

1 Samuel 14:24-46: Eight Simple Steps to Being Completely Unreasonable

This morning as we continue looking at 1 Samuel, I want to talk about those who are unreasonable. I think we have all known people who are insufferably unreasonable. Everything you say or do in their presence is misconstrued or turned around or manipulated in some way. They are defined by unreasonability. And, if we're honest, we are all a bit unreasonable from time to time. Maybe more at some times than at others.

But what we need to understand is that the gospel calls us to be reasonable people.

Phil 4:5: Let your reasonableness [or "gentleness"] be known to everyone.

Jas. 3:17: But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

We also reason with people to bring them to faith in Jesus. We explain to them the gospel and answer their objections about Jesus. That's what Paul did in **Acts 17:2, 9; 18:4,19; 24:25**.

The definition of reasonable is really packaged within the word itself. Able to be reasoned with. It's the idea that we are humble enough to allow someone to come to us, present information that might change our mind about something. It could be about theology, about a financial decision, a major life decision, or even something as small as what restaurant to eat at. Even if we don't agree with the person, we can be reasonable.

And being reasonable requires several things:

Manner - We can be approached by others who feel safe disagreeing with us. We're not critical or sharp or argumentative.

Humility: A reasonable person knows that they don't know everything. And that they've been wrong about things in the past and, depending upon the situation, they may be wrong right now.

Able to be persuaded: Someone who is reasonable is willing to let other people talk without interruption. And get this: a reasonable person actually listens to what that other person has to say. They don't sit there thinking about what they're going to say next in order to look good or smart or win the argument. Then they respond to what the person actually said.

We are to be reasonable because we are made in the image of God who is also a reasonable God.

Isa. 1:18: Come now, let us reason together says the Lord. Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Just think about that kind of language. God does not owe us his reasonability, he doesn't owe us any explanation at all about himself or our destiny. And yet he says, "Hey, let's sit down and have a conversation about how you can avoid my eternal damnation and your sins can be made white as snow." What God does that? Our God. He is a reasonable God. And calls his people to be reasonable people. The problem is that we're not always reasonable.

To make matters worse, it's hard to convince someone when they're being unreasonable. The trap that they are in is that they think they are reasonable, they think that what they are doing is justified and logical and good. And even believers who struggle with lack of reasonableness think they are holy and righteous and following the ways of God when they are actually their hearts are hard and their necks are stiff.

I mean, how many people have you ever talked to when they're being honest with you about the struggles they have in life just say "You know, I'm not a very reasonable person"? I can't think of any off the top of my head. No one has ever confessed unreasonableness to me.

Yet we all know unreasonable people. Whether we don't want to approach them about something because we know their temper will flare up, they lash out at the oddest times, or they defend themselves when confronted.

Saul is the quintessential unreasonable person. Yahweh has just given Israel an unprecedented victory in the midst of an overwhelmingly oppressive situation. Remember just 5 miles north of Jerusalem is the massive Philistine army - tens of thousands of troops. Saul's army is down to 600 and the Philistines have closed off all the roads so Saul has no backup coming.

And in the middle of that situation, God used a small attack by Saul's faithful son, Jonathan, to create a huge victory. What started as a small attack killing 20 people in a Philistine garrison turned into a complete upheaval in the Philistine army. Philistines were killing each other, Saul's men were running back into battle instead of away from battle, and even the Hebrew mercenaries who had been fighting with the Philistines were now fighting against them.

Now, that should be cause for celebration. But instead it turns into one of the most pathetic displays of unreasonable insanity in OT history. And so what I did - tongue-in-cheek - is titled my message: Eight Simple Steps to Being Completely Unreasonable.

1) You threaten when you should rejoice. Read 24-26

Unreasonable people often don't rightly understand the situation they are in. Either they jump to wrong conclusions without all the information or they have all the information and don't come to the conclusion that most people would come to.

Here, Saul should be dancing for joy because the Lord is in the middle of giving Israel an unbelievable victory. Really, it is an impossible victory that only he could orchestrate. And Saul should be happy about that.

But instead of encouraging his men because of what the Lord is doing, he is threatening them with curses. He lays a unilateral oath on his own soldiers that no one can eat anything until evening once he is avenged.

Now, I've never been in a real battle or any sort of serious hand-to-hand combat. I did wrestle a little in high school, and the only thing I can tell you is that you are completely exhausted after only a few minutes.

And what Israel and the Philistines are engaged in is not modern warfare. This was hand to hand combat of ancient warfare. It's was swords and spears and wrestling and bows and arrows battling for your life.

We also read in **Vs. 31** that the Israelites battled from Michmash to Aijalon. What does that mean? That's 15 miles Israel based the Philistines in battle. That's like chasing people in combat from here to WalMart. That's a long way.

But you can't eat any food. If you do eat food, you're cursed and will die at Saul's hand. What sense does that make? It makes no sense. Maybe it makes Saul look determined and fierce, but his people can't sustain this demand. And in the end he looks foolish because he threatened people when he should have been rejoicing.

2) You seek vengeance.

We know that Saul is threatening his men, but why is he threatening them? I want you to notice here the reason for this command. **Read 24**

You know what he's doing? He's fueling his own pride. Battle "until **I am** avenged." He wants blood. He wants to be back on top and he wants to make sure the Philistines know it.

Well, who put him on top in the first place? God did. Who cut him down to size? God did.

If you're life revolves around making you look good and settling scores with your enemies and living for vengeance, you will live a life of perpetual unreasonableness. People who live for vengeance always do completely unreasonable things. People who want to settle scores all the time never actually get ahead. Their

life begins to be consumed by the destruction of other people, rather by being satisfied in the glory of God. And they can't even see it. Sometimes we don't even see it in our own heart.

We dwell on the downfall of others, fantasize about their undoing, their calamity. Maybe we even try to entice them to that end.

As followers of Jesus we need to be very careful not to go down that road. The Lord says vengeance is whose? Mine.

Rom 15:17: Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.'"

The gospel reminds us that although we can and should seek justice through proper means if someone has wronged us, ultimately it's not up to us to exact vengeance. There will be people who get away with wrongdoing. There will be people who wrong us and we never even know who it is.

But we need to remind ourselves that any sin that a person has committed against us is first and foremost a sin against whom? God. And God will settle it. He will either settle it in hell forever where there will be more judgment than we can possibly imagine. Or he will settle it at the cross where their sin, like our sin, has been graciously laid on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Vengeance is God's, not ours. When we forget that, it makes us unreasonable.

3) You turn blessing into cursing. **Read 25-28**

When the people of Israel were going to enter into the Promised Land, God continually told them the great things that were in the land. And of course one of the most famous description in the Bible is that it is a land flowing with what? Milk and Honey.

The first time God promises this is in **Exodus 3:8** when God is talking to Moses from the burning bush and he says he will deliver the people of Israel from the Egyptians and bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey. To some extent it's just a euphemism - a catch-all saying - that just means the land is lavishly rich. It's a good land.

But there was also a sense in which it was literally true. God would bless faithful Israel with milk. Where do we get milk? We get milk from animals that have bred. One of the blessings for Israel's obedience in **Deut 28:4** was that the Lord would bless the fruit of Israel's cattle. He would increase their herds and the young of their flocks. The animals would have babies and milk would flow as a result.

He also promised that it would be a land with honey. Honey in the ancient world was the sweetest thing available. They didn't have refined sugar in Israel, there was no Splenda or corn syrup or Sweet-n-Low. Honey was it. And interestingly, we get the idea that there was actually honey all over the promised land.

You remember Samson in the book of Judges (**14:5-9**)? One time a lion came to attack him but he tore the lion to pieces. Later on he was walking by the carcass and there was a bee hive in the lion's carcass. So he reached in and grabbed some honey. He actually made a riddle out of it.

Deut. 8:8-9: describes the benefits of the land, not using euphemism but actual descriptors: a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.

And here it seems that honey is just everywhere on the ground. And rather than taking part in it as a blessing as God intended, Saul turns it into a curse. People today still do that. They turn the good things that God has given to us into a curse.

Look over at **1 Tim. 4:1-4** for a minute. Paul here is encouraging people to be on the lookout for those who spread doctrines of demons. You'd almost think he'd start talking about people who deny the Trinity or that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone or that Jesus is virgin born. Actually what he mentions is marriage and food. **Read**

So the Spirit says in the later times - that's all the time from the first coming of Jesus to his second coming - in the later times people will abandon the faith and spread doctrines of demons. And he defines that as those who forbid food and marriage. You know what they're doing? They're turning blessings into cursing.

If the Lord has given you a wife he has given you a blessing. And as long as we're thankful - and don't have some kind of allergy - he's also given us all foods to enjoy. There's no theological reason to abstain from foods.

People who do this are unreasonable. And depending upon the issue, they are also heretical. These guys had departed from the faith because they forbid people from eating certain foods. They turned God's blessing into cursing.

People do this all the time. There are people who say wealth is a cursing, children are a cursing, work is a cursing, or rest is a curse - workaholics. People still try to forbid marriage and certain foods.

Anytime someone is taking what God has called "good" and calls it "bad" or vice versa, they are being unreasonable. Look back at **1 Sam. 14**.

4) When you sacrifice long term gains for short term gains. Read 29-30

So had the Israelites been allowed to eat of the honey that was freely available, the defeat of the Philistines would have been much greater. Instead many of them actually escaped from the Israelites because they were too tired to chase them or fight them.

As you probably know, the Philistines were a constant thorn in the side of Israel. From the time of the judges throughout the monarchy - 800 years - they were never defeated after God had told the Israelites to wipe them out. King Hezekiah was still battling them just shortly before all of Israel was deported to Babylon. And part of the reason they hung around is because the Israelites did stuff like Saul is doing here.

They wanted short term victories to look good, rather than considering a long term plan of action to actually fulfill what God had called them to do. One sign that someone is unreasonable is that they are focused only on the near term. They are focused only on what's right in front of them. They are impulsive, have very little self-control, don't sacrifice for the bigger picture.

You see this in several areas. People who spend their time on things that seem like a win in the short term but have no long term benefit.

When I was in high school and college I spent a lot of time playing video games and watching movies. In the short run it seemed enjoyable. In the long run I look back at cringe at how much time I wasted. My wife and I even joked when we would play video games together that we were turning ones into zeroes and zeroes into ones because the graphic interface in video games really just comes down to a binary language of ones and zeroes. We joked about the vanity of turning ones into zeroes. If you spend 30 minutes playing video games or watching movies or checking Facebook or Instagram every day - that's almost 8 solid days worth of time in a year.

It might be fun, but most of the time it's also fruitless. I'm not saying all video games are evil or that playing them is evil or watching TV is evil. What I am saying that we burn up a lot of time on them that we might regret in the long run.

We do the same thing with money - especially this time of year. I mentioned it last week, but I'll mention it again. We do a lot of unreasonable things around Christmastime in the name of holiday spirit that we would never do any other time of year. Maybe the thing we should give our kids and our family this year is the model of self-discipline when it comes to spending.

Unreasonable people will continually sacrifice long term goals for short term gains. And they will justify it 10 ways to Sunday. It's a great deal! I need to relax! They cover up laziness with some sort of biblical principle of Sabbath. They will do everything in their power to convince others they need this short term gain and that the long term will always be there to the point where they can't be reasoned with.

Here, Jonathan sees right through all this nonsense. The men don't actually give him any push back for what he's saying. They don't rebuke Jonathan saying "No, your father is right! We need to make a fast move now." No, he sees through all of the nonsense. He sees that his father has just sawed the branch off behind him. He'll get a win, but it won't be nearly as great as it could have been.

And that is the trap on unreasonable people. It's a win! Maybe, but in the long run it's a loss.

5) Unreasonableness acts self-righteous when others sin. Read 31-35

Now, before you get too revolted over what's going on here, the people are probably not eating raw meat with red blood just flying everywhere. I don't know what you picture, but that's what I imagined when I first read this. I thought that they had basically turned into barbarians and are eating the animals like a pack of wolves.

No, more likely what's going on here is that the men were not going through the proper procedure for draining all the blood from the animals. If you remember throughout the Bible - both OT and NT - there are prohibitions against eating blood. Blood is not food, it should not be eaten. You know what blood is according to God? It's life.

Gen. 9:4: You shall not eat flesh with it's life, that is, it's blood.

Lev. 7:26-27: ...you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or animal, in any of your dwelling places. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people.

In the OC to eat blood was to incur the death penalty. Blood is not food, blood is life.

I wouldn't make a big argument of it, but I'd say that the NT says the same thing. Twice in the book of Acts (**15:29; 21:25**) NT believers are forbidden from eating blood. It is not food, it is life.

In any case, in the OT, when they would kill an animal they would hang it up from a tree so that all the blood could drain out. Now, there are still particles of blood in any meat, but the idea was that most of the blood was gone.

These guys were so famished because of Saul's orders that they weren't going to wait. They were just taking chunks of meat off of animals that were laying on the ground in a pool of their own blood.

This was sinful. And it appears that Saul wasn't even aware that this was a bad thing. It had to be pointed out to him that the men were sinning. Anyone who grew up in a quasi-religious home in Israel at the time would have known this but he seems clueless.

But right on que, he waxes self-righteous and accuses the men of being treacherous! **Read 33-34**

So he turns out to be the big hero. Now, were the Israelites who were cutting up these animals in their own blood responsible for their sin? Of course. But had Saul fostered a situation where people were pushed to exhaustion and were willing to sin just to eat? Yes.

This is classic unreasonableness. It's the employer who makes ridiculous demands of his employees and then yells at them because morale is low. It's the dad with the low-grade anger at his children all the time who gets frustrated that they never have any fun with him.

It's the "Oh, I'm doing everything just right - what's your problem" mentality that's going on here. The problem is often the person who thinks they aren't the problem. Going back to the boss: if he were to ask his

employees why they were upset, and they were actually bold enough to be honest, what often happens is that the boss excuses his actions. Or blames the employees for the bad situation.

Listen, if you notice in life that when things sideways or other people are having a problem and they **don't** want to talk to you. You might actually be the problem. You might be this self-righteous person who can do no wrong - or just some wrong - but they're the real problem. It's unreasonable. True gospel humility, when asked what is wrong - and if told an honest truth, will accept the rebuke and seek to change the situation. And it will usually do that without trying to justify itself or blame others.

6) Unreasonableness forces division rather than seeking unity. Read 36-42

Saul is out for blood. He wants to lay blame on someone; he wants division. That's the whole point of casting the lots - find out who is responsible.

The point of lots were to allow God to supernaturally direct the decisions and affairs of people. The goal was not to put God to the test but to give God a say. The people knew that God directed the lots - as he clearly did here - and Jonathan was chosen. God wanted Jonathan to be chosen, he wanted to force this situation. Not because Jonathan was guilty of sin like Saul says he is but to show the wickedness of Saul's own heart in wanting to kill his son over a ridiculous situation. But unreasonableness does that, it wants division rather than unity - and often at any cost.

When I lived in Kentucky I worked at 2 very different places. The first place was a pressure cooker. We joked that you knew who your friends were because your friends would throw you under the bus but at least they'd tell you. If they weren't your friend, they'd still thro you under the bus but you'd never know until the owner came by. Everyone there, from the top down was all about placing blame and dividing and pointing fingers. There was no unity.

I remember working at the second place and occasionally someone would mess up an order big time and I would still get sick just thinking about what was going to happen. And the owner would find out and his first question was, "We've got a big team here - how are we going to fix it?" His whole goal was to bring people together and work out a solution. That's reasonable. That's honoring to God. Not seeing how we can divide everyone into factions, but how can we come together in unity.

7) Unreasonableness has no desire for grace. Read 43-44

This is a simple point, but an important one. Saul doesn't even attempt to be gracious. Doesn't even attempt to let his son off the hook.

You'd think maybe Saul would try that whole seeking God's direction thing again before deciding to slaughter his own son. But he doesn't. He is blinded by his own sinfulness.

Unreasonable people want law and blood and justice.

You know what reasonable people desire? Grace. Not: if I get my way, then I'll give you some slack. No, reasonableness is: I'll give you grace when you don't deserve it at all. That's the definition of grace, isn't it? Unmerited favor. Favor that's given when it's not deserved.

8) Unreasonableness pretends it has convictions, but will compromise when it suits them better. Read 45-46

So what happened to Saul's righteous zeal to put Jonathan to death? What happened to his oath that he put people under?

What happened was that he buckled. If he had had a true conviction about the oath or the gravity of the situation, Jonathan would be dead. Saul would not have listened to the people.

But the reality is that Saul never had a true conviction here. He was willing to put his own son to death as long as he didn't get too much push back. But the minute the people raised their voices in defense of Jonathan, Saul cracked. And he cracked because he was about to have an uprising on his hands. Saul had been hiding

from the Philistines when his son led the charge to destroy them. The Lord used Jonathan - not Saul - to deliver Israel that day. And all Israel knew it. And Saul had gone too far. He was being a loose canon with no convictions.

To be honest, Saul almost never has true convictions. In almost everything he does he'll press an unreasonable point until he gets too much pushback and then he backs off.

You ever known people who liked power trips? Maybe they had more authority or whatever and they just wanted their way to want their way? You ever been that person?

Although it's easy to look at Saul, I think it's safe to say we've all been unreasonable. Some of these traits might hit home more than others, but we've all missed the mark. We've all been Saul.

And over and over we all have to go back to the Lord Jesus. The one who through his own grace has promised to wash us white as snow and make us white as wool. He has reasoned with us, and now he calls us to reason with others.

Pray