

1 Samuel 13:16-14:23 | “Mission Impossible?”
Preached on January 16, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 13, verse 16.

I'll start explaining in the middle of chapter 13, but we will end up mostly in the first half of chapter 14 this morning. *[pauseeee]*

Some of you may remember an old TV show that was called, “Mission: Impossible”.

In it, typically in the beginning, there was a recording played, which would say, “Your mission, should you decide to accept it is...”

...And then the voice would give details as to an impossible-sounding mission that that person was supposed to do. *[pause]*

Do you ever feel like what you're experiencing is an everyday recording, detailing an impossible mission in front of you?

Maybe it's at work or at home, where you feel like there are an impossible amount of tasks to get done in a short amount of time.

And you're thinking, “There is no way I'm going to get this all done in time.” *[pause]*

Maybe it's in relating to someone - you feel like it's going to be impossible to make it through the day, relating to a very hard to deal with person.

And you're reflecting upon this, thinking, “I can not make it through another day with that person!” *[pause]*

Or maybe for you, the impossible situation is a sin struggle that you have been battling with that seems so impossible to conquer.

And you're feeling like, “I just can't do it. I can't beat it. The temptation and struggle is just too strong.” *[pauseeee]*

We have all faced impossible-seeming circumstances that make us feel so overwhelmed, powerless, and hopeless.

I feel like I experience that “overwhelmed-from-the-impossible” feeling everyday, maybe you do, too. *[pauseeeee]*

So what helps us in those times?

When you are up against even the most impossible-seeming situations, what can give you hope, confidence, and stability? *[pause]*

We will find the answer today in this portion of 1 Samuel.

For Israel faces that same feeling of helplessness against impossible-looking odds, and we will see the key to what turns their story around.

Let's discover what that is, shall we? *[pause]*

In the second half of chapter 13, we find Israel in an impossible-looking situation.

Recalling the story from last Sunday, we remember what had gotten Israel into this position.

Jonathan attacked a Philistine garrison, which made the Philistines angry enough to muster together a *huge* army in response.

We're talking about "thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude." *[pause]*

Saul was told by Samuel to wait for him for 7 days, but because of the pressure he felt, Saul took matters into his own hands and went ahead with the sacrifice before Samuel arrived.

This was foolish and sinful, that's what Samuel tells us, and Samuel gets up and leaves. *[pause]*

So Saul's army is left with no guidance from the Lord about this upcoming battle, and he's left with a mere 600 men against the huge Philistine army.

Not only that, but the Philistines have sent out raiders in many different directions, cutting off any chance of reinforcements, and making the threat of attack even more menacing. *[pause]*

Israel's situation after Samuel leaves is bad, and the writer throws more bad news onto the pile, as he essentially says, "Oh, and by the way, at this time there's no blacksmith in Israel." *[pause]*

The Philistines have a monopoly on blacksmithing, so that Israel can't make its own iron weapons.

The only way that Israel could even get blacksmithing done is they had to go to the Philistines, pay a high price, and get their farming tools made.

And so the only ones with a sword or spear were Saul and Jonathan in the whole Israelite army.

Yikes! That's a rough spot to be in! *[pause]*

The Israelites were totally outmatched in number and weaponry, and the Philistines were on the prowl with raiders sent out in different directions.

This was an impossible-looking situation.

On paper, Israel had no chance, and add onto that the fact that they didn't have any direction from God because of Saul's foolish choice...

Talk about a dire situation!

What chance did they have? What's going to happen next?

According to human thinking and logic, we'd expect the next part of the story to be that the Philistines utterly destroy Israel in battle - THE END - but that's not what happens.

What happens next is something amazing.

LET'S READ STARTING IN CHAPTER 14. (14:1-15) [pause]

What an amazing story, right?!

Israel was outmatched in every possible way, yet Jonathan steps up and does something spectacular for the army. [pause]

In this section, we find a truly God-confident man, and a victory-bringing God.

Faith-filled Jonathan decides to do something, since his dad is just kind of sitting back doing nothing in the pomegranate cave. [pause]

We find that there's these rocky crags nearby a Philistine garrison, and Jonathan sees the advantage of using those.

So he gets his armor-bearer to go with him over to this Philistine force.

He tells his armor-bearer that they will show themselves to this garrison and if they call them up, then it's a sign that God has given the enemy into their hands. [pause]

This is what happens, Jonathan and his armor-bearer go up to them, and kill 20 men within a small section.

This leads to panic among the Philistines as even the raiders are trembling, and God makes an earthquake happen, which terrifies them even more. [pauseeee]

What a reversal of events, isn't this?

It was Israel who was trembling before, but now it's the big, Philistine army trembling.

All because of a small, little victory by two people who had faith in a big God. [pause]

That's the main thing in this section: Jonathan's fear-defying faith in the Lord.

I'll talk about that more a little later. [pauseeee]

So we just learned about Jonathan's brave leadership, and now we will learn about Saul's indecisive leadership...

LET'S FINISH READING STARTING IN VERSE 16. (14:16-23) [pause]

God just used Jonathan to do an amazing thing, causing the whole Philistine army to tremble and panic.

The multitude is dispersing, and this is the prime time for Saul to rise up and finish off the Philistines, but what do we find?

Saul hears about what's going on, and instead of taking advantage of their panic, he decides to count his men to see who's missing.

It's like, "Come on, Saul, why does it matter who did what? Look at what's happening!"
[pauseeee]

So he finds out that Jonathan and his armor-bearer are missing, and then Saul asks for the Ark to be brought to him. *[pause]*

Now there's debate as to whether Saul should have just seen God's hand at work in the panicked Philistines and attacked, or if he was right in waiting and seeking the priest's guidance...

...But either way, he doesn't fully commit to either of them.

For as he's seeking God's guidance from the priest, he tells him to stop before getting an answer.
[pause]

I believe this is showing us the indecisive, poor leadership of Saul.

He doesn't see the signs around him, nor does he fully wait for God's guidance.

At a critical time to take leadership and guide God's people to victory, Saul is hesitating and waffling, counting his men and then not even waiting to hear God's answer through the priest.

This poor leadership will continue on when we learn more next week. *[pauseeee]*

But kind of backing up slightly, I want you to notice another important detail that's given here.

Look back at verse 3 of chapter 14.

We are told who's with Saul, and look who is with him.

It's "Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli." *[pause]*

If you have been tracking with us in 1 Samuel, you'll pick up on this.

Here's a priest with Saul, who is in Eli's family line.

What happened to Eli's family line? They were judged by God and rejected for Eli and his sons' sin.

And not only that, but this is the nephew of Ichabod, whose name means, “no glory.”¹

That’s not a good sign, is it?

Here is Saul, the rejected king, and a priest from the rejected priestly family line - that’s not a good combination. *[pauseee]*

So getting back to the story, Saul finally goes to battle, and there’s great confusion among the Philistines, and they start to fight each other.

Even some Hebrews who had previously joined the Philistines, now join the Israelite ranks and fight against them.

That’s not all, for those who were hiding got the courage to join in and fight, too. *[pauseeee]*

This was a major reversal of the situation, and it all comes down to this, for the writer tells us what really happened in verse 23...

“So the Lord saved Israel that day.”

That’s the true difference maker in the total reversal of Israel’s situation: the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

So now that we know the details of what happened, let’s discern what God is teaching us through this story. First...

I. God doesn’t need tons of resources to do what seems impossible.

Compared to the Philistines, Israel’s resources were tiny.

The Philistines had the numbers, they had the better equipment and weapons, and they even were out and about being the aggressor with raiders roaming around.

It looked like an impossible situation for Israel to get out of.

What chance did they have against such an intimidating, enormous force?

Yet God used two men, Jonathan and his armor-bearer, to throw the whole Philistine army into a panic, and all Saul and the Israelite army had to do was to finish them off.

That’s all God used! *[pause]*

He didn’t need chariots, He didn’t need horsemen, troops like the sand of the sea, raiders, mass loads of swords and spears, or some brilliant military strategy - He did it with two men.

That’s God, not needing much of anything to do anything He wants. *[pauseeee]*

¹ See 1 Samuel 2:30-36; 3:11-14 for the judgment upon Eli’s family line & 1 Samuel 4:19-22 for information about the birth of Ichabod.

Verse 23 makes it clear that this victory was God's doing.

And we are reminded that the God who created out of nothing doesn't need tons of resources to do what seems impossible.

God vs. anything is always a mismatch. *[pauseeee]*

I'm not sure if you noticed this, but in each of my points this morning, I put a critical word.

I put the word 'seems' in the phrase, "what seems impossible." *[pause]*

To Israel, their situation *seemed* impossible, but God makes the impossible possible!

There is no situation where God has to think, "Hmm...I don't know if I can do this one."

No, all things are possible for Him. *[pauseeee]*

When two forces go up against each other, there's usually one that is an underdog.

Well what's interesting in the Bible is that Israel is never *truly* an underdog.

They may look like it at first according to our human perception, but they are never truly an underdog with God at the helm.

As Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"² *[pauseeee]*

And Jonathan said something that summarizes this point well, when he said, "nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few." *[pause]*

Jonathan knew this truth!

He knew that God didn't need many, for he can save by many *or* by few. *[pauseeee]*

We face many barriers and obstacles that hinder our work, don't we?

Everyday you are faced with this reality.

You have a plan for the day, and what happens? Barriers and obstacles hinder your plan from coming to be and you become frustrated.

Lots of things interfere or delay our work, I'm sure you are familiar with that, especially if you have a job.

But for God, there is no barrier or obstacle that hinders or restrains God from working when He wants to!

² Romans 8:31.

He never becomes frustrated over a hindrance, but He works without limitation, im-ped-i-ment, or setback.

He can save by many or by few, and this story is a clear demonstration that He can save by few. *[pauseeee]*

Christian, we have a God who doesn't need anything to do whatever He wants to do.

And so that means that any impossible situation that you are facing is just a "seemingly" impossible situation, if God determines to work.

It may look impossible, but it's not, if God chooses to work.

No matter how little the resources, no matter how bleak it looks, no matter how intimidating the enemy - when God acts, he doesn't need tons of resources to reverse the situation. *[pause]*

If God determines to work, there is no hindrance to God's power over cancer.

If God determines to work, there is no obstacle for him in saving that person who seems like they would never turn to Christ.

If God determines to work, He can use a small, rural church like ours to do great things for His name! *[pause]*

The Lord who fed 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish, can take very little and do very much.³

Nothing, absolutely nothing, can hinder God's work, and He doesn't need tons of resources to do what seems impossible. *[pauseeee]*

That's one thing that we find in this story, but we also find that...

II. God chooses to use people, who step out in faith, to do what seems impossible.

Although we are told in verse 23 that the Lord saved Israel, we also see that God used Jonathan to do that.

This is the consistent pattern in Scripture...

God is the ultimate "Doer", for without Him, this would have never happened, yet He also chooses to use people, so that they have a part to play in His work.

It is *His* work and doing, yet He often determines to use people in that great work. *[pause]*

The truth is: He didn't need Jonathan and his armor bearer.

³ See Mark 6:30-44 for this story.

He could have easily caused the Philistines to panic and be confused with no human actors, yet He desired to use them and their faith in Him to work His marvelous deeds. *[pause]*

Isn't that amazing?!

God desires to use us, even though He doesn't need us!

He wants us to play a part in His great plan for the world, giving us amazing purpose and privilege!

He enjoys giving His people a role to play in His grand work in the world, for we are His workmanship, created for good works.⁴ *[pauseeee]*

God uses people with faith in Him, and that's what Jonathan does here. *[pauseeeee]*

Just look at Jonathan's faith...

Saul and the rest of the troops may have been trembling in their boots, but Jonathan was confident in his God.

Saul made a foolish decision based on his lack of faith, while Jonathan made a brave decision based on the presence of his faith.

Saul looked to his circumstances and not to His God, while Jonathan looked to his God, and not to his circumstances.

While the Philistine army was an intimidating foe to Saul - to Jonathan with his faith in His God, they were beatable.

This is because Jonathan knew that victory depends not on the size of the army, but on the size of His God. *[pauseeee]*

Throughout all that Jonathan said, you don't see a confidence in himself, but a confidence in the Lord.

In verse 6, he says, "It may be that *the Lord* will work for us, for nothing can hinder *the Lord* from saving by many or by few." *[pause]*

There was His confidence - in the Lord's working and saving.

He knew that God could do anything, and he could save Israel through this small battle.

But did you notice, he also doesn't act like he can force God to work, but he says, "*It may be that the Lord will work for us.*"

Another way to translate it would be, "perhaps." *[pause]*

⁴ See Ephesians 2:10 (paraphrased).

What a great posture of faith to have!

Jonathan was confident in what God could do, but He also left the choice of whether God would work up to Him.

I love this quote by commentator Dale Ralph Davis, which says, “Faith recognizes its degree of ignorance and knows it has not read a transcript of the divine decrees for most situations.”⁵

[pauseeee]

It’s this mentality of saying, “Lord, I know you can do all things, and I desire for you to work now, but it’s up to you to work or not.”

So, “It may be that the Lord will work,” is a mindset that recognizes that God is in charge, and so whether He will work or not is up to His good and wise choice, and it’s content either way.

[pause]

May we each have that attitude more in our lives!

So often we act like we are the Lord’s boss, trying to force Him to work, and we get angry when He doesn’t do what we want.

But we are subordinate to the Lord, so every request must ultimately say, “Your will be done.”⁶

[pauseeeeeee]

What a powerful truth that verse 6 is!

“It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.”

That’s a verse of humble and confident faith - that’s a verse to plaster everywhere!

Who knows what God can do?

He can do the impossible, so we need to step out in humble, yet confident faith in Him!

[pauseeee]

More depth of Jonathan’s faith comes out as you continue looking at what he says...

In verse 10, he bases what they do and whether they will be victorious on a sign from the Lord.

[pause]

He knew that this secret mission’s success was not based on his incredible strategy, but based on God’s will.

In fact, if you think about it, his plan defied military logic.

⁵ Davis, D. R. (2000). 1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart (p. 144). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.

⁶ A reference to Matthew 6:10 in the “Lord’s Prayer”.

Instead of making a sneak attack, he would let the enemy see them and talk to them first.

And then instead of having the enemy come down to them and possibly get tired, he and his armor-bearer would have to climb up to them and lose some strength.

But this is because he knew God could give the victory no matter what, and wanted to make sure he received God's sign. *[pause]*

So Jonathan was grounding his mission on the Lord's will and power.

This is why in verse 12, Jonathan says, "Come up after me, for the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel." *[pause]*

He doesn't say, "Let's do this, we are amazing and brave!"

No, he points out that it's going to be *the Lord* who gives them into the hand of Israel.

Everything was focused upward in a solid confidence and faith in His God. *[pauseeeee]*

The key in Jonathan's daring act was his trust in God, and his desire to be used by God.

Jonathan didn't just sit back and do nothing like Saul.

Jonathan put himself at God's feet, willing to be used by Him as an instrument in His hands.

He stepped out in faith, and it affected the nation as a whole.

His faith and leadership even led his armor-bearer to be willing to do anything and go anywhere with him.

That's the impact of a God-confident person! *[pauseeee]*

What could the Lord do through your faith in Him?

'It may be' that He will do great things through you!

But will you be willing to step out in faith and be used by Him? *[pauseeeee]*

Pastor Steven J. Cole gives this illustration, he says...

"Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Seminary is an extraordinary man who has had a worldwide impact for Christ.

Howie was from a broken home, raised by his grandmother, and he often wandered from tavern to tavern, looking for his alcoholic grandfather. *[pause]*

A man named Walt, who taught a Sunday School class, came upon young Howie and some other boys and invited them to his Sunday School class.

Howie didn't know what Sunday School was, but since it sounded like school, he wasn't in favor of it.

But Walt took an interest in those boys, challenged them to a few games of marbles, beat them at it, and then taught them how to play better.

Eventually, there were 13 boys off the streets of Philadelphia who attended Walt's Sunday School class.

Even though Walt never went beyond high school, 11 of those 13 boys went on to vocational Christian service, becoming pastors, missionaries, and seminary professors.

God was accomplishing His purpose by using an ordinary man who obeyed Him.”⁷ [pauseeee]

Christian, stand in amazement - God wants to use *you* in His great, big purposes in the world, but will you put yourself out there at his disposal?

Will you step out in faith and do something hard and uncomfortable?

Jonathan was willing to step out in faith and do something hard, but he was willing to do it because He knew His God could do anything. [pauseeee]

Maybe for you it's stepping out in faith and giving generously to God and others, even until it hurts, but with a trust that God will take care of you.

Maybe it's stepping out in faith to serve in church in a new area, even though it feels out of your comfort zone, but trusting that God will give you what you need.

Maybe it's stepping up and talking to that co-worker about Christ, not letting fear hold you back, but believing that no matter what, God is with you. [pauseeee]

So often we let fear and discomfort hold us back, and we end up like Saul, sitting back, doing nothing under the pomegranate tree.

But instead, imagine if we all lived with Jonathan's fearless faith, boldly stepping out with a rock-solid trust in our Lord's will and power. [pause]

God chooses to use people, who step out in faith, to do what seems impossible - and ultimately...

III. God gets the glory when He does what seems impossible.

“Who gets the credit?” is a common thing that we think about.

We want to know who will get the public acknowledgement and praise for something done.

⁷ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-51-how-god-uses-ordinary-people-genesis-261-35>.

Or when we notice something well made or done well, we ask others, “Who made that?” or “Who did that?” *[pause]*

Well the Bible makes it very clear who gets the ultimate credit and glory: the Lord.

In this story, Jonathan and his armor bearer may have done things, Saul may have done things, his army may have done some things, but verse 23 says, “The Lord saved Israel that day.” *[pause]*

God gets the glory here because it was all dependent on His working.

If God didn’t work, Jonathan would have been killed by those 20 men, and Israel would have been slaughtered.

So it wasn’t Jonathan’s intelligence, bravery, and skill that led to the salvation of Israel, for even Jonathan kept emphasizing that it must be the Lord working.

It was the Lord, who determined to use Jonathan. *[pauseeee]*

This is an all-important truth to remember: without God we can do nothing.⁸

And that means that anything that we do for the Lord is ultimately *His* work and *He* gets the glory. *[pause]*

Verse 23 should be a verse seared in our minds everyday - “the Lord saved Israel that day...”

So that whenever God uses us, we can remember to say, “The Lord saved that person, not me.”

“The Lord worked in me to show kindness to that person today.”

“The Lord gave me the gifts to serve others, and worked through me to grow others today.” *[pause]*

May we never lose sight of the fact that God deserves the glory, and He will get the glory whenever He does what seems impossible...

For God loves to overcome seemingly impossible situations, using weak vessels like us with very little resources, so that He receives the glory. *[pauseeeee]*

Do you give Him the glory for what He does through you?

We have no reason to boast, for we are “jars of clay”, who can only boast in the Lord.⁹

So let’s boast in Him! Let’s look to the one who can do anything! Let’s remember that...

God can do what seems impossible, so let’s trust Him with everything!

⁸ See John 15:4-5.

⁹ A combination of allusions to 2 Corinthians 4:7 & 1 Corinthians 1:31.

If you think about it, God is still in the business of doing the impossible.

God changing your life and causing you to be born again is living proof of that. *[pause]*

How can sinful, undeserving people be saved? As Jesus says, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”¹⁰

For when you were dead in your trespasses and sins, God made you alive together with Christ by His amazing grace.¹¹

I’d say that’s doing what seemed impossible - taking a dead person and making them alive!

And once He does that impossible-seeming reversal, He takes us, who have nothing in ourselves - and gifts and empowers us for His service...

...So that we are able to play a part in His grand plan for the world, showing that the surpassing power belongs to Him, and not to us.¹² *[pauseeee]*

What an amazing God that we have, who “saves by many or by few”, for He saved us by only One - Jesus Christ - who died for us and rose again.

Have you trusted in Him to be saved?

If you have, will you trust Him with everything? *[pauseeeeeee]*

What are you facing that seems impossible?

Trust Him with it!

I can’t promise that God will work in your situation, but I can promise that He *can* work.

‘Perhaps’ he will work in your situation, but leave it up to His will, and be content either way.

Put your faith wholly in Him, trusting Him with the outcome, be ready to be used by Him, and see what He can do! *[pauseeee]*

Is there someone in your life who seems like they will never turn to Christ?

Trust Him with it, step out in faith, and share the Gospel with them - ‘it may be’ that God will work and use your witness for His glory. *[pause]*

Are you facing a sin struggle that seems impossible to conquer in your life?

Trust Him with it! Keep falling at His feet, asking for deliverance!

¹⁰ Matthew 19:26.

¹¹ A reference to Ephesians 2:5.

¹² A paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 4:7.

Turn to Him for help, for nothing can hinder His powerful working!

He can do what seems impossible! *[pause]*

The God of 1 Samuel 14 is the same God of today, so will you trust Him with everything, no matter how impossible-looking the circumstance?

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”¹³

¹³ Psalm 20:7.