

An Opportunity Missed

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[0:00] In 1 Samuel chapter 14 we read, In verse 25, All the other land came to a wood, and there was honey upon the ground. And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped.

But no man put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath. Wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes were enlightened. Then answered one of the people and said, Thy father straightly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that he did any food this day. And the people were faint.

Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land. See, I pray you, how my eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey.

How much more, if happily the people had eaten freely today, of the spoil of their enemies which they found. For had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines.

[1:07] They smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Adel. And the people were very faint. I want us to begin this evening a short little series, which we might entitle Sweeter Than Honey.

You'll see the passage that we made reference to just now, concerns the honey that was in the wood, which Jonathan Bartikoff, and the rest of the Israelites didn't, because they had been bound under the oath, by King Saul not to touch anything, not to taste anything, until the battle was over. Now, that may have been a perfectly devout religious thing for Saul to command, that everyone should fast, and devote themselves, and dedicate themselves, to obedience to the Lord, for that day when the battle was to be joined.

But from a practical point of view, it meant that the people were that much weaker, for the physical exertions of the chase, and of the battle, which followed.

It might perhaps, with hindsight, have been better, to have held a solemn fast beforehand, and then thereafter, to have the people eat and drink, and then be strengthened for the work ahead of them.

[2:19] But of course, this situation came upon Saul, and the army, almost as it were, out of the blue. It arose because, under God's providence, Jonathan and his armour bearer, decided to expose, their vulnerability, to the Philistines, just the two of them, to discover themselves, to the garrison, and then, see what they could do, just by way of hitting back, against the Philistines, who were swamping, the country, with their strength, and their numbers.

We read, for example, in verse 21, the Hebrews, that were with the Philistines, before that time, which went up with them, into the camp, from the country round about, even they also turned, to be with the Israelites, that were with Saul, and Jonathan.

Likewise, all the men of Israel, which had hid themselves, in Mount Ephraim, when they heard, the Philistines play, even they also, followed hard, after them, in the battle. In other words, when the Philistines, are winning, there's plenty of Israelites, who are willing, to join them, and to become, their camp followers, and to help them, in the work, just to be on the winning side, or perhaps, they were captives, who had been coerced, into supporting, the Philistines, or whatever, certainly those, who had hidden themselves, and who had sought, to preserve, save their own stint, if we weren't to be cynical about it, suddenly find, they're very, very brave, when the Philistines, are on the run.

Such fickle, human nature, is all too common, alas. But Jonathan, and his armour bearer, are the ones who, humanly speaking, trigger, this situation.

They, started off, putting their life, in their hand, but clearly, the Lord, also changes, everybody's hearts, and causes the hearts, of the Philistines, to melt, and give strength, and backbone, to those Israelites, who had previously fled.

[4 : 12] Verse 15, there was a trembling, in the hopes, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison, and the spoilers, they also tremble, and the earthquake, so there was physical symptoms, and earthquake as well, it was a very great trembling, and they began, to melt away.

They began, to run for it, and to turn on each other, and those Israelites, couldn't understand, what had happened here. But it has been initiated, humanly speaking, by Jonathan, and his armour bearer, undertaking, what we might call, devoutly, an act of faith.

They are, if you like, stepping out in faith, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, and the Lord, blesses that, trust, that they put in him, because they say, well, if they see, come up to us, we'll take that, as a sign, that the Lord, has delivered them, into our hand.

Because there's no restraint, to the Lord, verse 6, to save, by many, or by few. So Jonathan, the devout prince of Israel, is putting his life, and the life of his armour bearer, into the Lord's hands, and taking on, the Philistine galaxy.

And that becomes, the trigger, for the great, melting away, of the host, and the great, change in heart, the failure of courage, amongst the Philistines, and the strengthening, of backbone, in the Israelites, and the great victory, there is not.

[5 : 31] But, the fact that Jonathan, is if you like, taking this, risk, he is trusting, to what he knows, of the Lord, before the great, victory of the battle, ensues.

We might take, this is indicative, of how, when we first, hear of the Lord, we are inclined, perhaps, to trust him, with a child's, simplicity.

Perhaps, if we hear about Jesus, at our mother's knee, or at Sunday school, or whatever, we have the, the faith of a little child. We, we pray quite earnestly, when we are children, and we, we genuinely believe, that Jesus, as our friend, hears, and answers, pray, and we go on, perhaps, in that, that good will, and that good faith, and, and it comes to, putting it into practice, we trust, in what we are.

We don't stop to think, I'm a, wait a minute, think of all the problems, in life, think of all the, all the insurmountable odds, oh, maybe it's just foolishness, to put my trust, in Jesus. With a childlike faith, we don't worry about these things, when we are young, in the faith.

And we might say, that Jonathan has this, kind of trust, that puts his faith, in the Lord, and then the Lord, blesses and honours that. Perhaps, we might say, that those, elsewhere in Israel, are taking far more, of a pragmatic view, hiding themselves, in the dens of the rocks, or perhaps, going over to the Philistine side, or perhaps, like Saul, and those few left, then, grimly holding on, with gritted teeth, against all the odds, but not really, putting their trust, in the Lord.

[7 : 03] Even if we were to say, that you know, bring hither the ark of God, as he says, and let's, let's see what God says, about this. And then, in the midst of it all, whilst he's busy, consulting the Lord, suddenly, Saul says to the priest, talking the withdrawing hand, in other words, I might have been right here, we don't need to ask, counsel of God now, let's just go after, the Philistines, but, just to make sure, God's on our side, everybody take a solemn fast, nobody take, touch anything, and we'll do it my way.

Now, perhaps I'm putting words, in Saul's mouth, you're perhaps, judging him too harshly, he was obviously, one who, tried to be, faithful to the Lord, tried to be, as good a king, as he could be, you could argue, that maybe Samuel, was keen to find hope, with him, you could argue, that maybe he was just, doing his best, but, at the end of the day, it's probably fair, to describe Saul, as a sort of, worldly minded, king, who was trying, to do his best, to be as godly, as he could, but didn't really know, how, whether or not, he was born again, whether or not, he was saved, one could discuss, the scriptural evidence, for that, backwards and forwards, certainly, Jonathan appears, to have the Lord, in his heart, and he puts his life, in his hand, and this then, religious decision, of Saul, that nobody, should taste anything, nobody should touch, any of the food, that may be about, certainly not, the sweetness, of the honey, this ends up, weakening, the people,

God doesn't withhold, the victory, because of it, but still, it weakens the people, we might take this, as perhaps, pointing us, to the fact, of how, when the childlike faith, perhaps, of our youth, has perhaps been, coldened a bit, or perhaps, been battered a bit, by experience, as we grow up, and grow older, we lose something, of that sweetness, and then, when we encounter, the gospel, we come up, with all manner, of reasons, as to why, we really, should stay away, from it, with the best will, in the world, we think, it can't be that simple, or, it can't be that easy, falsely believing, and following Jesus, is easy, coming to faith, in Jesus, if it isn't even easy, accepting, that we are sinners, who can't be saved, by any other means, than the cross of Christ, and his precious blood,

isn't easy, but it is, that which the Lord, freely offers, to us, and the sweetness, and beauty, and strengthening, of what he freely gives, there it is, dropping on the ground, there it is, there to be had, freely offered, but because, we are bound, by our previous ideas, of what we should, and shouldn't do, and it can't be for me, and I'm so bad, and such a sinner, God can't possibly, offer this to me, or else, well, I've decided, I'm doing this, so I mustn't touch it, or I've decided, I'm doing that, or I've got to wait, till I'm good enough, or till I'm worthy, we've got to wait, till nightfall, before we eat anything, we've got to do this, we've got to do that, we keep ourselves away, from the sweetness, and the strengthening, that the gospel grace, the receiving of Christ, in the simplicity, in the sweetness, in the strengthening, which his gospel grace, would give to us, we keep ourselves, away from that, it is, if you like, an opportunity, missed, and all too often, in those, who may fear the Lord, who may in a sense, love the Lord, and strive, to obey the Lord, as best they can, have time, and again, this sense of, opportunity, missed, the sweetness, of the honey, drops upon the ground, Jonathan, put his hand, to his mouth, with the honey, and his eyes, were enlightened, he was strengthened, he was built up, for the task, for the fight, for the battle, that was ahead, because he tasted, of the sweetness, of the honey, it was for everyone else, an opportunity, missed, but it is one, that need not, have been so, now, honey, of course, has great, strengthening qualities, being a, a food, that is in many ways, good for you, because of the big, sugar hit, that it gives you, it's, one tablespoon, that's maybe, something like, 46 calories, as you can imagine, the boost, it would give, to somebody, who takes a, a good mouthful, of honey, as it would be there, it's, it's got many, many positive qualities, being that, such a, a natural food, in which, microorganisms, cannot move, for the most part, so if honey, was actually, sealed in, when it was, it would keep, you could open it, literally, thousands of years, later, and as long as, it was sealed, and they've done this, apparently, they've opened up, and discovered honey, stored away, and because it was sealed, thousands of years, it's still good, you could still, use it, you could still eat it, and it wouldn't be, wouldn't have gone off, it wouldn't be poisonous, or anything, it wouldn't have been decayed, because microorganisms, can't really live, for the most part, in honey, it also has, great medicinal purposes, people debate, about whether or not, if it's good for a cough, or not, maybe that's just, it feels better, or whether it's good, for other illnesses, or whatever, certainly, the treatment of, of burns, and wounds, they have found, that wounds, for example, or burns, that are treated, with honey, as a sort of, you know, hope, that she put on it, kind of thing, it can be, maybe four to five days, faster, than wounds, that are treated, by ordinary, medical needs, and likewise, it can be, a benefit, in terms of, of healing, faster than, than antiseptic, and gauze, and so on, on skin, and wounds, and burning, and so on, so there's great, positive qualities, for it, we can extrapolate, that also, and see, well that's how the gospel, it helps us, it heals us, and so on, but let's just, go back, to where we first, the earliest mentions, that we have, of honey, in scripture, now the earliest, actual mention, in the bible, that we have, of honey, is in Genesis 43, where Jacob, is seeking, to send his sons, back again, down into Egypt, a second time, to get, to get food, for the famished, children of Israel, and we read, their father, Israel said unto them, if it must be so, now do this, take of the best fruits, in the land, in your vessels, and carry down, the man a present, it's Joseph, that was giving, the present to, of course, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds, so the land of Canaan, obviously, was one in which, honey, was plentiful, it was one of the, specialities, the land, Egyptians had honey too, but this was a present, being taken from, the children of Israel, to Joseph, who, at that time, they didn't know, was their brother, but of course, he was the, the head governor, of Egypt, in Exodus 16, and verse 31, we read, that the house of Israel, when the manna, came down from heaven, and they were trying, to describe it here, that the house of Israel, called the name there, of manna, which just means, they didn't know, what it was, and it was like, coriander seed, white, and the taste of it, was like, wafers, made, with honey, so it was obviously, sweet to the taste, whatever the, the nutritious value of it, it kept them alive, in the desert, for years, so the taste of it, was like, wafers, made, with honey, but the promised land, itself of course, was also rich, in honey, and every other kind, of blessing, and good thing, if we read in Deuteronomy, in chapter 8, from verse 6, therefore thou shalt keep, the commandments, of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear them, for the Lord thy God, bringeth thee, into a good land, a land of brooks, of water, of fountains, and depths, that spring, out of valleys, and hills, a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates, a land of oil, olive, and honey, a land wherein thou shalt eat bread, without scarceness, thou shalt not lie anything in it, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills, thou mayest dig brass, when thou hast eaten, and art full, then thou shalt bless, the

Lord thy God, for the good land, which he hath given thee, and then of course, verses 11 to 18, and goes on to warn, against the foolishness, of thinking, well because we've got, all these good things, it must be because, we're so great, it must be because, we're so good, rather than the blessings, of God, again in,

[15 : 58] Deuteronomy 32, we read, from verse 9, for the Lord's portion, is his people, Jacob, Jacob, is the lot, of his inheritance, he found him, in a desert land, and in a waste, howling wilderness, he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him, as the apple, of his eye, as an eagle, stireth up her nest, nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad, her wings, taketh them, beareth them, on her wings, so the Lord, alone, did lead him, and there was, no strange God, with him, he made him, ride on the high places, of the earth, that he might eat, the increase of the fields, and he made him, to suck honey, out of the rock, and oil, out of the flimpy rock, butter of pine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams, of a breed of bashing, and goats, with the fat of kidneys, of wheat, and that it's drink, the pure blood, of the grape, that again, the problem there, as we read the very next verse, but Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked, thou art waxing fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness, then he forsook God, which made him, and lightly esteemed, the rock of his salvation, and so on, this is part of the difficulty, also with the gospel, it is so good, and it is so freely, available to us, it tends, perhaps, even if we receive it, perhaps, to make us a bit blasey, make us say, oh, well,

God loves me anyway, God's forgiven my sin anyway, I can do exactly as I please, I can do anything I want, and God's still going to forgive me, and of course, part of the beauty of grace, and the ongoing work of sanctification, is that once we receive, the good gift, of God's grace, of this forgiveness, the sweet honey, as it were, of the gospel, that it begins to change, how we think, so that it becomes true, yes, when I have Christ, I can do as I please, because, what pleases us, more and more, as the Lord's grace, continues to work in our hearts, what pleases us, more and more, is that which God, commands, that which, God requires, our will is brought, more and more, into line, with this, but, one reason of course, as we said, why perhaps, we don't value, the gospel, and the free grace, of God, for the beauty, and the wonder, that it is, is because, it is so free, and because, it is so, if we could say it, relatively common, the fact, that it is, held out freely, to us, is seeming like, well I can come back, to it anytime,

I can always, pick it up, some other time, I don't have to, have to do it, such as, God's going to love me, anyway, some of you, no doubt, will have read, in this month's, monthly record, the opening part, of the article, by Mr. Rankin, of Kyle, let's just read, the opening part, of it here, as some of you, have already read it, there is nothing, that God, hath established, in a constant, course of nature, and which therefore, is done, every day, but would seem, a miracle, and exercise, our admiration, if it were done, but once, nay, the ordinary things, in nature, would be greater miracles, than the extraordinary, which may admire most, if they were done, but once, and only the daily doing, takes off, the admiration, that's something, which a churchman, called John Dunn, preached, in 1627, and he's recognizing, that all that we have, if God did it just once, then we'd say, wow, what a miracle, isn't that amazing, just like the first day, the man fell, he's like, wow, this is incredible, we can eat this stuff, and then after a few years, we're thinking, oh, this is so boring, we get every day, if only we had flesh, if only we had, the fish, and the cucumbers, and the melons, and the meats, and the onions, and the garlic, that we had in Egypt, as they moaned there, numbers 11, and so on, and that which is common to us, we don't think it anymore, now just imagine, that day by day, for the sake of argument, that we just breathed, in still, stagnant air, you looked at, on the scene, it was just a stagnant pond, the only ripples on it, were fish that came to the surface, or boats that passed across, nothing, and then one day, a prophet of the Lord, appeared, and he implored heaven, and suddenly, a breath of wind, blew right across, the sea, and it refreshed the hills, and it waved the grass, and we all, breathing, oh, that cold, clean air, and isn't that wonderful, isn't that fantastic, and the whole day, there was waves on the sea, and there was fresh air, a breeze, and the ground, which maybe, it was dry for years, and then, water just fell out the sky, oh, look, the brooks are bubbling down the hillside, isn't this amazing, and then the next day, it was all back and all, we would think, remember that day, when the water just fell out the sky, wasn't it amazing, remember that day, when there was that fresh wind, oh, my grandfather said, when he was young, there was a day, when the fresh wind blew, and we never knew, oh, it's just stagnant now, Mr. Rankin goes on to say, imagine the sky, was always blanketed in cloud, days were spent, under a diffused grey light, nights were black, with unremitting monotony, then one evening, on account of

freak conditions, the cloud dispersed, and out came the Milky Way, in all her splendour, the moon's kind face was seen, stars scintillated, in their constellations, meteors blazed, planets drifted lazily, and the aurora, bathed the north, in silent colour, that one night, would go down in history, as a wondrous prodigy, spoken of in harsh voices, all who were able, would spend it outside, in rapt awe, and rhapsodise, its resplendent beauty, ever after, in poetry and song, because it was one night, of wonder, one day, of fresh wind, and water, that fell down, at the center, because here we are, shuffling from the wind, and the rain, isn't it terrible, isn't it awful, because it happens every day, and it happens every night, and we look up, and we see the stars, almost every night, and we don't think, anything about it, and because there's always, brooks of water, and honey from the rock, because the gospel, is always free, we think, oh, but we don't think, anything about it, and we take it for granted, so much, but the Lord, in his mercy, and his grace, makes it available, to us, David writes, in the Psalms, Psalm 19, the feet of the Lord, is clean, enduring forever, the judgments, of the Lord, are true, and righteous, altogether, more to be desired, are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also, than honey, and the honey, the judgments, of the Lord, are sweeter, than honey, might think, oh, judgments of the Lord, I'm a bit scared of those, we don't want, the judgments of the Lord, we want the blessing of God, we want the nice things of God, but such is, David's love, and delight, in the Lord, that he knows, the judgments, of the Lord, are always, going to be true, always, going to be, perfect, always, going to be, so balanced, so proportionate, so right, so perfectly, true, and just, that they are, to his taste, sweetened, and honey, he devours, the very living, word of God, the judgments, of God, the decisions, of God, just as Jonathan, here, devours, the physical honey, and as a result, his eyes, are shining, with it, his body, is strengthened, he is equipped, for the Lord's, battles, friends, the grace, of God, in Jesus Christ, is, so, totally, different, from, dead, legalism, of mere, religion, as different, as the deadness, and the emptiness, of the Israelite, army, that day, bound, under a religious, oath, that was simply, draining their strength, away, even in the midst, of victory, that the Lord, was given,

[24 : 33] Jonathan, is able, to partake, of the sweetness, and the strengthening, power, of the honey, his eyes, shine, his body, is strengthened, partake, friends, not merely, then, of the form, of religion, of the outward, purity, of the ordinances, with which we are blessed, since reformation times, the purity, of God's word, the proclamation, of it, the singing, of his word, the truth, of praying, as it is, in Christ Jesus, that simplicity, that we have, is much to be prized, and most people, around the world, don't have it, it is common to us, now we take it, for granted, we assume, we will always have it, but the sweetness, of the gospel, the sweetness, of Christ, causes those, who receive it, those who are born, again by it, to cause, their very eyes, to shine, to cause, their body, and soul, to be strengthened, and invigorated, to mean, that the battle ahead, holds no fears, for them, because they are equipped, and energized, for it, not by a mere religious, or laws, or commandments, to follow, but by the strife, and the sweetening, the power, the veritable, honey, to the taste, of the grace, of God, as it is, in Jesus Christ, it is, the difference, between a living, relationship, to Christ, that sweetness, the empowerment, that healing, properties, the strengthening, of the honey, over against, the leader, deadness, of outward, commands, this is the truth, as it is, in Christ Jesus, that for most, of the Israelites, it is, an opportunity, in this, grasp, when we look, at the next section, we look hopefully, at an opportunity, grasp, but for now, tonight, we have to recognize, that for the Israelites, as a whole, for Saul, for the army, this is an opportunity, missed, they could have partaken, they might have partaken, just as we ourselves, may so often, hold off, from receiving, and accepting, of Christ, in all his fullness, we content ourselves, without word form, we either, keep at a distance, oh that's just church, as opposed to, that's Christ, or we, we have nothing, to say to those, oh no interest,

I don't interest, in religion, don't want anything, it's not about religion, it's not about church, it's not about rules, it's about Christ, it's about that, living relationship, which is sweeter, than honey, to the taste, it is the outworking, of God's free, grace, which because, it is grace, and because, it is free, to our shame, we so often, treat it as though, it was worthless, as though free grace, meant cheap grace, as though, because it is freely, offered to be, it will always be there, and we will always, have opportunity, to partake of it, and because, Jonathan, took that opportunity, that day, he is strengthened, his eyes shine, his body, his soul, is embedded, and of course, he comes under, stentia, for it later on, but it is, for so many, and for most, an opportunity, missed, now, what is the outcome, of that opportunity, missed, it means, that when it comes, to the end of the day, they fly upon the spoil, they're slaughtering, the beasts, are ready to eat, with the blood, and sin more,

against the Lord, they were trying, to do their best, by outward conformity, to religious rules, but it simply, meant, they sinned, more against the Lord, at the end of the day, because they were not, physically strong enough, to keep, all these commands, in their own strength, none of us is, it is why, we need Christ, it is why, we need the Savior, it is why, we need the beauty, the sweetness, the invigorating, strengthening, goodness, of Christ, this was, what we say now, an opportunity, missed, how many of us, go through, how much of our lives, with such opportunity, missed, we content ourselves, perhaps, with trying to do our best, and trying to play together, trying to follow the rules, and trying to be, diligent, and so nobody could find, fault with us, and anything, and that's all good, and laudable, but, the high drop, in the call, the sweetness, the beauty, the invigorating, strength, that is there, for the receiving,

Christ is there, to be received, in all his sweetness, in all his empowerment, but an opportunity, missed, is all too often, an opportunity, lost, and what happens, with these rights here, one sin, compounds, another, and that will be the case, with each, and every soul, who tries, vainly, to go on, in their own strength, one sin, compounds, another, until they, accumulate, at the end, to our damnation, which will be, the ultimate end, of all, who perish, without Christ, Christ, is not a burden, Christ, is not bitterness, he is sweet, to the taste, he is strength, to the soul, he is a blessing, to the heart, the honey, drops upon the ground, and the Lord, Jesus Christ, is sweeter, than honey, to all, who will receive him,

Jonathan, does this, most, do not, do not, let it be, for any one of us, that which it was, for the Israelites, at large, in that day, of what should have been, even greater victory, let it not be, for us, an opportunity, missed, that is fine.