

PRAYER (10:45)

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INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven’t met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I’m the Lead Pastor here.

If you’ve got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Samuel chapter 14. 1 Samuel 14. That’s where we’re going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to 1 Samuel 14. That’s on page **236** in those Bibles under the chairs.

INTRODUCTION

And I just want to say this up front: you’re not going to like this sermon.

- If last week’s passage was my favorite passages in 1 Samuel,
- today’s doesn’t even hit my top 10.
- And I think you’ll see why.

Let’s set it up:

- Israel’s relatively small army
- is pitted up against the Philistines and their massive army.

And Saul,

- the first king of Israel,
- is afraid,
- and is hiding in a cave with his troops.

But Saul's son, Jonathan, is bold and courageous.

- He and his armor bearer
- lead a charge against the entire Philistine army
- that inspires the rest of Israel
- to come out and fight.

And in 1 Samuel 14, verse 23, the text says this:

1 SAMUEL 14:23

[23] So the LORD saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.

Now, you would think,

- *“Alright! It's time to celebrate!*
- *Israel is victorious,*
- *and now to the spoils!”*

But they can hardly celebrate.

The writer makes a hard u-turn in verse 24.

1 SAMUEL 14:24a

[24] And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day,

Now, those words really are in stark juxtaposition to verse 23.

- 23 said that the Lord saved Israel that day.
- But 24 said that Israel is hard pressed.
- This is like oil and water.

And we've seen these words "hard pressed" in this section already.

- Back in 13:6 Israel was "hard pressed"
 - because of the massive Philistine army...
- But now here the Philistines have been defeated
 - and Israel is STILL "hard pressed".

So, why were the men of Israel hard pressed? Well, the text tells us.

1 SAMUEL 14:24

[24] And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food.

EXPLAIN: SAUL'S VOW

Why were the men of Israel hard pressed, after such a decisive victory?

- Well, Saul had placed a curse
- on any troops who ate food
- before evening and total victory.

Saul shows a strange ability to turn deliverance into distress.

He makes this bizarre vow.

- And we've seen this with Saul in the past two chapters.
- It's like Saul wants to include God in his plans,
 - but he's unwilling to do it in God's time
 - or in God's prescribed way.

I think what we're seeing here is a pseudo-spiritual superstition

- where Saul thinks that God is more likely to listen...
- if his men indulge in unnecessary self-denial.

APPLICATION: SUPERSTITION

And I think too many Christians

- fall prey to the temptation
- to use the good things of the Lord
- to control our fates apart from him.

The Christian life is often difficult and complex, and superstition boils down that complexity to a simple input-output equation.

- If I do my devotions,
 - I'll have a good day.
- If I attend Sunday service,
 - My week will be blessed.
- If I have a cross hanging on my rearview mirror,
 - I won't crash my car.

But superstitions give us the illusion of control.

- The world can be a terrifying place,
- and as long as we do the right things,
- we think we can maintain some control over our lives,
- regardless of God's plans for us.

TRANSITION

So, this is where Saul is, but things aren't going to go well.

Now, we're going to have to really move to cover some text here, so follow along: look at verse 25.

1 SAMUEL 14:25-30

[25] Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. [26] And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. [27] But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright. [28] Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food this day.'" And the people were faint. [29] Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. [30] 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."

EXPLAIN

Now, Saul's superstitious vow has three ramifications.

The first is MILITARY EXHAUSTION.

- This is not the time you want to fast!
 - When you're fighting the enemies...
 - in a land filled with hills and crags and valleys.

ILLUSTRATION: FASTING

I fast one day a week. It's just a way for me to grow in self-control.

I practice saying no to a good thing, so I'm trained to say no to bad things.

So, I fast once-a-week, but I also run 3-4 days a week. For exercise. And I make it a practice to never fast on the same day I run. Except once...

- Last Fall I did both on the same day.
 - I ran 6 miles in the morning,
 - and then fasted.

Well, that afternoon I was doing a membership interview in my office...

And midway through the interview,

- my hamstring cramped up so bad...
- that I quickly stood up from my chair,
 - while the candidate was sharing her testimony.

But between the lack of calories,

- mixed with too much physical activity,
- not enough water,
- and getting up too quickly.

I got tunnel vision...slinked back into my chair...and passed out!

Right in the middle of a meeting in my office!

And I came to a few minutes later

- to 6 paramedics in my office,
- my shirt taken off,
- and they were sticking probes to my chest for an EKG.

And that gal STILL became a member!

Even with a blouse less pastor on the floor!

TRANSITION

THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO FAST!

But in his superstitious vow,

- Saul deprives his troops of getting any sort of calories...
 - of any nutritious boost they needed.

And note that Jonathan didn't hear the announcement of the oath. Why?

- Well, it's conjecture...
 - but it's probably cause...
 - he was too busy fighting the Philistines!
- And he even brings up the foolishness of his father's vow!

So, there's military exhaustion. But there's more. Verse 31:

1 SAMUEL 14:31-35

[31] They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint. [32] The people pounced on the spoil and took sheep and oxen and calves and slaughtered them on the ground. And the people ate them with the blood. [33] Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here." [34] And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and they slaughtered them there. [35] And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD.

EXPLAIN

The second ramification of Saul's vow of starvation is that it led to RITUAL TRANSGRESSION.

- You see, in the Old Testament Law,
- God's people were commanded not to eat meat with blood in it,
 - that is: they were to drain it properly.

Well, the people are so faint and hungry

- that the text says they pounce on the spoil,
- start slaughtering animals,
- and eat the meat before all the blood had been drained.

Now, this is a transgression against God's law!

God has killed people for much less in the Old Testament!

- But note that God does not punish them for their transgression.
- And I think that's because it really isn't their fault.
- It's this dumb vow.

But there's one more ramification of Saul's vow. Verse 36:

1 SAMUEL 14:36-46

[36] Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." But the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." [37] And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him that day. [38] And Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today. [39] For as

the LORD lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die.” But there was not a man among all the people who answered him. [40] Then he said to all Israel, “You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side.” And the people said to Saul, “Do what seems good to you.” [41] Therefore Saul said, “O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim.” And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. [42] Then Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.” And Jonathan was taken.

[43] Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” And Jonathan told him, “I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die.” [44] And Saul said, “God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan.” [45] Then the people said to Saul, “Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.” So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. [46] Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

EXPLAIN

The third ramification for Saul’s vow is the NEAR DEATH FOR JONATHAN, Israel’s deliverer.

- It wasn’t Saul who saved Israel from the Philistines.
- No, it was Jonathan! And everyone knows it!

And we see in this asinine move of Saul, that everyone realizes he's gone off the deep end!

- You see, Saul wanted to plunder the defeated Philistines,
 - and he seeks the Lord,
- but God did not answer Saul.
 - A sign of divine disapproval.

But Saul thinks God is silent because someone has broken his vow.

- And he knows it's Jonathan,
- but no one will speak against Jonathan,
 - because he's Israel's deliverer.

If Jonathan dies,

- these guys are stuck with Saul!

So, Saul essentially cast lots to show that Jonathan is guilty.

- The lot falls to Jonathan,
- and Jonathan tells the honey story.

And Saul is about to kill his own son...

- over a stupid superstitious vow,
- but the people step in,
 - as if to say,
- *"Sorry Saul,*
- *but you caused this mess!*
- *You're not killing Jonathan."*

And then the remainder of this chapter just chronicles a bit more about Saul's kingship, and his children's names.

EXPLAIN: CONTRAST

So, now do you see why I said that this section isn't in my top 10 favorites?

What do we do with this bizarre passage?

Well, this section is really a part of the larger chapters 13 & 14 showing a stark contrast between Saul's follies and Jonathan's successes.

And any serious reader of these chapters instinctively know that Jonathan is the true royal material in this family, not Saul.

- But that is where the tragedy comes in:
- Jonathan will never get such an opportunity.

Back in 13,

- after making the unlawful sacrifice,
- Saul is stripped of his kingdom.
- His heir, Jonathan,
- would never sit on the throne.

But the question immediately asked in our minds is WHY NOT?

- Why not Jonathan?
- Why must Jonathan's opportunities be squelched by Saul's choices?
- What do you suppose God is doing?
- Why does he work this way?
- Why this waste?

MAIN POINT

And it's my point for this morning: **SLIDE THAT'S NOT FAIR**

You see, the reason why this story offends our modern sensibilities

- is because in our western cultural mindset
- we think things ought to always be fair.

In our minds self-fulfillment is a right.

- We think that the equation of ingenuity...
- PLUS discipline
- SHOULD EQUAL success.

But, y'all, how many of you know that's not how life works?

ILLUSTRATION: BIBLE ISN'T FAIR

THAT'S NOT FAIR! And church, fair isn't really in the Bible.

Three quick examples.

JOSEPH

First, think about the story of Joseph in Genesis.

- Joseph is sold by his own brothers into slavery.
- He ends up as a servant in Potiphar's house,
 - but goes to jail on a false rape charge.
- Then when he interprets the cupbearer's dream,
 - and asks him to remember him
 - and mention him to Pharaoh.
 - But the cupbearer forgot about Joseph.

And then, one of the lesser-known moments in Joseph's life,

- in Genesis 49,
- Judah is given the blessing
- that said that the future king would come from his line.
 - Not Joseph's.

One of the very brothers who sold him into slavery...

- would have the line of the Messiah.

THAT'S NOT FAIR!

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Second example, consider John the Baptist.

John's role in redemption history is to be the forerunner of the Messiah,

- to prepare the way for Jesus to come on the scene...

And this would make his life incredibly difficult...

- It meant that he was going to be homeless,
- he was going to live in the woods,
- and wear animal skins,
- and eat bugs and honey,
- and never touch a drop of wine or alcohol...
- essentially, he's going to be a picture of radical obedience,
- in order to call people to repentance.

And he does all of it!

- Goodness, if God came to me and said,
 - *“I want you to be a homeless preacher.”*
- I’m pretty sure I’d be like,
 - *“Look, I’m going to need an audible voice*
 - *coming out of something burning*
 - *yet not being consumed. Alright?”*

And...I’m gonna need you to talk to my wife.”

But John is unbelievably obedient to God!

And, when Jesus comes on the scene,

- John gladly moves from the spotlight
- and into the supporting role he knew was his,
- and he will ultimately be killed for it.

THAT’S NOT FAIR!

HEBREWS

And the third example is what’s known as the Hall of Faith.

- In the book of Hebrews chapter 11,
- we find a list of men and women of old,
- heroes who lived by faith.

And the list covers some Old Testament names such as:

- Abel, Enoch, and Noah.
- Abraham and Sarah.
- Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
- It mentions Moses...
- and even Rahab the prostitute.

But then in verse 32, something really important happens.

I'll put it up on the screen.

SLIDE HEBREWS 11:32–35a

[32] And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—[33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection.

And listen, that stuff is so good and encouraging and hopeful!

But the text didn't end there. Let's pick back up in the rest of 35:

SLIDE HEBREWS 11:35–37

[35] Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. [36] Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.

Wait, wait, wait.

This is the Hall of Faith.

- Some received back their dead by resurrection...
- while others were sawn in two?

SLIDE THAT'S NOT FAIR

APPLICATION

And that's what I want us to get today, church. That's not fair.

JOSEPH

Joseph didn't get fair...

- but in Genesis 50,
- when talking with his brothers about the past
- he says the famous line:

SLIDE GENESIS 50:20

[20] As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

JOHN

And John the Baptist didn't get fair either.

- But when his disciples start complaining
- that everyone was leaving John to follow Jesus.
- John famously replies:

SLIDE JOHN 3:30

[30] He must increase, but I must decrease.”

HEBREWS

And even those who were mocked and flogged, and imprisoned, and killed, and poor, and mistreated. Even those, the writer of Hebrews says,

SLIDE HEBREWS 11:38a

[38] of whom the world was not worthy.

JONATHAN

And church, Jonathan seems to know this as well. He seems to know better than our modern sensibilities.

- He doesn't make excuses:
 - *“I didn't hear the oath.*
 - *And it was a dumb oath to begin with.*
 - **SLIDE THAT'S NOT FAIR”**

No. To Jonathan,

- it wasn't Saul's kingdom.
- It wasn't Jonathan's kingdom.
- It was God's kingdom.

For Jonathan,

- the kingdom was not his to seize,
- not his to rule,
- but his to serve.

And though he may have made a wonderful king,

- he will faithfully play his role as the prince to Saul...
- AND he will faithfully play his role
 - as the best friend of the next king,
 - a man after God's own heart.

CONCLUSION

So, let me apply this to us today, church:

we should praise the Lord for the THAT'S NOT FAIR moments in the Bible!

- If Joseph doesn't suffer.
- If John the Baptist doesn't decrease.
- If there was just, *"Women received back their resurrection from the dead."* Period.

Then the Bible cannot be trusted, and all of this is a lie.

If the scriptures said this to us:

- *"Jesus makes everything happy.*
- *Jesus makes everything better.*
- *If you have Jesus,*
 - *you won't struggle.*
 - *You won't hurt.*
 - *You won't lose.*
 - *You won't weep.*
- *All there is with Jesus is rainbows and Skittles.*

- *You give your life to Jesus.*
 - *And there are no more tears*
 - *and no more sadness.*
 - *There is no more loss.*
 - *There is no more perplexity or confusion.*
 - *There is no more anger and despair.*
- *Depression and anxiety are gone,*
 - *and you will skip with gladness*
 - *through all the days of your life.”*

If that were true...then what happens when our lives don't look like that?

If that were true, we would be forced to fake it for the rest of our lives.

- If that were true,
 - then we would have to PRETEND we were ok,
- OR
 - we'd have to conclude we didn't have enough faith.

Wouldn't we?

And God help us, that's what some of us are doing.

- Praise God for the mess!
- Praise God for the trials!
- Praise God for the THAT'S NOT FAIR!

Cause here's what I know.

- This is what life actually looks like.
- This is the way life actually works.

- It's not all awesome.
- It's not all happy.
- It's not all Instagram...on a date night...with a filter on.

That's not the way life works, and we know it!

- And any version of Christianity
- that has been so Americanized
 - as to make it this clean,
 - happy,
 - clappy,
 - skip through the days of your life
- should never be trusted!

It's not how the Bible says life works.

In fact, what we see all throughout the Bible is:

- *"Follow Jesus. It could end really badly."*

Giving our hearts to Jesus does not mean that the rest of our days will have no struggle.

- You will war against your flesh until glory.
- You will wrestle.
- You will have spells of doubt where you'll have to push in by faith and trust the Lord.
- You will wrestle with sin.
- You will have relational strife.
- You will face anxiety and depression.
- You will question.

Christ doesn't make all that go away....

But he empowers and grants faith to walk in those things.

- It's by faith,
- following after the Lord,
- in the highs and lows,
- of life in a broken world,
- that we become people of whom the world was not worthy.

THAT'S NOT FAIR...you're darn right it's not.

BLANK SLIDE W/PADS

ENDING

But then I begin to think a little deeper, and I find myself going,
"God, thanks for being so unfair."

Because, if we're honest,

- there isn't a single one of us in here
- who wants to walk up to God and go,
- *"I really want to get what I deserve from you!"*

Right?

- Cause we'd all back away
- and expect fire to come from heaven
- and burn that dude extra crispy.
 - Like go Old Testament on him.

Does anybody here WANT what they deserve? Not me!

- There's not one of us who could stand up here and say,
 - *"I deserve God's grace."*

- Not me!
 - With my life?
 - With what I've done?
 - With what goes through my mind?

You only get to hear the filtered version from me...

You don't want to know the crazy that goes on in my head!

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that:

In the greatest move of THAT'S NOT FAIR,

- God took all our sin and rebellion,
 - and placed that on his Son. THAT'S NOT FAIR!
- And God took all Christ's righteousness and obedience,
 - and offers it freely to us.

Oh, praise the Lord that he doesn't play FAIR!

So,

- if you've been struggling with this stuff...
- feeling like you're getting a raw deal...

And you've been going,

- *"Where are you?!?"*
- *Have you abandoned me?!?"*
- *I thought you were with me.*
- *I thought you were for me.*
- *This isn't fair!"*

If that's where you're at I want to tell you that Jesus is enough for you.

God hasn't forsaken you! He actually forsook his Son for you!

God help us to believe this! Let's pray.

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

- Davis, Dale Ralph. Focus on the Bible: 1 Samuel.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *A Swell and Lousy Day*.
- Redd, Scott. "Don't Be a Superstitious Christian."
- Tsumura, David Toshio. NICOT: The First Book of Samuel.