

Sermon Title: “**Caught Up in The Moment**”

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

Speaker: Pastor Damian Mericka

Text: Acts 23:12-22

Introduction



CarverStone

As much as we try to plan, sometimes the enemy-or life in general- will throw us curve balls. In those moments we face the need to make decisions we did not anticipate. *How can we avoid being rash, yet decisive in such moments?* Much has to do with our focus- ***are we focused on ourselves more than Jesus?*** In our text today, a rash vow is made among those convinced Paul needs to die, and a young man must make a decision that could cost him much than the loss of an uncle. *Confusion touches everyone as God's Kingdom continues to come into the world, and people must face and answer the question- **just who is Jesus Christ?** As we trust His **leading into** the conversation, we must*

*trust His **work through** it as well.*

I. When it is about Me more than He! (1 Samuel 14:24-46)

*“Now the Israelites were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, “Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, **before I have avenged myself on my enemies!**” So none of the troops tasted food. The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground. When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out; yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath.”*

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Samuel 14:24-26 NIV

Talk about *unmet expectations*, Saul the first King of Israel failed to live up to the role he stepped in to. Though outwardly he seemed the best fit, inwardly he was far from it. Saul was constantly driven by his fear, which in turn was very contagious to the Nation of Israel as some would defect to the enemy for survival. ***Saul was learning that if the leader lacks courage, the people will lack commitment.*** Saul found himself often caught up in the moment unprepared, and in this place made rash decisions that hurt himself and those he led.

In our text, the Philistines had pressed against Israel again taking land and resource, along with those enslaved or simply choosing to defect because that was the better option for survival. Yet Saul's son, Jonathan, would lead his armor bearer against them and through their faith in God would lead the Nation to a place where God did the miraculous. His heart declared,

“Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.” -1 Samuel 14:6

The difference between the King and his son was that of faith. Saul was too *focused on himself* to place faith in God; Jonathon was too *focused on God* to place faith anywhere else but God! This was well placed by Jonathon, for God did bless and brought a great confusion upon the Philistine army, allowing Israel to fight and push them back.

However, while Jonathon was walking by faith, he missed the memo his dad put out while walking by sight. Saul ordered all to fast until he had revenge upon *his* enemies. This vow, or oath, was the fruit of Saul’s pride. He empowered his fear and could not lead, therefore he was trying to *force others to step up* as well as *force God’s hand* to act. The result of this was an exhausted military facing fatigue amidst the moment of victory; but they could not celebrate it due to their exhaustion. Nor was the victory as far reaching as it could have been.

Jonathon had broken this vow unaware and had eaten some honey. When confronted by members of the military, he replied,

“Jonathan said, “My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey. How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?” -1 Samuel 14:29-30

Things only got worse from this point. When the day finally ended and the vow accomplished, the soldiers rushed upon the livestock taken back and consumed them as fast as they could butcher them. This act violated the Law of Moses (blood was not drained). Seeing how far the pendulum has swung from his fear of the enemy overcoming him, he now has the fear that his own military will overcome him due to his rash decision making.

Unfortunately, this resulted in Saul making *more* rash decisions. Finally, the priest steps in and requests that they ask God first and see what He wants done. *God did not answer*. Saul then points the finger to the men he was leading as the reason God was not blessing them. Over time, as people were dumping their sins out on the ground awareness surfaced of Jonathon’s act against his dad’s vow. Assuming that was the source of God’s silence, he is ready to run Jonathon through with his sword if not for the military throwing themselves in from of him. Victory came that day due to Jonathon’s focus on God and his placing faith in Him.

Both *cowardice* and *courage* are contagious. When it is more about me than God, *cowardice will win the day*. When it is more about God than me, *courage will win the day*. We need to be cautious with our vows; *if our focus is on ourselves to force something from God we are set up for silence from Him. If our vows fruit out from our relationship with Him, then His voice we will hear!*

II. More About Me leads toward Rash Decision Making (Acts 23:12-15)

“The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. More than forty men were involved in this plot. They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.” -Acts 23:12-15

In our text we follow up from last week where the mediation of Rome failed to identify and resolve the issue Jewish leadership had with Paul. After the Sanhedrin turned into a mob scene, Paul is again spending the night in a Roman prison. However, those who are against Paul and his message about Jesus are far from willing to simply let this go.

We do not know much about this group of more than 40 Jewish men who bound themselves under an oath to fast from both food and drink. What we do know is that they were not about to wait for God to take care of Paul, but perhaps felt like *right was on their side* and God would bless their decision. In a sense, their oath was an effort to force God’s hand and kill Paul. If they are successful, then God’s silence *by not stopping this* would affirm His blessing of this oath and act.

This is further affirmed as they go to the leadership of the Temple—most likely some from the Sanhedrin— and invite both their blessing and participation. This scene is reminiscent of one who came to Temple leadership to orchestrate a betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

“Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.” -Matthew 26:14-16

*When leaders lose in the eye of the public, they tend to make alliances to help their cause with people they normally would not associate with. **Like king Saul, their eyes were on themselves and in the moment were making rash decisions.*** Cowardice is winning the day with them. This band of determined killers should have been arrested themselves by the Temple officials. Instead, they were blessed, *calling evil good*. Together, the plan is set and soon to be put into motion.

III. More about Jesus leads toward Kingdom Decisiveness (Acts 23:16-21)

“But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.” The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?” He said: “Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the

Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request. " -Acts 23:16-21

The enemy may have been in motion with plans to work evil, but God is already on the move and His declaration over Paul's life stands against any weapon formed against him!

*While many had their eyes on themselves and were in the moment making rash decisions with cowardice, a young man like **Jonathon**, had his eyes on God and moved with courage!*

Again, we know very little about the people in this situation. Yet what we do know speaks volumes of their character. This young man, Paul's nephew, overhears the collaboration for Paul's death. **How?** Paul was formerly a Pharisee; *that line of work was traditionally a family occupation- like the trade of fishermen.* This conversation most likely happened on the Temple grounds where the Sanhedrin convened, taking place while everyone is still hot and divided from *the pot stirring Jesus did with Paul!*

This young man put himself, his mother (Paul's sister) and anyone else connected to them in grave danger by doing this. Slipping through the Temple area *with the ease of a child in their own neighborhood*, he finds Paul who was held in the Roman Fortress which was also on the Temple grounds. How old was he? Anyone's best guess- however the way the Roman Commander Lysias *took his hand and led him aside* indicates a younger age- most likely pre or early teenage years. Further, someone of that age running around would not be outside the norm therefore not drawing attention to themselves that a younger or older person would have.

What difference would one young man make? I wonder if he was thinking about the same story of Jonathon that perhaps *Uncle Paul* had taught him? I cannot but hear Jonathon's words,

"Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

-1 Samuel 14:6

Note that no names are given, just the details of the mob under oath and the collaboration with the Sanhedrin. Further, no more information was needed for Lysias. This kind of underhanded treachery is unfortunately what the Jewish Temple leadership were known for (as was Rome) and most governmental leadership in the world today. The fact that the request for Paul was waiting for Lysias' permission shows the urgency in the young man's efforts. ***This was a divine appointment!***

Caught up in the moment, the Temple Leadership made ***rash decisions*** out of *cowardice*. This young man, caught up in the same moment chose ***Kingdom Decisiveness*** out of *courage* because his eyes were on Jesus (through his uncle Paul). <- I love that "Uncle Paul"!

IV. In The Moment Stability (Acts 23:22)

“The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.” -Acts 23:22

These words from the Roman Commander affirm the potential danger this young man and his family could face if the conspirators find out who snitched on them. I’m sure *snitches get stiches* was not a phrase back then, but most assuredly something similar was threatened out!

Like *Saul and Jonathon*, the *Temple leadership* and a *young nephew*, we too will be caught up in moments where we will need to act fast. What is the fruit of our actions in those moments? While we may not be facing *Philistine raiders* or a *mob seeking our death*, **we do face Kingdom opportunities to stand for Jesus in the unexpected urgency of the moment.**

When we have our eyes more on ourselves than Jesus, we may make rash decisions where like dominions, one flows right after the other. *Cowardice* is the fear that surrounds our self-focus; *fear of losing what we value. In this place we make it all about me!*

When we have our eyes more on Jesus than ourselves, we may act courageously with Kingdom Decisiveness. *Courageously* for it is Christ in us overflowing through us when we recognize He is in control, He is allowing this, and He can be glorified through this. *In this place it is all about Jesus, and we cannot lose anything in Him!*

Who we are focused on is who others see in such moments we get caught up in- *me or He!*

Finally, Jesus cautions us against running into oaths and vows during such moments of crisis we get caught up in. We must remember we cannot move God to act on our behalf with such oaths.

Rather, Jesus said to simply say yes or no.

“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” -Matthew 5:33-37

Dear Saints, *Be in control of the moment; not controlled by the moment.*

Cowardice and Courage are both equally contagious. Which are you more known for?

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” -Romans 8:37-39

Be in Him, and He will fill you anew with His Spirit to overflow through you and be Glorified in such moments that He sweeps you up into!