

JONATHAN - STIRRING GOD'S PEOPLE INTO ACTION (I Samuel 14:1-14)

Fred Rhodes

The Old Testament is alive with examples that will help us in our every day life. It gives us examples that will give us direction as we chart our daily path and that will help us to have a faith in God to help us have the strength to go forward in the challenges that we encounter every day. Jonathan is one of those examples that we find that gives much insight into directing our steps.

In 1 Samuel 14 we find Israel set in battle array with the Philistines. The condition in Israel at the time was not good. They were beset on numerous fronts by the invading Philistines (1 Samuel 13:17,18), and the Israelites were defecting because of fear (1 Samuel 14:21). They were short on weapons to fight against the enemies (1 Samuel 13:19-22). And it certainly seems that as a whole they were greatly lacking faith in God to deliver them in struggles. It is important to note that all it takes is a weak and ungodly leader that can change the whole focus and demeanor of a nation.

But in this deplorable condition we find a godly man who trusted God to take care of him and deliver him and his people from the adversaries. Jonathan obviously had a different attitude toward God than his father did. The chapter starts with Jonathan taking the lead and making plans to attack the enemy on a small scale. In making these plans he is careful to choose an individual that he can trust to carry out the operation. He exhibits a great faith in God in the way these plans are carried out and since he is not acting on a direct revelation from God but simply on a faith in Him and His promises he recognizes that God may not be for this plan and he could come to a bad end.

TOOK THE LEAD

At the outset we see that Jonathan took the lead in doing something that it seems everyone else was afraid to do. He saw a job that needed to be done and was determined to go ahead and get it done even if all of those around him did not want to do the job. As we consider this example we should think of the jobs that need to be done around us every day. Not jobs that put our life in jeopardy but simple things that just need to be done, things like changing light bulbs, cleaning the baptistery, fixing the leaky toilet, or turning on or off the lights. What about that individual that needs a visit for encouragement or a job done around the house for the elderly or infirmed. All too often these things are noticed by many but ignored and questions asked like, "Why doesn't someone take care of that?" As we learn from Jonathan we should just learn to take the lead and get the job done.

Many times leaders will strive to go ahead and do all of the things that need to be done. It is easy to go overboard in setting the example for doing the work and not encouraging others to get in there and work themselves. It seems that it is important that we balance taking the lead and doing the jobs that need to be done with helping others to serve also.

In taking the lead Jonathan chose a faithful individual to assist him in this endeavor (1 Samuel 13:1). This was a man that he was used to working with and knew that he could trust. We can see the faithfulness of his armor bearer in verse 7 when he affirmed his willingness to do whatever Jonathan chose to do. Not stopping at anything. As we learn from other biblical examples of this we look to Paul and John Mark. Paul even though wrong at the time did not trust John Mark because he had turned back earlier when they went to the work. Paul believed him to not be a faithful individual that could be

trusted in the heat of the battle and so ended up choosing Silas (see Acts 13:13; 15:36-39; 2 Timothy 4:11).

In the work of the church today we should be careful to choose faithful individuals who we are confident will help us in the work that we have to do, people that will be there when the going gets tough and that we can trust to back us up as we strive to serve the Lord. Remember that "evil communications corrupt good manners", (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Another thing that we can see in Jonathan is the training that he had received. It seems clear as we look back at history in this period that the members of the royal family were trained to do the job that they would need to do. Jonathan was inline to be the king and would be well trained in the tactics of battle. We can see his clear thinking and learning in the tactics of battle as he laid out his plans to his armor bearer.

In the church we should also be careful to train our young people, boys and girls, to do the jobs that need to be done in the kingdom. The jobs are many and varied but all very important. Jobs that range from seeing and doing the menial jobs to leading the assembly and teaching the lost. Each job is essential. We should not neglect to train the older as well. In my experience many of our older members have never been trained to do the work. But if you can get them to give in to training they can take that and go forward and work and grow even more by their experience. Isn't that what Moses did with Joshua. Isn't that what Jesus did with the apostles. We MUST train up those who come after.

It is also exciting to notice that the strong godly leadership of Jonathan spurred others on to action. In I Samuel 14:21 we see the defectors coming back to fight on the side of the Israelites. In verse 22 we also see those who were waiting around are now ready to go to battle and get the work done. It is amazing how one individual who will go before and show the way (Romans 12:10) can spur on so many to do the work. Strong, confident leadership has a profound effect on others.

In the work of the church each of us should be challenged to step out and get a job done. Not lingering back and doing nothing for fear of failure and reprisals. I was always taught that if you are doing something you will make mistakes. The big mistake that is often made is that we do nothing. We will give account of how we used what God has given us cp. I Corinthians 4:2. By going ahead and working on a job we will motivate others to get in there with us and help to get it going. Keep in mind that you play an important role in the faith of others.

PLANNING

As we proceed in the account of what Jonathan did we see that he was careful to plan out his path. Planning is a crucial aspect of accomplishing anything that needs to be done. The old saying, "To fail to plan is to plan to fail" is all too true. Planning of course takes forethought and effort.

Jonathan laid down a plan of action in verses 8-10 that he intended to follow and within that plan were variables that would determine the course of action along the way. He clearly recognized that there were different things that could take place and he considered what he would do if either of those options occurred.

As we consider the work of the church today the scriptures teach us also that we should plan the Lord's work. Just as Jonathan was doing the Lord's work and needed to carefully consider the path to take we must do the same. Notice passages like Matthew 28:19, 20. Here Jesus commands us to go and teach all nations, then to continue to teach those who obeyed the gospel. Inherent in this command is the clear need to make plans. Then in Acts 13:1-4 we see the brethren making these plans to see that it gets done. We see that they fasted and prayed about the task and then commissioned them to do the job.

We see planning in reaching out to the lost in the world in Colossians 4:5. It says to "walk in wisdom". Wisdom is the proper use of the knowledge that we have. Brethren, that is planning and we must make plans to reach out and influence the lost. We have been given the greatest job on the face of the earth. People are lost and dying every day and we have been given the marching orders to go and teach them the saving message of Jesus Christ. If we are to achieve that goal we must plan.

Within those plans Jonathan made some human judgments. These are things that he did not have a specific command for. Keep in mind that the whole plan was according to God's plan to conquer the nations around them (Deuteronomy 7:2). He knew that God wanted this job done and that He left some of the details up to human judgment. The same must be done in our plans of living the Christian life and reaching out to others. In our plans for doing the Lord's work we will make some human judgments. Just keep in mind that our plans should be within God's will (cp. 1 John 5:14), and they must be based on God's Word, 2 Timothy 3:16,17. When it comes to those areas of human judgment remember that God's Word gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness (II Peter 1:3). So it should be used to determine if the method or decision will be acceptable to God.

Within those human judgments on Jonathan's part (both would be acceptable to God, or at least not sinful), were criteria that would determine the direction that he would take. According to the doors that opened or closed a determination was made as to what direction to take. Paul used similar criteria in determining the direction that he would take in Colossians 4:3 when he desired open doors to preach the gospel.

What kind of plans are we making? Do we have plans to reach the lost of our community, our friends or the world beyond? Jesus teaches that we are supposed to in Matthew 9:36,27. Pray insinuates planning with God's help and laborers insinuates work. We can pray but we must do our part in the plan (Matthew 28:19).

Do we make plans to build up the local church? Too often we just let it happen. That simply means it won't. We must plan proper teaching that will edify and grow strong Christians. We must plan proper avenues of encouragement and fellowship among brethren. Time together apart from worship services is very important to keep people encouraged. We are social creatures. The religious world around us is capitalizing on this aspect and growing. I realize that people like to be entertained and that is not the purpose of the church but time together is essential for continued growth. The church in Acts 2:42,46 spent time together and grew.

As the church do we make plans to bring back the erring? The Word of God clearly demands that we try to bring back the erring. (Cf. Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20) Within these commands it is clear that we must do some planning to bring about the desired end.

As the Lord's church we comprise an army (Ephesians 6:10-20). Being an army gives us a purpose. That purpose is to win souls to the Lord and to aid them in going to heaven. As an army with a purpose we must have a plan for the path of attack. If we are to be efficient and have the success that we desire we have to plan. We plan for kids college, retirement, and new car and a house to live in. We make plans to have a better paying job and to make our business more profitable. We even plan for a vacation and how we are going to make time to see a ball game. Why not plans to further the kingdom of God. Are we not supposed to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). If we do not plan we will fail in our mission.

TRUSTED GOD

As we follow through with the account of Jonathan we also see that he had a great faith in God. He trusted him to care for him in difficult situations and with this trust he went ahead and did the job that needed to be done. Keep in mind that he had made some human judgments in this plan. In other words he did not have a direct "thus sayeth the Lord" for the criteria that he used for carrying out this plan. But it was still within the accepted plan of God and did not contradict His will. So he trusted in God to take care of him in the process.

The Bible has much to say about the fact that we must have a faith in God to take care of us in our life, such as in James 1:5-8. Within the framework of faith in God is the realm of providence. We do not understand this subject to any great degree, most likely because God revealed what He intended to reveal and if we totally understood providence where would be the faith in God to care for us. Within the realm of providence we do know some things. We know that God does not miraculously intervene and tell us what to do, or force us to do something. Miracles have ceased and we have a free will to do as we choose. We know that the Holy Spirit does not work separate from the Word of God to reveal things to us. God revealed through the Spirit and then was quiet.

Within the realm of faith Jonathan put himself at risk. We can see this in verse 11 where we can see that they had been in hiding but now they are exposed. He exposed himself and his armor bearer to the possibility of being hurt, captured and/or killed. We also know from verse 6 that Jonathan had no way of knowing for sure that God was going to deliver him in this plan. He clearly said to his armor bearer, "it may be that the Lord will work for us". This is in the imperfect and shows the realm of possibility. It was possible that the Lord would deliver them and it was possible that He would not. But He had a great faith in God that whatever came about he would still be under God's care. But the key is that Jonathan did not know the outcome. He did know there was a job to do within God's will and that God had promised to care for them and help them.

Quite frankly, where is the faith if there is no risk? Where is the faith if there is no danger of failure? In the Lord's work today we seldom have the danger of being killed because of the job at hand like Jonathan faced in his day. Our risk is very different. But like Jonathan we must have a great faith in God which necessitates risk to ourselves.

We must trust in God when it comes to giving as we have prospered. It is amazing to me that as Christians we make bold decisions when we want to purchase a cell phone or TV service. We sign big contracts that involve a lot of money. When it comes to a boat or other big purchase for entertainment we bravely sign on the dotted line and step forward in faith promising that the money will be there and trusting that we will have a job to pay for the promise. We sign on the dotted line for a house or car. These things are a step in faith. But of little value eternally often no value eternally. But when it comes to purposing in our heart to give so much to God we cringe and say that we cannot or give a small pittance that is a slap in God's face. SEEK FIRST GOD'S KINGDOM. Lay up treasures in heaven!!! Step forward in faith. I believe that the reason people give little or none to the Lord's work is because they have not given themselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5).

What about as the leadership of the Lord's church. When we consider the projects that need to be done all too often we lack faith to step forward and trust in God to provide. We do not have faith to go forward unless there is money there and to spare for emergencies. What a shame! What a lack of faith!! Jesus praised the widow who gave two mites in Mark 12:44. She gave all her living. That means that she trusted God to provide her next meal. As the church do we have faith? Are we striving to go forward in the Work of the Lord on faith or do we wait till we have a big bank account to be able to do anything.

God commanded that the Israelites step forward on faith in Malachi 3:10. They were not giving to God as they should. They seemed to be basing their giving on the fact that they lacked. But God put it into a different realm. He told them to trust Him and go ahead and give and in turn God would then provide for them. They had to go forward in faith. You and I can learn from this that we like Jonathan and the Jews in Malachi need to go ahead and make the sacrifices necessary, putting ourselves at risk, taking chances in the Lord's work and do what needs to be done, trusting God to get us through. Do not confuse the comfort zone with faith

In the Lord's work we must trust in God as we stand firm on God's Word. Too many feel that they must ignore sin in brethren in order to keep numbers up. Too often departure from acceptable worship is pursued in the name of attracting more people to a so called faith in God. We must do what is acceptable to God and trust him to send laborers into the harvest. God will not bless the church if we are not an acceptable vessel. But if we cease to be an acceptable vessel it seems likely that Satan will bring a delusion to cause us to think we are acceptable to God. Stand firm.

As we go about our everyday activities trust in God to help you through. Do what God expects and trust Him to bring things around to good through His providence (Romans 8:28). We do not need to know how God's providence works we just need to trust Him to do what He says He will do, all the while putting Him and His will first in our lives. We can trust Him by not allowing a job to interfere even if it means losing that job. We can trust him by not allowing our entertainment to interfere, even if it means not having some fun that we desire. We must trust him and not allow our family members or friends to interfere with our service to God.

I challenge all to go forward in what is right and acceptable in God's sight and trust Him. Even in the midst of adversity and danger and struggles. And when those things come and make life difficult say with Paul "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"

(2 Corinthians 12:9). This was not a miraculous power but a trust in God's providential care to get us through the difficulties and to make us stronger by having to trust in Him.