

Situation: Critical

We finally completed our series on the Apostles' Creed. I began to pray about what to do this morning and felt drawn to a story found in the Old Testament in 1 Samuel 13 and 14. I've preached from this passage and this story probably 3 or 4 times over the years, most recently, I think, in January of 2013, but I've not approached the story like this before. I was praying for some of the folks in the church battling cancer when this word just suddenly came up in my spirit. I felt like this was a word for those folks in particular, but for everyone that is battling with illness, cancer, with something that is terrorizing you and your life, for everyone that needs a miracle, for everyone that feels overwhelmed, weak, that the odds are against you, the situation is critical – this message is for you!

Turn to 1 Samuel 13 and let me quickly give you some background. Saul has been chosen as the first king of Israel. As usual, Israel is facing threats from her enemies. In particular, the Philistines were moving inland from the Mediterranean and were causing problems for Israel, raiding towns and villages to the north and west of Jerusalem. Saul had a standing army of about 3,000 men. 2,000 were with him and 1,000 were with his eldest son Jonathan. Chapter 13 tells us Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba and the Philistines amassed a huge army to retaliate. 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers or cavalry and soldiers like the sand on the seashore. Some estimate perhaps 90,000 total. 3,000 versus 90,000. Not good odds.

The Israelites had won their share of battles and these 3,000 were veteran fighting men, but their mommas hadn't raised dummies. Look what the bible says. **“When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.” 1 Samuel 13:6-7**

Those words really grabbed my attention – “when they saw that their situation was critical.” King James says they were in a strait. It means they were shut up, besieged by an adversary, they were trapped. “We're in a tight spot boys.” The situation was critical.

It describes many of us today. We're in a tight spot! The situation is critical. Something has to happen. America is in a tight spot. Israel is in a tight spot. The church is in a tight spot. We are in a tight spot. There is an adversary that is trying to trap us, to bind us up, to hem us in, to back us into a corner where we cannot escape, to demoralize us. That's what the Philistines

did to Saul. They cut off the supply lines, forced them to spread their resources too thin over the area, besieged and overwhelmed them. They weren't playing games. The situation was critical.

Some of you know what I'm talking about. This isn't child's play. The situation is critical. It's life or death. We have several, too many as I mentioned earlier, battling cancer, battling other debilitating diseases. Besieged. Overwhelmed. Out numbered. It looks as if there is no way out. We're trapped. Try this treatment, try this surgery, try this approach, but there is no sure way out. There is no easy alternative. The situation is critical.

Some of you are facing personal crisis. Crisis on your job, in your marriage, in other relationships, problems with children or family members or co-workers, life-altering decisions have to be made and you feel trapped, besieged, out numbered. The situation is critical.

It's interesting the bible says they saw that their army was "hard pressed." The word used there can be translated as "tyrannized." They were being terrorized. Some of you, the devil is terrorizing you right now. Your mind, your body is being terrorized, frightened, shaken to the core. The devil doesn't fight fair. He is a terrorist, trying to torment you every way he can.

When the situation is critical, you have to decide, do we run or do we take a stand? Do we cave in or do we trust and fight? What will we do? What's the saying, "when the going gets tough the tough get going." Well, these soldiers got going all right, unfortunately they got going in the wrong direction. Some surrendered to their fear and ran to hide in caves and thickets. Some ran to the Philistines to defect. Some ran even further, crossing the Jordan river and defecting to their old enemy the Ammonites in modern day Jordan.

We have to decide, in the face of the devil's tyranny and his attacks: will we surrender, give up, defect? Will we take the easy way out, or will we take a stand and place our trust firmly and completely in the Lord? Saul panicked. His men were literally shaking in their boots (13:7) and starting to scatter. Samuel had instructed Saul to wait for him before he acted, but rather than trusting God and waiting on the Lord's timing, Saul acted foolishly, presumptuously, and took matters into his own hands. (You can read about that in chapter 13). Because of Saul's disobedience, the situation grew even more critical.

The bible tells us the Philistines camped at Micmash and sent raiding parties out to strike the surrounding towns and villages. They cut off supply lines and basically took over the area. The Israeli army was down to about 600 men versus 90,000 Philistines. Weapons had been seized and the bible says "**On the day of battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a**

sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them.” 1 Samuel 13:22

That’s about as bad as it can get. Your army is down to 600 guys against overwhelming enemy forces. Morale can’t get any lower. Men are hiding in caves, frightened. Your king has sinned against God and been told his actions would cost him the throne. You’ve only got two swords and two spears for the whole army. The enemy is watching your every move. I would say the situation is critical.

The bible says, **“Now a detachment of Philistines had gone out to the pass at Micmash.” 1 Samuel 13:23** This was very difficult terrain. There was one road through the pass and there was a Philistine garrison stationed on top of a cliff looking down over this pass. As every good western movie said, “we will cut them off at the pass.” That’s what the Philistines had done, stationing themselves on what looked like an inaccessible position.

Saul’s son Jonathan decided he had all he could stand of this situation. It was time to act. **Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.” “Do all that you have in mind,” his armor-bearer said. “Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.” 1 Samuel 14:6-7**

Let me tell you what I heard in this passage. Jonathan decides the situation is too critical to hide. It’s too critical to run. There is too much at stake to defect. It’s time to resist. It’s time to fight the enemy. It’s time to refuse to be terrorized any longer. It’s time to trust God, to put it all in the Lord’s hands and believe God for something miraculous. So he says to his young armor bearer in verse 1, **“Come, let’s go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side.” But he did not tell his father. 1 Samuel 14:1** Jonathan knew his father would stop him. It looked like a suicide mission. Two guys with one sword can’t take on a Philistine garrison on top of an inaccessible cliff!

I would like to tell you that Jonathan had awesome faith, but perhaps this is why I love this story so much. He doesn’t. He said, “Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf.” “Who knows? Maybe God will deliver us today. I know one thing: if God is going to deliver us and save us, he can do it by two guys with one sword and spear just as easily as he can do it by an army of 10,000. Who knows what God might do today?”

“Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf.” King James version reads, “It may be that the Lord will work for us.” Matthew Henry wrote, “**An active faith will venture far in God’s cause upon an ‘it may be’.**” ...**Matthew Henry** Jonathan didn’t know for sure, but he knew God. He was willing to trust God!

Today may be the day when God decides to heal you and deliver you and set you free. Who knows what the Lord may do today. Perhaps this is the day when God delivers. “Yes but the doctor said it was inoperable. Incurable. He said the odds were against me.” Let me tell you what Jonathan found out at Micmash: **God is never outnumbered!** Do you hear me? “**Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.**”

Another king of Israel called upon the Lord at another time and prayed, “**Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you.**” **2 Chronicles 14:11**

“Lord, you are our God. There is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty, against cancer, heart attack, against MS, against depression, against mental illness, against Tourettes, against arthritis, against the terror of the enemy. Help us. Don’t let our enemies prevail against you and against us as we come in your name.” God isn’t outnumbered!

Notice Jonathan called the Philistines “uncircumcised.” Circumcision for the Jews was a sign of the covenant between God and his people. I don’t think Jonathan was just “trash-talking” when he told his armor bearer “let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows.” I think he was pointing out a spiritual reality. He was reminding himself and the armor bearer that the enemy had no part in the covenant. The Philistines had no place with God.

Listen to me: that enemy that is coming against you has no part in the covenant of God. That cancer, that disease, that thing that is attacking you is uncircumcised – it has no place with God. Cancer isn’t under the protection of God’s covenant. That sin, that torment, that terror isn’t under the protection of God’s covenant, it is under his wrath, his judgment.

Our God is a deliverer! He is mighty to save and he rescues those who know him and love and serve him. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few. The bible says, “**Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?**” **Jeremiah 33:27** I have reason to believe the Lord is about to act in our behalf because we are in a covenant relationship with him through his Son Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter how impossible the odds, the numbers against you. Who knows? Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf today!

Jonathan says “we will show ourselves to the Philistines on top of the cliff. If they say, “wait there and we will come down to you” then we will stand our ground here and take our chances. But if they say, “come up to us” we will climb up because that will be our sign that the Lord has given them into our hands.”

Jonathan and his armor bearer step out from the wall of the cliff and make some noise so they are spotted by the sentries above them. “Look, the Hebrews are crawling out of their hiding places. Come on up boys. We’ll give you a lesson on how to be soldiers.” **“So Jonathan said to his armor bearer, ‘Climb up after me; the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel.’ Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.” 1 Samuel 14:12-14**

“Climb up after me; the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel.” Really?! You still just have one sword. You are still outnumbered a zillion to two. You still have to climb up and over a cliff. “God has given them into our hands.” Jonathan said. As Ned told Rooster Cogburn in True Grit, “I call that bold talk for a one-eyed fat man.” Outnumbered 90,000 to 600. Jonathan and a young armor bearer against 20 plus Philistines, and that’s after they climb hand over foot up a steep cliff to get there. What are the odds? Excellent because God is never outnumbered! The Lord is on our side and he delivers whether by many or by few!

Jonathan and his armor bearer killed some twenty men and then panic struck the Philistine camp. Apparently an earthquake caused the ground to shake. The bible says in verse 15 “It was a panic sent by God.” Saul and his guys saw something was going on and they assembled and went to battle. When the other soldiers who had fled or been in hiding heard that Saul had the Philistines on the run, the bible says **“They joined the battle in hot pursuit. So the Lord rescued Israel that day.” 1 Samuel 14:23**

Are you in a tight spot? Are you in a critical situation, desperate for an answer, a miracle, for deliverance or help? The odds are against you, outnumbered? No problem. God is never outnumbered. It doesn’t matter the odds. “Nothing can hinder the lord from saving, whether by many or by few.” We are going to pray. Who knows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf!