

Row the Boat - The Dawning of a New Day
Jason Gaston, FM Pastor
Sept. 26-27, 2020

Beginning somewhere in the 17th century and carrying on much through the 19th century, the American Spirit of Adventure and Exploration was at its height as brave men and women would saddle up and head into the great unknown to see parts of our nation no Westerner had yet seen. "The American Frontier" as it would come to be known, was expanding through people who embodied courage and risk.

In the early 1800's, a young man by the name of John Wesley Powell, was growing in his love of science, history, and literature. His life dream was to teach, and Powell would eventually realize that dream and begin his life of teaching in a small sleepy pocket of our growing nation.

However, in 1861, news of a Civil War breaking out had reached the quiet town where Powell was teaching. Immediately, he felt the call, left his job and enlisted in the Union Army and earned the ranking of 2nd Lt. Just a few months later, on April 6, 1862, at the Battle of Shiloh in western Tennessee, Powell was struck in the right forearm by a bullet, shattering the bones. Two Days later, Powell would have his arm amputated.

A few years after losing his arm, Powell would put the courage that was forged on the battlefield and the passion for the created world together, and he would lead the first recorded expedition of the Colorado River through the heart of the

Grand Canyon. It was, in many estimations, one of the final arenas of the American frontier yet to be explored.

The journey would require every ounce of courage the 10 men on the trip could muster. The Canyon was dangerous. And unknown.

If you've ever hiked the grand canyon, you know that the terrain is not just difficult, it can at times be absolutely overwhelming. This was no small task.

The rag tag group of 10 men journeyed down the river in clunky wooden boats, hoping and believing for the best. In his personal journal that he kept which would later be turned into a book titled "Down the Great Unknown" Powell says the following as his team began officially entering into the walls of the canyon journey:

*"We are now ready to start on our way down the Great Unknown. We have but a month's rations remaining. The flour has been resifted through the mosquito-net; the spoiled bacon has been dried, and the worst of it boiled; the few pounds of dried apples have been spread in the sun, the sugar has all melted, and gone on its way down the river; **but we have a large sack of coffee.** We are three quarters of a mile in the depths of the earth, and the great river shrinks into insignificance, as it dashes its angry waves against the walls and cliffs, that rise to the world above; We have an unknown distance yet to run; an unknown river yet to explore.*

What falls there are, we know not; what rocks beset the channel, we know not; what walls rise over the river, we know not. Ah, well!"

Ah, well.

We're living in some pretty unique times. Division at every corner, traps of social media are set on every path, and navigating those waters are going to be tricky. May I propose, however, that we need a generation of Christians with an "Ah well" mentality. When the odds seemed stacked against us, but the promise of something new ahead... we press forward into the unknown.

In the Book of 1 Samuel, we find the Israelites facing an unknown future. Chapter 14 begins with Israel's army hiding among the caves of Gibeah after having been defeated in battle by the Philistines. But why were they hiding?

Israel had just defeated the Amorites and Jonathan defeated a group of Philistines in a small back alley bar fight, so Saul foolishly declared war against the Philistines who were "as numerous as the sand."

Saul's soldiers were overmatched, but not according to Saul's ego. Saul sends his troops to battle without seeking leadership from the LORD first.

Needless to say, they're like cats with their tails between their legs right now. Not only did they get their tails whooped, but their land got raided as well while they were hiding. In fact, it tells us that there were no Blacksmiths in the land, because

the Philistines didn't want them making their own weapons. Only two people had weapons: Saul and Jonathan. TWO people with weapons left. That's where we pick up in Chapter 14.

1 Samuel 14:1-2, 6-14 CSB

That same day Saul's son Jonathan said to the attendant who carried his weapons, "Come on, let's cross over to the Philistine garrison on the other side." However, he did not tell his father. 2 Saul was staying under the pomegranate tree in Migron on the outskirts of Gibeah. The troops with him numbered about six hundred.

6 Jonathan said to the attendant who carried his weapons, "Come on, let's cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will help us. Nothing can keep the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

7 His armor-bearer responded, "Do what is in your heart. Go ahead! I'm completely with you."

8 "All right," Jonathan replied, "we'll cross over to the men and then let them see us. 9 If they say, 'Wait until we reach you,' then we will stay where we are and not go up to them. 10 But if they say, 'Come on up,' then we'll go up, because the Lord has handed them over to us—that will be our sign."

11 They let themselves be seen by the Philistine garrison, and the Philistines said, "Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they've been hiding!" 12 The men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armor-bearer. "Come on up, and we'll teach you a lesson!" they said.

“Follow me,” Jonathan told his armor-bearer, “for the Lord has handed them over to Israel.” 13 Jonathan climbed up using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer behind him. Jonathan cut them down, and his armor-bearer followed and finished them off. 14 In that first assault Jonathan and his armor-bearer struck down about twenty men in a half-acre field.

3 things I want us to see today:

1. God Uses Our “Perhaps” and Not Our “Personal Power”

“Come on, let’s cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will help us. Nothing can keep the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.”
1 Samuel 14:6b CSB

Why is this statement that Jonathan makes so important? It’s a stark contrast to the leader that the Israelites wanted, Saul. Remember, just one page back in the timeline of events that happened that day, Saul made an attack on the Philistines, except it didn’t go as planned. They got routed. The primary reason? It wasn’t because they were overmatched. That’s pretty much the story of God’s people.....always overpowered and overmatched by human standards.

Saul, just the day prior, determined in his heart and his mind that he needed not the approval of God to fight & win the battle. He determined that it would be won through his own strength and the wisdom of his plan. Down goes Frazier!! Now,

Saul is out in Migron showing licking his wounds. He got molly whopped

So where’s irony in that, you might ask? If you move just a touch further back in the timeline of Israel’s story, right here in 1 Samuel, you’ll see that Israel wanted something that all the other nations had. Do you remember what that was?

A king. A king *like all the other nations*. Strong & wise

But the reality is that they had a **better** king...but they took their eyes off him. They stopped trusting. God gave them their wish, and who did they get?

Saul. The one who was *strong in the eyes of people*. He looked the part. He fit the bill on the outside. Yet here we are, just a few chapters later, and their earthly king has already failed them MISERABLY. His wise plans were thwarted and his strength was failing.

In the economy of the Kingdom of God, an investment in personal strength is an investment in a crashing market.

What God is after is not your skill, he’s not after your strength. He cares not about the size of your home, the car you drive, the amount of friends you have on social media, or the platform you’ve been given for influence. He’s after the posture of your heart. Like Pastor J.D. mentioned last week, *Ordinary people doing extraordinary things for the kingdom.*

Oh how beautiful Jonathan displays this right here in 1 Samuel 14.

“Perhaps God. For nothing can keep the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.”

- 1 Samuel 14:6b

In its purest form, what kind of posture is that? **TRUST.**
Trusting in the heart of God and his promises to his people.
Throwing every ounce of the potential outcome completely on God, and not on himself.

How is your trust in the promises of God today?

“Brothers, a lack of familiarity with the Word of God is very often the seed-plot of our doubts! Half our fears arise from neglect of the Bible.” - Charles H. Spurgeon

Because of God’s promise to his people, and Jonathan knowing the promise of God towards his people, he saw things differently. He had a different lens in which he saw the battle, and it led him to action.

If you are in Christ, you have a new lens in which you not only SEE the world, but also how you ENGAGE with the world on a day to day basis. How well you know those promises will determine your PERHAPS.

Boat Oar Illustration: Hold up wooden boat paddle/oar

- Some see this as
 - Backup in the boat in case motor dies
 - A literal paddle for a canoe
 - A baseball drill
 - Grow up in Eastern NC? This is a stirrer for a massive pot of Brunswick stew

- So many different things some of you see when you look at this.....
- If you were to ask a University of Minnesota football player what he sees when he looks at this oar, he sees something *utterly different*.

2017, the university hired a charismatic coach by the name of PJ Fleck. He brought an energy, passion, and skillset to the program that hadn’t been seen in decades. He also brought a new thought process as he was determined to change the culture of the program and the university. It started with an OAR and a motto: **ROW THE BOAT**. Row the boat is pretty basic in it’s understanding....Every person contributes. Trust the process. You don’t jump out of the boat when the storm hits, you put the paddle back in the water and keep rowing.

After a few seasons of average football, in 2019 the team was 9-0 for the first time since 1905. There had been a change in the culture. ***The people in the program were beginning to see and act differently.*** Expectations had changed. Up and down the hallway of their locker rooms are oars, personalized by each player’s commitment to keep rowing, keep trusting, keep believing.

My wife was on the crew team at UNCW, I remember watching her row. There’s only one person who can see the river ahead....The Coxswain. The Captain of the boat. The people in the boat just set their eyes on the Coxswain and row with their backs facing their destination and their trust in their captain.

How much more should the promises of God reshape the lives of believers. They reshape the way we see the world. They reshape the way we live and act in the world.

Jonathan had a firm grasp on this, and it caused him to act.

Here's the thing....Jonathan was not promised he'd come out on the other side alive! He just knew either way.....God be glorified. I'll row the boat. You see what's ahead, not me. You tell me to go, I'm in.

Where have you stopped rowing?

My gut tells me that if we dig deep enough, we'll find areas of our lives where we have relied on our own strength and not in the beauty of the promises of God.

We have a God that is for us. We have a God that is on our side. We have a God that has already won the battle. So keep fighting. Keep trusting. Keep ROWING. EYES ON JESUS (EOJ!)

2. You Never Row Alone

Remember Jonathan's halftime speech....

"Come on, let's cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will help us. Nothing can keep the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

His armor-bearer responded "Do what is in your heart. Go ahead! I'm completely with you."

1 Samuel 14:6b-7

Saved by the Bell timeout here, okay?

If I'm the armor bearer, I'm looking at Jonathan and I'm like "What you talkin bout Willis?!?!?!"

But that's not what Armor Bearers did. They were steadied with courage and equipped for the battle. And their unwavering courage filled their leader with confidence.

Jonathan needed someone to go to battle alongside him. We all do. We all need someone to row the boat in life with. Without them, we die.

True friendship, as Ralph Waldo Emerson once said "is not just that you love me, but it's also you seeing the same truth as I do." I would add to that, "even when I cannot see it."

If we're gonna make it, we need an armor bearer. A friend. A friend that

- *"A friend loves at all times.." Prov. 17:17*
- *"A friend who sticks closer than a brother. Prov. 18:24*

Some of you are gathered at home right now, **alone**. And it's been like that for a while, maybe since COVID started, maybe even before....this has just highlighted your loneliness. YOU. ARE. NOT. ALONE. Let us connect with you. Let your pastors and staff at Summit help you get connected to some friends that can help you walk with Jesus for the long haul.

- Some of you are sitting in home gatherings and small groups this week, and you are shoulder-to-shoulder (with masks on of course) yet you still feel alone. **You're not alone.**

- Kids and Students: You may know what it feels like to walk down a crowded hallway at school and feel like you're the only one facing issues. **You're not alone**

Eph 1 tells us we've been sealed with the Holy Spirit inside us.
Col 1 would tell us that Christ IN us is the hope of Glory.
John 15 tells us that Jesus calls us friends.

In Christ? You're never alone. He lives in you. And he's also given you a tangible expression of that nearness.....THE CHURCH. Living life side by side, attacking the gates of hell TOGETHER. **Don't row alone.**

3. Your Faithful Rowing Spurs on Others

So, I intentionally left out the last few verses when we first read the story, because I love what happens here at the end. Remember, Jonathan and his armor bearer attack. They strike down 20+ men in a half acre field. God causes confusion and hits the Philistine camp, they're running around like their hair is on fire, and the Israelites that were in hiding begin to gain hope. Saul joins the fights, and then we read this:

When all the Israelite men who had been hiding in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they also joined Saul and Jonathan in the battle. So the Lord saved Israel that day.

1 Samuel 14:22-23a CSB

I don't believe that it was just Jonathan's action that led to the victory that day. It was the posture of faithfulness. Obedience. **And that obedience and faithfulness of Jonathan spurred**

the entire remaining Army back into action. It spurred Saul back out from underneath that pomegranate tree and back into the fight.

Here's what I know, and I think you may know this too. This is an epic story. But let's be honest, epic stories don't change us. They don't change us because we *don't* naturally trust God, or lean on each other, or spur one another on. We are much more like Saul than like Jonathan. We need someONE to change us.

That's the beauty of Jesus. Jesus came to save people like us.

Where does this faith to **keep rowing** come from? Where do we get the power to say, with Jonathan, "**Perhaps** God will work?" Because of Jesus. Jesus trusted that God would deliver him even through the grave. Jesus went, without an armor-bearer and faced God's ultimate enemy, not an army, but sin, death, and Hell. What a beautiful name it is. Jesus.

With our Eyes on Jesus, we have every reason to say, "Perhaps God will work." If God has already conquered sin, hell, and death for us, by grace in Christ, we can look at the cross and with great confidence say, "God has already worked, perhaps he will work again."

So in Christ, regardless of our circumstance, we can keep rowing. Keep rowing, together.

You may be here today, and you got that report from the Doctor you did not want to get.....YET YOU KEEP ROWING. You bring courage to our hearts.

You might be the parent overwhelmed with 3 kids in virtual school and trying to balance full-time jobs in the home...YET YOU KEEP ROWING. You bring courage to our hearts.

You may be the student who has faced all kinds of challenges in your family life, YET YOU KEEP ROWING. You bring courage to our hearts.

You may be experiencing pain and loss all around you, yet because you trust the promises of God....YOU KEEP ROWING. You bring courage to our hearts.

Keep Rowing. Your faithfulness spurs us all. And remember....***THE LORD SAVED ISRAEL THAT DAY.*** And he's doing it every day until finally on that ONE DAY, when he makes all things new, the battle will finally be over.

Pray