



Catalog No. 1639

1 Samuel 14:15-23

Twenty-second Message

Brian Morgan

June 20th, 2010

FAITH'S GREAT REVERSALS

SERIES: THE CROSSING FATES

As this is Father's Day, I'm going to take the liberty of addressing my message to the men. Last year I attended a lecture on the topic of raising boys, given by Jerrold Shapiro, Professor of Counseling Psychology at Santa Clara University. Since I am a father of all daughters, I thought it would be profitable to learn what I had missed. Shapiro opened by saying that in the last twenty years or so, since Title IX has given girls equal opportunities in athletic programs, we have done a fairly good job raising our daughters. Young women today are more independent, confident and self-assured than in past generations. By contrast, however, Shapiro observed, we have not done as good a job with our boys. Whether it's our educational system that is geared more toward the way a girl's brain functions, the absence of fathers, the lack of good role models, or because boys spend too much time playing video games, it doesn't take a social scientist to conclude that a large percentage of our male youth is emotionally detached, lonely and lost. In an article on the PBS Parents Website, "More Strategies from Raising Cain," the author writes:

Boys imitate what they see. If what they see is emotional distance, guardedness, and coldness between men, they grow up to emulate that behavior...The loneliness of men has to be addressed in the lives of boys. Boys need to be encouraged to initiate friendships, maintain them, and experience the conflicts that arise in male friendships from different levels of athletic skill, from teasing, and from competition for the attention of girls. Too often boys lack both the resources and the will to resolve those conflicts and preserve friendships.¹

So I want to address the crying need of this generation for "fathers of the faith." I'm not downplaying the role of natural fathers, but just as significant is the role that spiritual fathers play in our lives. Spiritual fathers are unique individuals who believe in us, inspire us and invest in us for no reason other than the grace and glory of God. These unsung heroes often appear unexpectedly, entering our lives at critical junctures when things seem difficult or bewildering. As seasoned guides they gently lead us into new worlds of faith, hope and love. Their goal for us is not getting accepted to the right college, landing the perfect job, finding a suitable mate, having children or rising to the top of the corporate world. No, their task is more focused and profound. It is for us to know Christ and to demonstrate that love by making disciples of the next generation. I would not be here today if it were not for several "spiritual fathers" who invested so much in my life. The three most influential were Dave Roper, Ray Stedman and Bruce Waltke. I will forever be in their debt.

When we look for Biblical role models for our faith, Abraham consistently gets top billing. I have nothing against Abraham but, because we are at the "Samuel Film Festival," I would like to nominate Jonathan to the academy for the "Most Inspirational Model of Faith in a Male Supporting Role."

As a character, apart from his naïve optimism about his father, Jonathan appears practically flawless. Where did such faith come from? How did he acquire such character in an abusive home that was void of faith? The narrator does not tell us. But in the end, we find Jonathan as the forerunner of John the Baptist, whose sole purpose was to introduce the Messiah to his people and then exit the stage of life. John's motto, "He

must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), would equally describe Jonathan's attitude toward David. The greatest praise a father can receive from his children is that he lived his life sacrificially for others. Jonathan made the ultimate sacrifice. Yet for him the price could not be compared to the privilege of serving his king.

One of the most inspiring things about Jonathan's faith is that he did not allow his environment or upbringing to limit his potential. As Saul's son, he was Israel's crown prince, and therefore next in line to the throne. But through no fault of his own, the opportunity was irrevocably taken away because of his father's disobedience. Just as bad leadership can cripple a nation, a passive father can wreak havoc in a home. In Jonathan's situation most of us would have become resentful if not bitter toward our fathers. But we never hear a word of complaint from Jonathan's lips, for his faith is not constrained by the choices his father makes. If his father refuses to fulfill his responsibility to the nation, Jonathan simply steps out by faith and does what the king was supposed to do.

As we have seen in previous weeks, Jonathan first attacked the Philistine outpost that had invaded his father's hometown by assassinating the governor. In response to Jonathan's actions, the Philistines mobilized a massive retaliatory strike and all Israel quaked in fear. When Saul and his elite troops fled the city and took refuge in the Benjamite "bomb shelter" (the pomegranate cave at Migron, cf. Judg 20:45-47) to brace themselves for the coming onslaught, Jonathan would have none of it. While his father is hiding in seclusion, Jonathan's courageously advances into the enemy camp to see what God is up to. Jonathan started this fight, and he will finish it. In the invitation to his armor bearer, Jonathan gives voice to the bedrock of his faith:

"Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. Perhaps the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few." (1 Sam 14:6 ESV)

Four qualities of Jonathan's faith set the bar for future generations to emulate.

1. It is CONFIDENT in the sovereign power of God, believing that "nothing can hinder the LORD from saving."
2. It is HUMBLE, granting God freedom to act in his timing and in his way.
3. It operates out of the FREEDOM OF THE HEART and is not bound by ritual.
4. It INSPIRES OTHERS to cross forbidden boundaries.

This is the kind of freedom that authentic that faith gives us. Like a blazing comet streaking across the night sky, Jonathan's faith gives hope to those who grew up lacking good role models. The darker the night, the brighter the light of his faith becomes.

Today as we continue our "mini-series," we will see how Jonathan's daring assault that decimated the Philistine garrison ignited God's promise to fight for Israel (Deut 1:3), saving the nation from annihilation. Yet all is not well in the royal family, for the faithless king is driven to jealousy and paranoia over his son's deed. The contrast between father and son could not be greater. As we are drawn into the center of the action,

our faith will come under the scrutiny of these two opposing mirrors. By the day's end you will see your image in one of these mirrors, for we are either driven by fear like Saul, or developing a fearless faith like Jonathan. There is no third alternative.

I. The Party's On, But Saul Is Gone! (1 Sam 14:15-19)

A. Drawn In by the Divine Panic (14:15-16)

And there was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic. And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude was dispersing [or "melting"] here and there. (14:15-16)

The shocking news that Jonathan had decimated the Philistine outpost shot through the Philistine troops at breakneck speed and was intensified by seismic shock waves that caused the soldiers to quake with the ground itself, bringing a divine dimension of holy terror into the conflict. In the Torah, God had promised Israel that if they would step out by faith to fight his enemies, he would fight for them: "The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes" (Deut 1:30). To assure his people that victory was certain, God promised to throw the enemy into panic and confusion before the battle: "But the LORD your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed" (Deut 7:22-24).

Jonathan had faith to believe that God had the vast resources of the entire creation at his disposal to fight his enemies. This is what earned God the title "LORD of hosts" (or "LORD of armies") in the books of Samuel.² "Hosts" included the vast starry hosts of heaven, as God instructed Job:

**"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?" (Job 38:22-23)**

"Hosts" also included all the angelic armies, and even the armies of the nations. LORD of hosts, that is his name! This is the name that David will invoke later in his war of words against Goliath: "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (17:45). This is what the people of faith count on when they step out in obedience to God's commands. So it should come as no surprise that God would use an earthquake to magnify the shock of Jonathan's massacre. Seized by terror, the Philistines flee in every direction: "So total was the Philistine panic and so noisy their flight (*hamon*, "army," in v.16 is translated "tumult" in v.19) that Saul's watchmen on the walls at Gibeah could see—and perhaps hear—many of the enemy soldiers as they scattered in all directions."³

Imagine the surprise and shock of Saul's watchmen as they witness the pride of the Philistine war machine melting like butter on a hot stove. News of the miraculous event is sent to Saul, who is hiding in the pomegranate cave on the outskirts of the city.

B. Saul's Faith Hesitates (14:16-17)

Then Saul said to the people who were with him, "Count and see who has gone from us." And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. (14:16-17)

Receiving news of the amazing turn of events, Saul does not act quickly or decisively to exploit the military advantage. Instead of seizing the day with an immediate pursuit, he orders a census of his troops to determine the perpetrator of the deed. To everyone's surprise ("behold"), it is none other than the king's son who has instigated this dramatic turn of events. With Samuel's termination notice and replacement still fresh

in his memory—"the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart"—Saul, filled with distrust, jealousy and paranoia, begins to self-destruct. Fearing the competition and insubordination of his son, the king's decision to muster his troops is motivated more by personal jealousy than the glory of God and Israel.

C. Phony Piety and Aborted Ritual (14:18-19)

So Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark [or "ephod"] of God here." For the ark [or "ephod"] of God went at that time with the people of Israel. Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand." (14:18-19)

After the shocking discovery that Jonathan and his armor-bearer had left the camp, Saul orders Ahijah to consult the divine will before engaging in the battle. (The Greek translation has "bring the *ephod*" instead of the ark, which may reflect a better Hebrew text⁴). Unlike Jonathan, Saul "does not have the certainty which a man of faith has in his heart."⁵ Having just been censured by the prophet, how can an army remain loyal to its king without some sign of divine authorization?

With heads bowed in a circle of piety around the king, the ritual begins. But as the riotous noise from the Philistine camp increases in volume, Saul cannot stay focused and abruptly shuts the whole process down. Fearful that the war might end without him, he hastily rallies his troops into battle. As his phony piety gives way to reality, his hypocrisy is fully exposed. Waltke comments, "The feckless king starts too late and then stops seeking God's will through the ephod, for God's will is so obvious in the Philistine panic and self-destruction."⁶

What draws you into the Lord's battles? What motivation do you model? Are you like reluctant Saul, arriving late on the scene because you are driven by guilt and duty rather than faith? Or are you motivated out of jealousy that someone else might be getting the praise you think you deserve? Are you free to do according to the heart, or are you bound by ritual?

II. The Swelling Tide of Victory (1 Sam 14:20-23)

Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle. So the LORD saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven. (14:20-23)

A. Samuel's Gains, Saul's Losses, and Jonathan's Gains

By the time Saul's troops finally rally to enter the fray, they discover that Jonathan's courageous act of faith sets in motion a series of reversals, restoring all the losses suffered under Saul's faithless administration. Under Samuel's godly leadership, Israel enjoys incredible success against the Philistines, driving them back to their coastal borders. During the rest of the prophet's reign, they never encroached upon Israel's soil again.

But under Saul's leadership, those precious gains quickly eroded. The Philistines planted military outposts deep within Israel's borders, creating a stranglehold on the nation's economy with a monopoly on the process of smelting iron. Saul tried to confront the problem in his own strength but he only made it worse. Mustering his troops to face the Philistine threat, he summoned them in derogatory, demeaning tones: "Let the *Hebrews* hear." Recall that the term comes from the verbal root meaning "to cross over," and was originally used by foreigners who considered Israel to be second-class citizens (i.e. "from the other side" of

the tracks). Unfortunately, berating his troops with a derogatory name did little to raise the bar of courage. Instead of reacting with strengthened hearts and fortified wills, the Israelites embraced the label that the king had given them. They became *Hebrews* indeed, “crossing over” the sacred boundary of the land, abandoning their people, their land and their God. Whenever you address peoples’ fear with demeaning labels, you are not pointing them to any resources outside of themselves from which they can draw strength. That kind of derision merely exposes your own insecurities and fears. No wonder many of the Hebrews “crossed over” and joined the Philistine camp.

But then there’s Jonathan, our man of faith. Seeking to motivate his armor-bearer, he uses the same term, but the result is exactly the opposite:

“Come, let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. Perhaps the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.” (14:6)

“Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.” (14:12)

Instead of using the root *avar* as a noun, labeling his people with it, Jonathan uses it as a verb in the equation of faith. He encourages his armor-bearer to look outside of himself and embrace his identity in the Lord (“*Lord has given*” = Jonathan’s name), trusting him for the victory. With the Lord in the equation, they “cross over” in the opposite direction and easily subdue their enemies. The faith of the one affects the many, setting off a divine panic that wreaks havoc among the enemy and simultaneously revives Israel’s dead faith.

B. Late In the Game: Spectators not Players

By the time Saul’s troops finally rally to enter into fray, the panic has already worked its divine magic to perfection. With a painful touch of irony, the narrator portrays Saul’s elite troops more as spectators (“*behold*”) of the divine reversals than as actual participants. Arriving at the Philistine camp, the scene is mass confusion, with the Philistines wielding their swords against their own. “Some were Hebrews who had previously gone to the Philistine camp (v. 21), perhaps either to have their agricultural tools sharpened (cf. 13:20) or, disgruntled with Israelite rule, to hire themselves out as mercenaries.”⁷

As they witnessed the Lord fighting for Israel, their loyalty is reignited and they turn their swords on the Philistines. Then, as the terrified Philistines try to escape westward to their hometowns near the coast, Saul’s forces swell with fresh recruits from those who had previously been traumatized by fear and had fled to the hill country of Ephraim, north of Michmash. These former cowards, who had gone AWOL, suddenly appear out of their caves and holes to bring fresh legs to the hot pursuit.

C. A Day for the History Books

So spectacular were the reversals, it was day to be remembered in the annals of Israel’s history. Fokkelman highlights each reversal with precision in his comparison of the beginning (13:1-7) with its end (14:15-23).⁸

- A The Philistines to the east of Beth-aven 13:5
- B Israel in sore straits 6a
- C Israel hides in caves and holes, etc. 6b
- D Hebrews flee across the Jordan 7a
- E Saul’s army trembles 7b
 - climax of the *descending line*: Saul’s little faith, clash with Samuel
 - motor of the *ascending line*: Jonathan, courageous through faith, liquidates the post
- E’ Philistines tremble 14:15-20

- D’ Other Hebrews run over to Saul 21
- C’ Israel, having hidden, re-appears and takes part in battle 22
- B’ Yahweh liberates Israel 23a
- A’ Battle passes Beth-aven (westwards!) 23b

When the day began, the Philistines had the strategic advantage, “encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven” (13:5). But by day’s end, Israel repossessed Michmash with Philistine swords and the battle “passed beyond” (*avar*, “crossed over”) Beth-aven (westward). In between, every aspect of Israel’s distress had its equivalent counterpoint in triumph. Though Jonathan’s faith initiated the reversals, the narrator seals the day, giving all the glory to God: “So the LORD saved Israel that day” (v. 23). This statement is an exact quotation of Exodus 14:30, when the Lord accomplished the greatest reversal in Israel’s history, destroying the Egyptian army in the sea and bringing Israel safely through on dry ground. With that historic seal, the narrator is placing the glory of this day’s victory, initiated by Jonathan’s faith, alongside the Exodus in Israel’s “Hall of Fame” of salvation history.

The words of Winston Churchill come to mind from a speech he gave on August 21, 1940. Within a matter of weeks, the Nazis had overwhelmed Holland, invaded Belgium and crushed all of France, converting their vast military arsenals to their own use. Soon the entire western seaboard of Europe was in German hands, its airfields and seaports becoming potential springboards of invasion. Then came the great air battle, with all the dreaded German air power unleashed on England. Applauding the bravery and determination of the airmen, Churchill spoke these historic words:

The gratitude of every home in our island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world...goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unweakened by their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of world war by their prowess and their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.⁹

Yes, so often in the history of mankind “so many owe so much to so few.” And in the history of salvation, so many owe so much to just One.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:18-19)

So men, today I am calling upon you to answer the Lord’s calling. Will you step out in faith like Jonathan, and take some young “armor-bearer” under your wing and be a “father” to him? There is no telling what kind of an impact you can have, not just on him, but on an entire generation of young men who have grown up without good role models as fathers.

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 2:1-2 NASB)

Several years ago, a young man arrived at the doorstep, shut down, fearful, walled in behind an edifice of his own construction. As a boy without a father, he experienced many unspeakable horrors, losses and injuries. As a young adult, he witnessed betrayal and confusion in more than one church situation. As he contemplated the road of no return, along came two fathers. They wooed him, beckoned him to come out to play, and invited him into their lives, their families, their adventures, successes and failures. They were not ashamed to call him “son.” And in their voice, a divine reversal took place. He embraced his “sonship,” and has been giving that gift away to every young person he meets. Today

he is one of the most respected and sought after youth workers in our church. In appreciation to the Lord for the gift of his “fathers,” he composed the following poem.

This Word “Family”

Family,
A simple word,
A simple concept,
A Mother and Father,
Sons and Daughters,
Brothers and Sisters;

This word Family,
What a precious word.

But reality invokes
A flood of emotions.
Few that are pleasant
Few that are Joyful.

Each memory chips away at my soul
Until there is almost nothing left.

The longings of my heart
Were to be loved as a son,
To be loved as a brother.

No one looked into my eyes
To penetrate my soul
To let me know I was loved.

The walls were being built,
Each day getting bigger, thicker, stronger.

I wandered aimlessly, lost
Searching for something,
Until what I was searching for
Is what I didn't want to find.

The loneliness and hurt
Became unbearable.
The walls were built—
“Leave me alone.”

Until one day,
Like a whirlwind—
Again things didn't make sense,
But something was different.

The walls started to crumble,
They started to weaken.

What I didn't want to find
I think just found me.
Gazing eyes pierced my soul.
They told me they Loved me,
Called me son.

The healing started
As the tears collided.

God spoke deep into my soul,
“Come home my son,
Enter into the New Covenant.
This is your family now.”

This word family,
What a precious
And wonderful word.

1. <http://www.pbs.org/parents/raisingboys/emotion1.html>

2. “LORD of hosts” is found ten times in 1 and 2 Samuel (1 Sam 1:3, 11; 4:4; 15:2; 17:45; 2 Sam 6:2, 18; 7:8, 26, 27) and first voiced by Hannah, who needs all the resources of heaven for a “new creation” to break through the impasse of her infertility (1:11).

3. Ronald F. Youngblood, “1 & 2 Samuel,” *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 3:662.

4. “In 1 Sam 7:1 the ark was located at Kiriath-Jearim, where it remained until David brought it to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6), but the ephod was present in Saul's camp at Gibeah (see v. 3). Nowhere else in the Old Testament is the ark used to determine God's will, but the ephod (with the Urim and Thummim) was given for this purpose (see 23:9; 30:7). The command to the priest to withdraw his hand (v. 19) is more appropriate with the ephod than with the ark.” J. Robert Vannoy, “1 & 2 Samuel,” *NIV Study Bible* (gen. ed. Kenneth Barker; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

5. J. P. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 59.

6. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology, an Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 638-639.

7. Youngblood, “1 & 2 Samuel,” 663.

8. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 61.

9. <http://century.guardian.co.uk/1940-1949/Story/0,,128255,00.html>.

© 2010 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino