

3/05/23 - 1 Sam. 13:1-23 - "Desperate Times call for Devoted Measures"

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[0 : 00] Today we read from 1 Samuel chapter 13. Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel, Saul chose 3,000 men of Israel.

2,000 were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and 1,000 were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent.

3,000 were with Saul in Gibeah, and the Philistines heard of it. 4,000 were with Saul in Gibeah, and Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear.

5,000 were with Saul in Gibeah, and all Israel heard it, said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines.

6,000 were with Saul in Gibeah, and the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel. 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude.

[1 : 05] They came up and encamped in Michmash to the east of Beth-Avon. When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble, for the people were hard-pressed, the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him, trembling. He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, Bring the burnt offering here to me and the peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came, and Saul went out to meet him and greet him.

Samuel said, What have you done? And Saul said, When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.

So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God with which he commanded you.

[2 : 29] For when the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, but now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.

And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army. They went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.

And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed at Gibeah of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash.

And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual. Another company turned toward Beth-haran, and another company turned toward the border that looks down on the valley of Zeboam toward the wilderness. Now, there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears.

[3 : 42] But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle. And the charges were two-thirds of a shekel, for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads.

So on the day of the battle, there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan. But Saul and Jonathan his son had them, and the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Our series in 1 Samuel has brought us to chapter 13, which comes just after a couple other chapters.

It's called Context. It's really important when you're studying God's words. And very important in this series. If you're new with us today, I want to welcome you to Steel Valley Church.

And it's great to have you here. And the best way that would probably be helpful to any visitors, depending on where you come from or where you've grown, just keep your Bibles open to the chapter that we're reading.

[5 : 07] And we're going to be sticking there. It's helpful to just keep it open. If you're a note taker, we'll have some notes and some points going through. But follow along with your finger through the passage as we dive into God's Word and the message of His Word for us this morning.

And so talking about context, going back to that C word, this chapter is occurring after Saul's reign that had begun in chapter 10.

That led to chapter 11, which led to a great military victory against the Ammonites. It was a good victory. And then Saul is that man that the people asked for.

We've kind of been harping on Saul a little bit these past couple weeks. He's the man that the people asked for. They requested. And this was so that they would have a king to go out before them and fight their battles.

That's not a bad request, would you say? That's not bad at all, right? But it wasn't until they stated the further reasoning for such a request. They wanted a king like all the other nations.

[6 : 22] And such a pursuit is a rejection of God's order of redemption. This nation is not called to be like all the other nations.

They're called to be set apart. And this led to chapter 12, which was a time of renewal, Samuel's farewell address. And he said, you are literally teeter-tottering on the borderline of the abyss or restoration into God's favor.

And we just preached that last week, which was a wonderful corporate time of confession as a church. But coming through so much, so many verses, so many words, so many chapters, we might be confused as to how this chapter fits in the whole, how chapter 13 fits in, because we might forget a contextual feature after all that has occurred thus far.

But there are still two instructions from Samuel that are left unaddressed. There are two things that Saul was called to do after being anointed king that he has not done thus far.

That was in chapter 10, verse 7, that he is supposed to do what his hand finds him to do, attack the Philistine, the garrison of the Philistine.

[7 : 53] And also, chapter 10, verse 8, just one verse after that, after he stirs up the hornet's nest of attacking the Philistines, he's supposed to go and wait for seven days in Gilgal for further instructions from Samuel.

We get a little timeline here at the beginning of this verse, because verse 1 actually says that it took a year for this to happen. Today's passage begins with the fulfillment of these two unfulfilled instructions.

And along with the rising action of the narrative that stretches all the way to chapter 15, and again, I know you're bummed out we can't sit here and study all the way to chapter 15 in one sitting, but we're going to take this in bite-sized chunks over the next couple weeks, okay?

And so, right now, we begin that rising action. The plane is just leaving the tarmac of the narrative. And so, behind the scenes, though, I want you to understand, it's like, things aren't the best right now in this nation.

Behind the scenes, behind all these victories, apparent victories, even against the Ammonites, number one, Israel rejected being a nation who represented God.

[9 : 14] And the second thing is that Saul is the king Israel chose in defiance of God, and a man that God granted and anointed based on man's selfishness and according to his sovereignty.

And so, behind the tone of this text is an ominous haze. Behind the tone of chapter 13 is sort of this eerie, ominous haze of a tone.

Of danger, of uncertainty. And so, let's drop in to ground zero of the text at this point in the nation of Israel.

And let's do this in a sermon titled, Desperate Times Call for Devoted Measures. I'm going to break this up into two separate sections, and I'd like to pray before I do.

So, join me. Father, we come to you today as your body of Christ today. And we are just humbled at the authority of your word for us, that as we turn to the message within chapter 15, we indeed are hearing the voice of God.

[10:35] We hear you this morning. Let us be attentive to that message and your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

The first section that we have begins in verse 1, and that's the danger when reputation becomes our God. And like I said, the timeline comes into view in verse 1 and 2 in chapter 13.

It was through a whole process of a year that Saul became king. He stationed himself in Michmash, and he assembled an army. It's pretty normal for a king, right?

Establish yourself. Station yourself. Get the army ready. Prepare. Make plans of attacks. But you see, for several months, the garrison of the Philistines remained unthreatened, untouched, and very much alive.

And that's a problem. It's delayed obedience. It's only through that local context that we can turn back to chapter 10, verse 7, and see that at Saul's anointing, he was called to do something, to take care of the Philistine threat.

[12:02] And now the Philistine is a very massive army, very strong opponent of God's people. So this would be a significant feat. But what he was supposed to do was attack the governor of the Philistines.

Do what your hand finds you to do. And so the setting of Saul's reign is set up in delay. But I think we could probably call that convenient forgetfulness, because who wants to stir up trouble?

Right? Who wants to talk about all these? Who wants to go out and make people mad? Right? I know a couple people here that might.

But we've already done our time of confession, so our hearts are clear. Everything that derives from this point, from that point of disobedience, is directly connected to that disobedience.

Regardless of the highs of defeating the Ammonites, great job, Saul. You still didn't do what you were called to do. And so the narrative begins in chapter 13 with the fulfillment of this command.

[13:16] Deal with the Philistines. In verse 3, the Philistines became attacked. They were attacked. They were attacked. They were attacked in verse 3. This is great, but guess who did it?

A guy known as Jonathan, which we'll soon know that that is Saul's son. Well, I guess that counts. In other words, Saul failed to be the king who goes out before them and fights their battles. It's like, oh, well, that's convenient.

My son got a little bit stirred up about the Philistines. He went out. Well, that's great. That's great. Well done, Saul. But... Well done, son. I'm going to take the credit, though.

He sends out word to all this nation. Let the Hebrews hear. Sound the shofar. Let them hear. Saul has attacked the enemy.

[14:13] Assemble! Right? You can hear that shofar blow. The time is now. And he claims and shouts his own praise in verse 4.

In verse 5, the narrative isn't quite being done set up yet. It's still developing at this point. We haven't met the responding Philistines.

We haven't seen or experienced the hornet's nest that is now being stirred up.

They now enter into Michmash. Saul leaps, assembles the army in Gilgal. And right behind them, as he's leaving Michmash, the enemy takes the territory.

And this enemy is ten times bigger. They have ten times as many chariots.

[15:21] They have twice as many horsemen. God only knows how many men were actually on foot. The author of the narrative is basically simply saying that they were a pretty legitimate threat.

Quite legitimate. The narrative is setting this up to make it clear. Saul's reign was not only marked in delayed obedience, but also serving the God of his reputation.

And so Israel was in trouble, you see. The people hid themselves in verse 6. I can blame them.

I mean, to see all those chariots and all those horses, and not to mention all the men that aren't even mentioned in this. They hid in caves. They hid in holes, rocks, tombs.

Cisterns. Who would have thought? You could hide in a cistern. Think about that for the next hide-and-seek game we play for the youth. You can hide in a cistern.

[16:23] It's a big water jug, essentially. They're hiding anywhere just to get out of sight of the enemy. Why? And they ran away to Gilead, even crossing bodies of water.

Those that remained trembled. Why would they tremble, though? Fear of failure? Fear of the unknown?

Fear of the unknown? Was it not the disciples of Jesus Christ who all ran away and dispersed from any affirmation with God's anointed Son?

How many of us struggle with fear of similar failure or the fear of the unknown? Boy, I mean, 2020 just happened.

It was a challenging year. And while it was probably the worst thing for some families to lose loved ones, it was the best thing for the church.

[17:31] Church. Within a week, church programs, the big lights, cameras, action of churches that become such a big thing of a way to attract people and build your reputation was ended within a week.

And while it was hard for many, it was good for the church. Church, it is quite easy for us to shout in confident ignorance.

But arrogance is masked as confidence when we put to the test to endure and fail to follow through. When our reputation is at stake and we reject God.

Such was for the nation of Israel then. So, too, is for the disciples. And how much more prevalent even is it for our day today? Today. So, it's not the fact.

It's not a matter of if we are going to have fear. It's a common human experience. But what matters is what we do with our fear.

[18:43] And church, we as God's people are to have a greater fear of God than we have of man. It sounds simple, right?

We'll ask you in your next trial. We'll ask you in your next dangerous situation, uncertain situation. A situation where your failure could probably ruin your entire family if you were to fail.

We'll ask you then. And church, we as God's people are to have a greater fear of God than fear of man. What would our faith be anyhow? Thinking about the object of our faith, the aspect of faith, the theology of faith.

What would faith be without God allowing a fearful circumstance to invade our lives? Or have we forgotten that the testing of our faith is actually good?

Have we forgotten that? Friends, we desire the high road. We always do. We desire easy believism.

[19:51] We desire this comfortability that we get in our lives. And the more our faith struggles in our comfortability, because it has no room to grow.

How might God be calling you to act in faith and not fear in your life at this moment? To surrender your reputation, maybe your entire career, on behalf of your devotion to God.

But the narrative isn't done setting up. The narrative has some rising action, and we're going to see the danger when desperation becomes our God.

The rising action takes place, and to say the least, this is just filled in desperation. You could almost sense desperation throughout the entire rest of the chapter.

We might ask, Will God follow through and deliver Israel from the hands of the enemy? Will the kingship be all that Israel hoped for?

[21:09] But a better question is not to put God on the stand, but to put Saul on the stand. Will Saul follow through to deliver Israel?

Will Saul be the king that Israel hoped for? He's already failed with taking credit from Jonathan's victory, but I guess Saul begins kind of on the right path.

He gets back on track. Praise the Lord, Saul, right? He gets back on track. He goes to Gilgal in verse 8. Look with me. He goes into Gilgal. In seven days, he waits. Wow, this is good.

It's a new year, new me. Saul taking a selfie, posting on Instagram. It's a new season for me. I know I took Jonathan's victory, but this is new.

And his reign is sort of... Isn't Saul's reign sort of marked in this theme of like, kinda, sorta, but not really? If you were to encapsulate Saul's reign, I think that phrase would probably state it well.

[22:21] Kinda, sorta, but not really. He kind of defeated the Philistines, if you wanna count it based on a technicality. But now Saul follows through with the second half of Samuel's direction that stems all the way back to chapter 10, verse 8.

Saul waited seven days for Samuel to arrive in Gilgal. Where is Samuel, guys? So, we just stirred up the hornet's nest.

You can actually feel the ground shaking with those chariots. They're right on our tail. We don't have an eighth day to stand here and wait.

Where is Samuel? In an act of desperation of Saul gazing all around Gilgal, hearing the men shouting from just across the way, people were like, probably each day he lost more men.

They're just like, yeah. Saul, good luck. I'm feeling sick. I got a sore throat. I'm not gonna make it to battle this time, so I'm gonna call off. Not gonna work for me and my family.

[23 : 41] It's just not what we need right now. So, we're just gonna remove ourselves. Forget Saul, right? We are out by Felicia.

So, Saul made a burnt offering. He's like, well, what do I got here? Okay, we can make a fire. I saw Samuel do this once. Maybe this will work, right? Let's try doing an offering.

Let me get the instruction manual. Offerings for dummies. So, he flips through the offering dummy book that he got from Barnes & Noble's Christian book section.

And he says, well, maybe this will persuade these people to stay. Maybe this will show that the people that I am strong, maybe that I do have the strength, that I indeed showed my stature and my chiseled draw line.

I mean, you can't blame him, right? Maybe we shouldn't be so hard. What alternatives were there? What kind of king would he be if the Philistines came marching in to their location?

[24 : 48] If they waited any longer, what kind of king would he be if everyone got slaughtered? His reputation would go down the drain. He'd be remembered as an outer failure. Don't you think that you wouldn't have done the same?

You are not exempt from Saul's plight. And then in a moment of, I believe it's a little bit of humor in the chapter, followed by utter dismay.

Saul's like, oh, Samuel. Well, funny seeing you here. Well, we've been waiting for you this whole time. And, yeah, guys, put the fire out.

Out. He's here, right? There you are. He goes to meet, probably a big gulp, and soon the smiles fade in just four words in our translations.

What have you done? It's not a time to play games anymore over reputation or alleviating your fear in what is seen and what makes sense.

[26 : 16] What have you done? These four words echo through the pages, stemming from the voice of God to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they disobeyed God's commands in Genesis 3-9, leading to Cain after he murdered his brother in Genesis 4-10, even to Achan after a greedy act in Joshua 7-19.

Do you hear the echo that surrounded Saul in these four words? Saul's reasoning, verse 11, it's like Saul's trying to play it off and actually manipulate the situation to blame Samuel for his delay.

He's saying, I'm losing people. You didn't come when you said you did it. It's your fault. And look, the Philistines, you can hear them. They're on our tail. Sort of as you're reaching the little minor climax of this narrative, the Philistines are coming and he says, I have not sought favor of the Lord. He wants to now blame his disobedience in worship, in his worship to God, that his worship is a means of trying to find favor in this situation.

And so he forced himself in verse 12 and offered a burnt offering. Liar. Verse 13, Saul was expecting sympathy.

[27 : 58] Nice try, essentially, with Samuel. You have done foolishly. Don't you think that's a little insensitive thing to say to a man who's caught in desperation, just trying to do his best, right?

He was out looking for donkeys, then all of a sudden he's called to be a king. Maybe we can sympathize with him, empathize with him.

He's already not feeling up to the task. But why was obedience so hard for Saul based upon his circumstances?

Might it be because it's hard to trust God against our every instinct? It's hard to trust God against every evidence that's saying that we're going to die if we stay.

Because it's hard to trust God against every odd against us. You see, Saul thought that he could worship his way out of obedience.

[29 : 14] And today, churches are filled with the same. It's a hard reality knowing that sometimes the loudest worshipers of God's people are the most disobedient.

Because they're trying to alleviate their disobedience through the ritual of praise. Offering a sacrifice to God to gain favor with God.

All the while letting sin run amok in their family, in their lives, and all around them. This is what happens in chapter 13 when we allow our ritual to be elevated over obedience.

And it calls us to repent. To turn. Completely changing our way of thinking. Church, obeying God is a far from easy thing to do.

We can acknowledge and shout an amen and everything all we want, but when it gets down to it, it is the most furthest thing from easy thing to do is to obey God.

[30 : 33] The desperation we experience in life will often serve will often serve as that reminder. When you reach, maybe not now, maybe you're in a season and you're just at the top of the mountain and you're just like, man, come on, man, let's jump into like Psalms and sing a shout of joy and praise.

Well, this is God's word for us today. And we will need these reminders for those valleys that will come in your life. And so, take notes.

The desperation we experience in this life will often serve as a reminder that trusting God, obeying God, is difficult. Trusting God is neither straightforward, it is so far from simple.

Church, the foolishness of disobedience, when weighed against the wisdom of obedience, obedience, can only be properly measured by something outside of our circumstance.

Let me say it a different way. It was in light of a circumstance, Saul's action was wise.

[31 : 46] It was in light of his circumstance that his actions were prudent, but in light of God's promise, Saul's action was the most foolish thing that he could have ever done.

Saul forfeited in verse 13, the promise of God. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

There was still grace in this moment. Now your kingdom shall not continue in verse 14. And a foreshadow comes, like guess what, Saul?

You will be replaced. And that will take us into context leading all the way to chapter 15.

But church, in our most desperate times, in those 11th hour moments that we have in this life, these are times that call for the most radical faith.

[33 : 03] Because it's the object of which our faith is placed in. We see God's promises being brighter and more glorious than any circumstance or situation that we may be facing in this life.

life. And might you hear the echo within your life today knowing that this is me. This is me.

Might you hear that echo of God's Word? What have you done? How is the church to endure such moments?

Well, our actions must be weighed against God's promise, not the problem ahead. Our circumstances will tell us to think quick, to act quick.

Time is of the essence. God's promise will tell us to hold fast. Our circumstances will tell us, you're going to die.

[34 : 07] You better run. Get out of here. God's promise will tell us we are secure in Christ. Amen indeed.

What therefore must we fear? God alone is only worthy of our fear. And so, up ahead, as the narrative is going to continue to build, we just don't have enough time in a single sitting to get through it unless we want to play Puritans here this morning.

Two hour long sermons. But verse 17 and 18, Samuel heads to Gilgal to meet with the troops while the Philistines have begun to make their military formation.

They go north, east, west. A time of desperation, church? I think so. The narrative makes it clear.

And check it out, verse 19, they don't have a sword, they don't have a spear, only Saul and Jonathan have a sword and spear.

There's a monopoly at this time where the Philistines were the only blacksmiths. They had to go to the Philistines in order to get their weaponry. How convenient for the Philistines.

[35 : 28] No wonder they were so powerful, right? And so, what they had was kind of like Gideon's army. They got some pots and pans and farm tools. Okay, well, whatever you got. I mean, it worked for Rapunzel entangled, so, I mean, it's going to work for us.

Verse 22 and 23 as the passage ends, the battle day arrives. And we're going to arrive at that next week in chapter 14, but for the sake of time, we're going to pause the series at this moment.

But we will pause with this ominous tone and pick back up next week, Lord willing. You see, church, we have much to be fearful of and many reasons to fear, but we have literally no reason to ever allow our desperation to become our God.

This passage makes it so clear. In Saul's desperate day, he offered up false worship. Hands were lifted high to the sky, shouting to the Lord.

Out of worship for God, though? No. It was out of worship of self to gain approval of God, to gain favor of man.

[36 : 57] It was a complete sham. It was a sham. You see, might we be reminded that our heart of worship ought to be in check during our most desperate times?

Is the driving force of our worship out of fear or trust, church? Fear due to the circumstance, the outcome of a possible circumstance in our lives, or trust due to the irrefutable, indisputable, unequivocal promise of God to us.

You see, Jesus Christ has called us to obey all that He commanded us, and this calls for a shift when our fear comes barging into our easy-believe-ism lives.

As Western Christianity, we are quite spoiled that the moment we get a splinter in our hands, our faith is shattered. It's sad. God, church, don't get comfortable.

Don't get comfortable. Lest the words reverberate within our lives and our hearts, what have we done? May our faith triumph over our fear and trust God when our circumstances prove to be quite unfortunate.

[38 : 19] it is therefore vital that we heed the words of Hebrews 5 verse 7. In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death.

And He was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

The obedient King Jesus has now come. This King is no fool. He is not like Saul.

He is not like us, even on our best day. This King sees you. He sees your situation. He wants you to look to Him.

Just as we read in our worship and song this morning, Hebrews 4 16, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[39 : 41] So, church, may we remain obedient in days of desperation, temptation, that desperate times do call for devoted measures.

What great promises God might have for us, that He wants to unfold in our lives, if only we might stay, remain steadfastly according to His promises in Jesus Christ.

blessings, what blessings could unfold in our lives, if we might only continue to follow Him, to pledge our loyalty to Him in the face of the most trying circumstances.

May God help us all to hold fast together. Let's pray.