

# 'The Rise of the Kings Series'

## Sermons in the Book of 1 Samuel

### Message 21 - 'The Vow of a Fool' 1 Samuel 14: 24 - 52



Saul was intent on snatching defeat out of the jaws of victory. His actions and words revealed the spiritual condition of his heart. Much can be seen of our standing and growth in grace by the way that we act and speak to those around us, and certainly to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. With Saul, his words revealed his heart clearly and how it was controlled by pride, foolishness and deceit. He tried to impress people with his spirituality, and as such said all manner of foolish things, and this would be an attempt to hide the reality that he was walking far away from the Lord. We can see the following:

**The Vow of a Fool (v24-35)** - Saul's desire to have the pre-eminence is clear. His heart is not right with the Lord, and he foolishly forces his army to agree to a vow of fasting. Saul didn't impose the fast because it was the will of God, but because he wanted his soldiers to think that he was a man of great spiritual standing. Saul was not walking by faith, but placing his trust in the externals of religion, fasting, the Ark, and thinking that these would prompt the Lord to move. The command that Saul gives is also ridiculous, what type of sensible commander would deprive his troops of food and energy in the midst of a conflict with a powerful enemy, who were at this moment vulnerable and on the back foot. If we are obedient to the Lord, walking in His will, then He gives us strength in the situations He has given us, we walk by faith. However, if we obey unnatural human regulations, and legalistic impositions, then we will not know the Lord's blessing and strengthening. The creation and spreading of extra-biblical rules and regulations only leads into sin, the Scriptures alone are the sufficient rule for faith and life. Jonathan hungry after a great battle desires something to eat. He spots some lush honey on a honeycomb that had dropped to the ground and eats. Saul's decision had weakened the soldiers and hindered their ability to pursue the enemy, not only that, but the men's hunger was now to such an extent that it was affecting their judgement and behaviour. It also led them to completely lose control the following day. Saul's sham piety would cause his men to stumble and violate God's law. Saul attempted to place a worshipful emphasis on the carnal chaos his foolish vow had created. The men were not interested in worship, just filling their bellies.

**The Judgement of a Fool (v36-46)** - Saul's actions had seriously hindered not only the men, but also the military advance. He tries to make up for it but God remained silent on the matter. God has all things under His control, in His hand, and He was going to use this foolish vow to rebuke Saul, and honour Jonathan. Saul would have the truth that his men loved Jonathan more than himself made very clear, so much so that they were prepared to stand with Jonathan against Saul. Saul knew that Jonathan had been missing from the ranks, the outcome was the same whichever way he looked at it, Jonathan was to be slain for his guilt. They cast lots, and the lot falls on Jonathan. The Lord could have overruled, but His plan was to reveal all things so that Jonathan would be vindicated, and Saul's pride would be deflated. As Saul pronounces the death of Jonathan, the people intervene, and praise Jonathan, not Saul, and ask the right question, if the Lord had granted such a great victory to Jonathan, using him in this way, why should he be executed? Jonathan was saved, but the Philistines had moved away, and Saul and his army had to retreat.

**The Verdict of History (v47-52)** - Saul, despite his foolishness, was able to establish his throne, and drive back the Philistines. A summary of Saul's rule is placed here, rather surprisingly, and we are told that Saul also recruited every good man he met. There is a distinction that helps us in our understanding. The verdict of history shows that as we observe the external achievements of Saul, his success, he made his mark well. He succeeded in war, he defeated his enemies, and he was helpful in delivering Israel. The final word on the life of Saul is not found here. The most important verdict, more important than the recognition of history, is the verdict of the great Judge, God. The factors with Him, are not success, but faithfulness, faithfulness to His Word, to His promises. Saul was a failure in this. In eternity, godly obedience matters more than earthly success.



## Penzance Baptist Church

'Upholding the Ordinary Means of Grace'

Pastor Jonathan Stobbs