as I studied was how glad I am that I am not in Saul's army. I am not being told to march 25 miles on an empty stomach. I am not berated by Saul for not properly draining the blood from my steak. When I make a minor mistake, I don't have to fear for my life. It isn't just Saul that is a poor leader. If we look through all the kings of Israel we find they were poor leaders in either lesser or greater ways. All of them but one: His name is Jesus.

My friends, the good news is that if you have asked Jesus to be your savior, today, you are in Jesus' army, not Saul's army. Jesus does not issue silly oaths to build his ego and make us suffer. All of Jesus' words to us are life, truth, and good for us because he loves us. Jesus does not berate us if we sin. He loves us. He died for us. He offers to forgive us. He suffered for our sin so we don't have to suffer for what we have done. When we fail Jesus, he is patient with us. Thank God that today we are in Jesus' army and not Saul's army. Jesus is the one king worth following. He is the one king who will always lead us with truth and what is right.

This week, serve our good king with all of our hearts knowing that everything he says to us and has done for us is because he loves us and he is the king worth following, unlike Saul and the other human leaders around us who fail and hurt us every day.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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