

I want you to picture someone who makes everything about themselves. When you get together with this person they spend the whole time talking about themselves.

They never ask you any questions about yourself, if they let you speak at all.

They always try to one-up your stories.

If they give money somewhere, they want everyone to know it was from them and they want their name on a building or a banner.

They want everyone to always be looking at them.

If an event doesn't cater towards them, then they aren't interested.

The kind of person who if they were a national leader they would always want to be on TV.

They would constantly watch videos of themselves speaking.

They would want to hear any positive word anyone ever said about them.

It probably was not hard for us to imagine this kind of person.

We probably have some of these people in our lives.

And we certainly see these people on our screens.

This morning we are going to see Saul be this kind of person.

And as we look closer.

I don't want us to just shake our heads at how bad these kinds of people are.

I want us to examine our own hearts.

To see how we can be just like them.

Turn with me to 1 Samuel 14:24-52

I. Selfishness, legalism, and empty religion lead to disaster.

This is what we see Saul do.

He makes this wonderful victory that Jonathan has brought all about himself.

So there's a lot of different twists and turns that the story is gonna take.

But I want you to keep that in mind as we unpack it.

Saul is trying to make everything about himself.

And him doing that is gonna lead all of these negative consequences.

Verse 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."**

Israel is tired.

They have succeeded in the battle.

And they are winning so much that they are physically exhausted.

So it is not that the battle has been difficult it is that winning. It has made them tired.

Their arms are hurting from killing so many Philistines.

God has already delivered.

He has brought them this wonderful victory.

And Saul sees that all of his people are exhausted.

And he does not respond by encouraging them that God has given them the victory.

He does not tell them let us continue until God tells us to stop.

He also doesn't say I think we can stop guys God has delivered us.

God will do it again next time so we don't have to finish today.

Let's all go home and take a nap and celebrate.

He does not do any of that instead he makes an oath.

He places a curse on his own people.

He tells them that nobody can eat for the whole rest of the day until it's done.

First, we need to see this curse is bad.

God has not asked him to do it.

There is no reason for him to make this.

There certainly is no reason to go to such an extreme.

Because people are exhausted and he wants to deny them what would restore them.

And he does so so that he can be avenged.

This is the problem and this is where Saul makes it about himself.
He does not say this is for God.
He does not say this is for the glory of God.
He does not say this is for the namesake of God.
He says this is about Saul.
This is about Saul being avenged.
This is about Saul being glorified.
In order for Saul to get this, no one else can eat.
He has taken a victory that should be about God and God's glory and try to make it about his own.

It is selfish and it is also legalistic.
There is no need to call for a fast.
There is no need right now to seek God desperately.
God has already blessed them.
God is in the middle of answering them.
When God is moving, it is not time to fast.
But Saul puts this unnecessary legalistic burden on his people.

It will immediately have negative consequences.
Verse 25-26, **"Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. 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."**

The people come and see honey.
Not just some honey.
But this entire forest is filled with honeycombs.
I don't have to worry about the bees or how to rip into them.
The honey is flowing so much that it is on the ground.
They are literally seeing the promised lamb that is flowing with honey.

But they cannot eat.
It is right in front of them, but their king has cursed them.
God clearly tried to bless them.

God set it up and let this honey flow; people are overwhelmed.
They could have been blessed and restored.
Instead, Saul does not allow it.
Because of his foolish oath.

I can only imagine how difficult this was.
I used to wrestle in high school and I had to cut weight so I had to lose about 10 pounds every single week.
There were a lot of meals and a lot of times that I could not eat, and I was hard-pressed.
And the absolute worst times was when I had to sit at a table and watch other people eat.
Or if I had to see sweets and things that I deeply desired, but could not touch.
This is what Israel experiences, but it's not something they impose on themselves. It is something Saul puts on them.
And immediately him making this about himself is causing his people to miss out on God's blessings.

Verse 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."**

Jonathan eats anyway.
And he eats out of ignorance; he didn't know.
He's been too busy fighting because he has led this entire battle by himself.
And of course, why would he assume that his father had made such a ridiculous vow?
It is not needed at all.
He does what anyone would naturally do which is eat.
It brightened his eyes.
This could be literally describing that his blood sugar is low, and the sweetness of the honey gets him back.

It also can just be that he has experienced the blessing and the goodness of God.

All of the people's eyes should be brightened, but they're not.

Verse 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."**

The people that Jonathan know he should not have done that.

They tell him about the oath that they've all been forced to take.

And the words here to describe the oath matter.

It is the same words that is used to describe Jephthah's foolish vow.

And all the people have been forced to do it, and they are even more exhausted now than they were before.

They are about to faint and fall over.

Verse 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.'"**

Jonathan rightly understands his father has done something wrong.

And he also says that his father is not just sitting against the people, but the land itself.

The land and the honey as servants of God and His creation sings and has been proclaiming His glory.

And the land has been working for a this very purpose.

The bees have been making honey to bless the people of God.

And instead, the honey is denied it's purpose.

The land that is long to see God people restored, doesn't get to see it.

Saul sins against the very ground itself.

Verse 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."**

Makes the obvious statement that it would've been a lot better. If the people got to experience God's blessing.

Making it about himself, so has denied the people what they needed. They would've been able to be restored and maybe they would've been able to continue the battle and done even more.

But now, because Saul has made it about himself, the victory is lessened. It is not as great of a victory as it could've been.

Now when we hear and read and think about this story.

When we think of the great victories over the Philistine, this one does not come to mind.

And if it does, we do not often think of the great faith of Jonathan we see the foolishness of his father.

The sad irony is that when we make things about ourselves, we lose out on the way God wanted to honor us.

So I could've experienced great blessing and honor and prestige and glory because of what God had done through him and his son.

And instead in trying to gain more glory for himself, he loses it.

Legalism often does this.

When we start to everyone around us to follow our laws, we miss out.

Take Sunday or the Sabbath for example.

God gave us rest.

A day to worship and to trust Him to provide.

It is meant to be a blessing.

But when we add legalism to it.

When we start telling everyone exactly what rest must look like.

That they better not go out to a restaurant because that forces other people to miss the Sabbath.

Or they better not send a single work email.

Or not travel more than 10 miles.

Then we ruin the honey and blessing.

And we turn the Sabbath into something we have to work to make sure we are doing instead of a gift we receive.

Verse 31, **"They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint."**

The battle is continuing.
But the people are getting very faint.
Notice it is progressing and getting worse.
They were hard-pressed; then they were faint. Now they are very faint.

Verse 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."**

And the people then sin.
Because they are so hungry, they eat the animals with blood.
God's law forbids them from doing this.
They are never to eat an animal with its blood.
But they've been driven to do so because of Saul's foolishness.
His legalism leads to disaster and sin.
They're so hungry they cannot wait to cook. They just need to eat.
So yes, they are responsible for their sin, but Saul is more responsible.
He is the king and it is his fault.
It is his actions that lead this to happen.

Because when we make things about ourselves.
When we seek our own glory above all.
When we desire for ourselves to be honored instead of God, it has negative, implications for other people.
Sin never just affects us.
When you send it is bad for your soul.
But it is also bad for the people around us.
And the legalism that comes with it destroys people.

And self-centered leaders lead people to sin in ways they would not have otherwise.
Particularly, that comes because of their desperation.
But there are many other ways that we see the selfishness and the self-centeredness of our leaders lead to people sinning.

Verse 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."**

Saul is informed about the people sinning.

And this should make him realize that he's done something wrong.

This should make him repent and realize how bad his oath was.

This should make him go and apologize to the people.

But instead, he says you have sinned

And he says that they have betrayed him.

And so he brings a stone.

So they can drain the blood and eat these animals properly

verse 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."**

And he approaches the people and tells them how they're gonna do it.

Verse 35, **"And Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first altar that he built to the Lord."**

This is a really interesting verse.

Because on the surface, it can seem good.

Saul is building an altar to worship God.

But there is a problem.

Should this be the very first time so does this?

Shouldn't Saul have done this at some other point in his life?

Also, why, now, after all has been rejected as king for wrongly making sacrifices when he should not have does he suddenly want to?

It appears that Saul is interested in the appearance of religion and not the power.

Saul wants to appear to worship God, even though he has not and does not.

Nowhere in this chapter does he show the right attitude and concern for God and his righteousness.

He is only concerned about the appearance and about himself.

He wants to appear as a righteous king so they'll make an altar.

This is the empty religion of Saul.

It is only after being rejected by God he cares.

Now he wants to follow the Law to the letter.

But his heart is not in it.

He does not want this out of worship and reverence for God.

It is purely about himself.

Verse 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."**

Then he immediately is back to being selfish.

He's all about himself again.

Now that everybody's fed that night, he wants them to go fight again.

Verse 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."**

This is one of the consequences of selfishness and legalism.

It keeps you from being able to hear the voice of God.

In the Old Testament, when God is silent, it is because of their sin.

This is also such a foolish question.

Saul has no need to ask God this.

This again is his empty religion.

He is asking God the day after seeing an incredible victory against the Philistines if God will help them beat the Philistines again.

God has already answered it.

He is in the middle of answering it.

This is like someone praying to ask God if they should worship with a local church on Sunday.

The answer is yes.

You don't need to ask.

Verse 38, **"And Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today."**

But Saul sees this is sin.

And he wants to get to the bottom of it.

There is irony that now Saul cares deeply about sin.

Not in his own life.

He is not deeply examining his own heart first.

He wants all the people to come together to see who did this.

Verse 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."**

Then we see him double down.

He makes another vow that is even worse than the first.

Before it was just a sin.

Before anyone who ate would be cursed.

But now Saul wants them executed.

And he goes so far to say that even if it was his own son.

This is beyond rash and foolish.

And no one answers.

They follow the proverbs and leave the fool to his folly.

But this is what we do when we are blinded by our sin.

Rather than stopping.

Rather than examining our own hearts and sins.

We just double down and blame everyone else around us.

Verse 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."**

He is getting ready to cast some lots.

And instead of casting all the people together like before.

Instead of following the normal procedure.

He just puts everyone else over there and himself and Jonathan here.

I think this is him trying to escape.

To make it easier to hide like he did with the baggage.

He thinks it is obviously those people over there.

Verse 41-42, **"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." "Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken."**

So, they cast lots.

And it falls on him and then Jonathan.

Now, these are things the priest would have.

We don't get a lot of details in the Bible.

It appears to be two stones; we think one white and one black.

One signifies judgment and the other innocence.

These are rarely used in the Bible.

And there is some debate what this means here.

God determines how lots fall.

But God has been silent.

So, some think maybe God did determine the lots because Jonathan has technically sinned and violated the oath.

Others believe the lots aren't working as intended because God is not speaking.

And Saul is just trying to force God's hand.

I honestly am not sure.

I think either interpretation could be right.

But it seems to me the main focus of our passage is how sinful and wrong Saul is.

The lot falling on Jonathan is just to point out even more how arrogant and wrong Saul has been.

Verse 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.'"**

Jonathan "confesses" his sin.

He tells it exactly.

And then he offers himself to die.

There may be some sarcasm here.

It certainly is a rebuke of his father's foolishness.

But it also reminds us of Jonathan's faith.

Verse 44, **"And Saul said, 'God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan.'"**

Saul just triples down.

He again refuses to repent.

He refuses to acknowledge this was a bad vow and all the sin is his fault.

He just says, "yup, you will die."

This is clearly the wrong choice.

And everyone knows it but Saul.

Verse 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.'"**

The people shout.

And they ask why the man who brought salvation should die?

And they rebuke Saul.

Because only Jonathan has actually worked with God.

Saul has had all of the formalism.

He has made vows and fasted.
He has followed all the law to the letter.
He has made altars and enforced worship.
He has made sure everyone is worshipping God rightly.
He has prayed and sought the will of God.
He has tried to find and eliminate sin in the people.
But his religion is empty and he has no faith.
Jonathan is the only one to actually seek God.

So, the people ransom him.
They take up an offering and pay a price to redeem him.
They buy his life.
Something Saul could have done, but refuses to.

Verse 46, **"Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place."**

Again Saul refuses to repent.
He just gives up and quits the battle.
He goes home to sulk and lick his wounds.
He has a chance to embrace faith again.
But he would rather keep his pride and empty religion.

Verse 47-48, **"When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them. And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them."**

And Saul continues to fight.
He fights over and over again.
Against all the enemies of God's people.
And God does bless him.
He continually wins battles and saves God's people.
He brings vengeance and victory.

But there is something he never brings.
He never brings peace.

Verse 52, **"There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself."**

All of his days there is war.
He wins battles, but never the war.
He never sees peace in his day.
The fullest blessing of God for kings is not victory in battle, but peace.
And Saul never knows peace.

We would be wrong to assume that because Saul wins battles, and because God uses him that God is pleased.
Too often we make this mistake with churches.
We think because it is growing God must be blessing it.
Or because anything we do is successful that God is pleased.
Sometimes God blesses in small ways, but He does not bring peace.

This is the unfortunate place Saul is in.
And it is all his own doing.
He has made everything about himself.
He is only interested in looking like he is following God.
He wants all the outward stuff of faith, but he does not actually have any.
And this is the same path I see believers on all the time.
I see countless Christians interested in the appearance of Christianity and none of the fruit.
There are those who are very interested in the morals and rules.
They want to look like Christians, and talk like them, and vote like them, dress like them, watch some movies like them.
They might go to church and listen to some Christian music.
But their hearts have no faith.
They are like puppets going through the motions with no life.

If we actually know Jesus.
If we believe the gospel that we profess.
Than we must actually have faith and life.
It is not enough to just not be selfish or not legalistic.
We must be born again and alive in God.
And the Christian life is not about us at all.
It is all about Christ.
It is all about Jesus.
Yes, we need to live out our faith.
That does involve outward obedience.
But our inner life has to be all about Christ.
Our lives should not be centered on ourselves, but on Jesus.
Because if we lives selfishly, legalisticly, and with an empty religion it leads to disaster.

But if we live towards Christ, it leads to everlasting life.
And the wonder of the gospel is that God forgives our selfishness.
That there is grace and mercy for Saul and for us.
If we would only stop talking.
If we would stop making everything about ourselves.
And if we would just choose Jesus instead.