

1 Samuel 14:24-52 | “An Unsatisfying Ending”
Preached on January 30, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel, chapter 14, starting in verse 24. *[pause]*

Have you ever been unsatisfied with the ending of something?

Maybe it's the ending of a book...

The ending was not what you expected, for you expected a good ending, but it ended on kind of a downer. *[pause]*

Let's say that you are building a new house.

With the amount of money that you have, you have it all planned out and you have it pictured in your mind exactly what you want.

But you know what happens when it comes to construction...

...Unforeseen issues come up that cause you to no longer get exactly what you wanted, for your money had to be put into fixing some problems.

In the end, you are happy with a new house, but the many issues kind of put a damper on the whole thing. *[pause]*

Well Israel went through that sort of thing here in 1 Samuel 14.

Last Sunday, we found that Israel faced an impossible-seeming situation, for they were totally outmatched against the Philistines.

Yet God used Jonathan's daring faith to stir up the Philistines into a panic.

But this week we will discover that because of Saul's bad leadership, he puts a damper on the whole victory. *[pause]*

LET'S START READING TO SEE THIS PLAY OUT. [1 Samuel 14:24-46]

Since I'll explain some things later, I'll only give a *very* brief summary of what's going on here... *[pause]*

Saul makes a foolish oath that no one can eat before evening or they are cursed.

Jonathan doesn't hear the command, comes upon some honey, and eats it.

Someone tells him what he did, and then Jonathan calls out his father's foolishness. *[pause]*

After this, once the oath is no longer binding, the men are so weak and famished from Saul's oath that they eat some animals, eating the meat with the blood in it, and sin against God.

According to Old Testament law, this was a big no-no.¹ *[pausee]*

Saul has to be told that they are sinning, and he puts a stone in place so that the people could drain the blood of the animals before eating. *[pauseeee]*

After they eat, Saul determines to go fight the Philistines, but the priest reminds him that he should seek God's guidance.

Saul does this, yet God doesn't answer.

In order to find out why He didn't answer, lots are cast to find the guilty party, and it's Jonathan. *[pause]*

Saul goes to Jonathan and Jonathan tells him that he ate some honey, and he's willing to accept the consequences.

But amazingly, the Israelites step up and intervene.

They make an oath that counters what Saul intends to do, and they save Jonathan.

They don't see how Saul could do this to Jonathan and kill the very one who worked with God to save Israel that day.

And a result of all this craziness is that Saul stops pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines return home. *[pauseeee]*

The final section of chapter 14, which we didn't read, gives a summary of Saul's kingship.

In human terms, Saul did pretty good militarily, as he fought against enemies on every side.

His family is given, but then we are told that he fights the Philistines all his life, and gathers any valiant man he sees to himself. *[pauseeeee]*

What could have been an amazing victory turned into distress for Israel. *[pausee]*

Now I know that was a very quick summary, but more will be talked about later.

And there are lots of questions of what is right and wrong in this story, but the writer doesn't give us answers to them.

So this seems to be showing us that this story is giving us a clearer picture of Saul - he's not really a good, spiritual leader.

He's truly not "a man after God's own heart," and we see that in numerous ways, but most of all, we see it in his self-centeredness. *[pauseeee]*

¹ One passage, among many, is Leviticus 17:14.

As we consider this passage deeper, we see the...

I. The ugliness of self-centeredness

Have you ever tried to cook something, and as you're making it, you're picturing that it will look perfect like the picture?

But something happens, for you pull that cake out of the oven, and it's not pretty.

One side is falling down, the icing is all messy, and it's just ugly-looking. *[pause]*

Your spouse says, "Well it's certainly...a cake, isn't it?"

And you say, "Yeah, it's a cake, but it's not pretty."

That's what selfishness does to good situations - it turns something that could be beautiful into something ugly and messy. [pause]

As you look at this story, nothing in this story says, "Well that was pretty."

Instead, it leaves you with this feeling of thinking, "What a mess!" [pause]

Even though the Israelites were victorious by getting out of their situation with the Philistines, it could have been so much greater.

But because of Saul's selfish, foolish leadership - it puts a damper on the victory, for it led Israel into a bunch of unnecessary, messy situations that hindered their success.

And so from Saul's bad example here, we learn some things about selfishness...first...

A. Selfishness is folly.

We are selfish people by nature because of sin.

We want our way, and we want it now, but it ends up showing our foolishness. [pause]

The foolishness of Saul is prevalent all throughout this story.

Saul is shown as having poor judgment and discernment, as well as being impulsive and rash. [pause]

He foolishly puts a food ban on his soldiers, who desperately need energy to fight well. *[pause]*

Israel was hard-pressed because of the Philistines back in 13:6, now they are hard-pressed again, but it's because of their leader, Saul!

He has to have his priest remind him to seek God's guidance before going to attack the Philistines.

And his folly reaches a peak when he's about to kill Jonathan for inadvertently breaking his foolish oath, and Israel has to intervene and save Saul's son from himself.

Even Israel was like, "This is ridiculous. It's going too far. Jonathan worked with God to save us!"

The folly of Saul is even more highlighted when you remember that he wasn't willing to kill those who opposed him back in chapter 11,² but he's willing to kill Jonathan. *[pause]*

This is folly on full display, and it comes from his selfishness.

He is focused on himself, his rash oath that he made, and his reputation. *[pauseeee]*

So often we don't see our own selfishness as foolishness.

We become focused on ourselves and our wants, and we think that that will bring about the best results.

We are like a little child, selfishly wanting their own way in touching an electrical socket, only to find out the utter foolishness of doing so. *[pause]*

We selfishly want comfort above all, become lazy, and then realize how foolish it was, for we get in trouble at work.

We selfishly want our way, treat our spouse badly, and the folly of our selfishness is demonstrated in the shambles that is our marriage. *[pause]*

But imagine if we truly understood that selfishness was foolish, that it's like shooting yourself in the foot.

If you remembered this, then whenever you felt selfishness rise up, you could think, "No, this is only going to bring bad consequences. It may seem good, but it's not worth it."

And best and most important of all - you can look to Christ, who is the walking definition of selflessness.

You can see his wisdom, his beautiful way of life, and submit to God's way, whose way is always right, beautiful, and wise. *[pauseeee]*

In this story, we also see that...

B. Selfishness leads us to pursue our own agenda's, not God's.

When we are "me-centered" we cannot be "God-centered".

That's what you see with Saul.

² See 1 Samuel 11:12-13.

Did you notice what he says, when he gives the curse for anyone who eats?

He says, “Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and *I am avenged on my enemies.*”
[pause]

This oath and pursuit of the Philistines was all about himself, and his revenge.

It’s not about the glory of God or the welfare of Israel, but about personal vengeance for him.
[pause]

He failed to remember that the battle was the Lord’s and not his own.

He lacked a heart for God and God’s renown, rather, it was all about himself. [pause]

Yet can’t we do the same thing?

We become more about our own personal agendas, and put God’s agenda on the backburner.
[pause]

How often do we start planning the day, and think only about our agenda with no thought as to what God would want?

How often do we seek our own glory over God’s glory? [pause]

This can so easily happen in ministry.

We turn service for God into a platform for propping ourselves up.

Instead of redirecting the glory up to the Lord, we let the glory become directed to ourselves.

But of course this is selfishness at work within us. [pause]

Yet just look at Christ’s life!

His life was all about the Father’s will and agenda, for His life was, “Not my will, but yours, be done,” perfectly personified.³ [pauseeee]

Whose agenda do you pursue?

When you interact with your kids, when you go to work, when you think about the normal parts of your day - whose agenda is it all about? [pauseeeee]

We also see from Saul’s life that...

C. Selfishness does not consider others, but uses others.

³ Luke 22:42.

The very definition of selfish is “lacking consideration for others,” for it’s “concerned chiefly with one’s own personal profit or pleasure.”⁴

And that’s what you see in Saul. *[pause]*

Did you notice that he laid this oath to not eat on the soldiers, rather than on himself alone.

Why didn’t he just say an oath for himself to not eat?

He didn’t think through what this would do to his soldiers’ energy because he was so consumed with his personal vendetta.

He didn’t consider what his *people* needed, but only what *he* wanted. *[pause]*

In his actions, you don’t see love come out, but a person devoid of love.

His soldiers were seen as people to use for his personal revenge, rather than people to care for. *[pause]*

Even when Saul finds out that Jonathan broke his oath by eating, you don’t see any love for Jonathan at all.

In fact, it’s rather shocking at how *unemotional* Saul is over his own son.

He just says, “You shall surely die, Jonathan.”

No words of regret, sorrow, or anguish. *[pauseeee]*

He also doesn’t show any love, for he doesn’t take into account the fact that Jonathan didn’t hear the command not to eat.

He just unlovingly focuses on the letter of the law, instead of caring for his own son, who unintentionally ate a little bit of honey. *[pause]*

You would think that a father would be utterly heartbroken over this, but he’s not.

You would think that a father would try to find a way, *any way*, to get his son out of this situation, but he doesn’t.

He is devoid of love for others, but only concerned with self, as he only cares that his oath is upheld. *[pauseeee]*

This is way too common in our lives.

It’s so easy to use people for ourselves, and not to love and care for them as people.

It’s so easy to not show love to others because we are so consumed with what we want. *[pause]*

⁴ I got this definition from the dictionary used in Google docs. (I’m not sure the name of the actual dictionary.)

Are your employees or co-workers there to use for your own benefit, or do you seek to love them?

Is your spouse someone there to take care of *you* and provide for *your* wants, and that's it? Or do you see them as a person, who you are called to love and serve?

Do you treat your kids badly because you just want some peace and quiet?

Do you always expect your friends to be there for you, but you aren't there for them? *[pauseeee]*

Saul's lack of love (and ours) show us the ugliness of selfishness.

Here's a father, who is indifferent about the struggle of his men, and indifferent about his own son's life.

He'd rather see his son die than admit that he made a foolish, rash oath. *[pauseeee]*

What about you?

Has your selfishness led you to treat others badly because you want comfort, or peace, or acclaim? *[pause]*

Consider Christ, who didn't treat us badly to get something else, but who loved us and considered us so much that He went to the Cross to die for us.

He didn't just use us to get something more important, but he actually *loved* us.

Now that's humility and it's glorious to behold! *[pauseeeee]*

We also see in Saul that...

D. Selfishness focuses on everyone else's sin rather than its own.

Did you notice that about Saul in this passage?

He makes this foolish, rash oath that makes it extremely hard on the people, then because the people are so hungry from his oath, they eat animals with blood still in them.

But when he's confronted with the fact that they did this, he only puts the blame on them, and feels no remorse for his part in it. *[pauseeee]*

Now certainly the people did sin here, but Saul doesn't even consider that he played a part in this, for his oath was a stumbling block for them. *[pauseeeee]*

Another example of Saul's focus on everyone else's sin but his own is seen in how he handles Jonathan.

When he intentionally disobeyed God back when Samuel told him to wait 7 days, he doesn't seem too concerned about it.⁵

But when Jonathan breaks *his* oath unintentionally, oh man, he's ready to kill him on the spot.
[pause]

That's what sin and selfishness do in us.

They cause us to see the speck in another person's eye with the utmost clarity, all the while, we don't even notice the log sticking out of ours.⁶

This is because in our selfishness and pride, we don't want to admit our guilt, but would rather point fingers elsewhere. [pauseeee]

Think about this: Saul was more concerned with people doing something wrong against him than doing something wrong against God.

The people ate food with blood in it, directly disobeying God, and Saul found a way to make it right.

Yet Jonathan accidentally disobeys Saul's oath, and he doesn't look for any way to make it right, but only seeks to exact justice without delay. [pause]

Isn't that crazy!

Breaking his oath was a bigger deal to him than breaking God's clear command. [pause]

I find that we can do this.

We think, "How dare that person do that to me! They deserve whatever is coming to them!"

But when someone does something against God, we think, "They were just tired. They made a mistake, that's all."

That shows where our heart and thinking is at: it's more focused on sin against us rather than sin against the Lord. [pauseeee]

Another thing that this passage shows us is that...

E. Selfishness covers up spiritual failings with pious language.

Did you notice how godly-sounding Saul made himself out to be?

His oath seems to be his way of making himself seem godly.

⁵ See 1 Samuel 13:1-15.

⁶ See Matthew 7:3.

It's like he was saying, "Look at how serious I am about killing the Philistines and look how truthful my words are that the person who breaks this oath will be put to death." *[pause]*

By doing this, he seems to be trying to make himself look good by showing that he follows through in his words and actions. *[pause]*

He might have felt humiliated by Jonathan's initiative and bravery, while he sat back, so he might have been trying to make up for it, desiring to regain his reputation. *[pauseeee]*

Saul was more about his image than about a thriving relationship with God.

He kept up the appearance of a godly person without actually being godly. *[pauseee]*

Oh, what a challenge for each of us!

How often do you care more about your image, than about your actual relationship with God?

We like to put on a good show for others, while our spiritual lives are a wreck.

We even refuse to admit wrong, so as to not look bad. *[pause]*

That's what Saul did - his pride caused him to refuse to admit wrong.

Instead of admitting that his oath was rash and foolish, he kept to it, no matter what, so as to not look bad among his men.

But what happened? He ended up looking bad anyway!

His men saw the foolishness of his oath, as they saw the absurdity of not giving them energy for the battle.

And they have to save Jonathan, the hero of the day, from the king himself.

Those things don't really give you much confidence in your leader, do they? *[pauseeeee]*

When we try to put on a show, and impress people with our spirituality, it's all a facade, and even if no one else knows, God knows.

We can use godly-sounding words, but our lack of character will be seen in our lack of love. *[pauseeee]*

Like Saul, we try to be outwardly religious, but not inwardly.

But this cannot do, for what's most important is a firm relationship with God. *[pauseeeee]*

When you consider Christ, He was more about his relationship with His Father than his appearance in front of others.

In fact, he was willing to say some shocking things, causing people to leave because of it, but that's because his appearance in front of others wasn't most important, the truth was.⁷ *[pauseeee]*

Selfishness is ugly and foolish.

In the end, it's not worth it, we see that with Saul.

But what's beautiful? Selflessness!

There's just something about someone else humbly putting others before themselves - that's one reason why Christ is so glorious.

He put others first so much that he humbly came as a servant to this earth and died for our sins on the Cross.

That's true beauty!

Christ didn't act in selfish folly like Saul, who cared only for himself, but he acted in selfless wisdom, for the good of his people and for the glory of the Father. *[pauseeee]*

That's the ugliness of self-centeredness, but we also see...

II. The ruin of self-centeredness

After a hurricane, tornado, or some other event like that, people go out to see the ruin and destruction caused by the extreme weather.

Well what Saul did here likewise caused ruin and destruction, and as we step out and see the consequences of Saul's behavior, what do we find?

One thing we see is evidence of...

A. Marred relationships

In the beginning of Saul's kingship, he had Samuel with him, Jonathan and him seemed to have a normal relationship, and the army was behind him.

But by the end of chapter 14, what changed?

He disobeyed Samuel's command, and Samuel left.

He was ready to kill his own son, that's going to cause some issues in a relationship!

And thirdly, his relationship with his army is severely strained, as they had to restrain their king from killing his own son. *[pause]*

⁷ See John 6:51-71 among others.

Because of his selfishness, Saul caused rifts in his relationships with others - that's what selfishness does. *[pause]*

Think of it this way, how can any relationship be healthy if someone is ever only about themselves?

Do you want to be around someone who is only ever about themselves? Of course not.

The path of selfishness is a whirlwind leaving marred relationships in its wake. *[pauseeee]*

But Christ, what does He do for us?

We had a marred relationship with God because of our sin and selfishness, but Christ restored our relationship with God by paying for our sins on the Cross.

Saul's selfishness pushed people away, but Christ's love, humility, and work on the Cross actually brings people near.

And so we seek to walk in his love and humility, putting others first, which has a beautiful result of restoring our own broken relationships. *[pauseeee]*

The other evidence of ruin in Saul's life, and one of the most prominent ones that I believe this text is bringing out is...

B. Squandered opportunities

Saul had a great opportunity in front of him.

Jonathan had initiated a great thing in stirring up the Philistines to confusion and chaos, but Saul's foolish oath actually hindered the victory's effectiveness.

Jonathan says this when he says, "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."

And I believe the writer is further making this point when we are told that Saul stops pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines make it home.

He even concludes the chapter by stating that all the days of Saul are hard fighting against the Philistines. *[pause]*

What a squandered opportunity!

Saul could have totally squashed the Philistines right then and there, but his selfishness and folly led him to waste the opportunity. *[pauseeee]*

Selfishness squanders opportunities.

We each have so many opportunities to live for God, and serve Him with our lives.

But when we become all about ourselves, we obviously aren't going to be living for Him.
[pause]

Now certainly God is sovereign over all and providentially working in each situation, yet we also have a responsibility to serve Him with our lives.

We can't neglect either one of those realities. *[pauseeee]*

God is giving you many opportunities to serve Him, but will you waste them on yourself?

You have moments to invest in your kids, but will your focus be on your comfort and wants?

You have chances to serve God by using your God-given gifts to serve others in the church, but will your time, agenda, and desires cause you to squander those chances? *[pauseeee]*

This type of thing happened to me recently when I went somewhere to get food.

I went in with the agenda of, "I'm just going to go in, get my food, and leave."

The person that made my food was very talkative, and it was only him and me for a while, and I talked with him, got my food and left.

But as I was driving home, I began thinking, "Ah man, that was a perfect opportunity to talk to that person about Christ.

Why didn't I say anything? There were even things he said that would have made a perfect transition into the Gospel."

And the reason was because I was so consumed with and set on my own agenda, time, and comfort that the Gospel opportunity didn't even go through my mind.

That's what can happen when we are focused on ourselves: we squander opportunities.
[pauseeee]

It's said that D. L. Moody once heard a preacher say, "The world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to him."

And Moody is often quoted as saying, "By God's help, I aim to be that man."

Do you aim to be that man or woman by God's help? *[pauseeee]*

Considering what Saul did here, we see from this passage that...

Self-centeredness foolishly ruins the opportunities that God gives us.

Now this passage could lead us to a life of regret and discouragement, but that's not what the Gospel should do in us.

We aren't meant to let our prior failures make us feel rejected and throw in the towel.

Instead, you may have noticed that throughout this sermon about Saul's failures, I kept trying to put your gaze on how Christ did the opposite of Saul.

That's because Saul's kingly failures point us towards a king who was perfectly humble and never squandered God's opportunities.

He was perfectly "a man after God's own heart," for He is the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

And our failures point us outside of ourselves to the perfect obedience of Christ in our place, and the forgiveness that he provides.

His obedience in our place secures our approval before God, so that God doesn't judge us based on our performance. *[pauseeeee]*

All of this means that your past sins and failures don't condemn you, for there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus!⁸ *[pauseee]*

When I missed that Gospel opportunity while getting food, I had to remind myself of this.

Should I have said something? Certainly, but my performance doesn't gain God's approval, for I am already accepted because of Christ's work for me. *[pause]*

Does that mean that I just don't care about taking advantage of future opportunities?

Of course not!

Instead, because of His marvelous grace to me, I'm motivated and compelled to live for Him even more!

When I gaze at the Cross, I'm not pushed to look inward toward my selfish interests, but I'm motivated to look towards the interests of others and to serve the Lord wholeheartedly, for Christ has humbly come and died for me!

So don't let your prior failures discourage you, but rest in and be motivated by His great forgiveness and grace! *[pause]*

Let's aim to use our time and gifts for His great name, not focused on ourselves, but empowered by His grace!

⁸ Romans 8:1.