

Please open your Bible at 1 Samuel 18. This is the last of our four weeks in the life of David. God willing, we will return to this series after Easter. We saw that David was anointed. God called Him to serve as the king. The Spirit of God rushed upon him to equip him for the work God had called him to do. We saw that David was tested. Calling is always followed by testing. In Goliath, he had an enemy to overcome and in Saul, he had a trial to endure. And we saw that David was kept. In the verses we looked at last week, Saul made six attempts on the life of David, and all of them failed. The LORD was with David. The LORD gave him success in all that he did.

Today, we are looking at the story of Jonathan, and we will see that David was loved. I want us to meet Jonathan and hear his story. I want us to learn from Jonathan what it means to be a true friend. And see how Jonathan points us to Jesus.

We take up the story in Chapter 18 immediately after David's great victory over Goliath: The giant was defeated, the enemy was routed, and Jonathan was there when it happened. When David reported back to Saul, Jonathan was standing at his father's side, listening to every word David said.

And,

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul (1 Samuel 18:1).

To understand this knitting of the souls of these two men together, we need to know something about Jonathan. Jonathan was Saul's son. He was the crown prince, and like David, he was a man of extraordinary faith and courage. We see this in a thrilling story recorded in 1 Samuel 13 and 14. The Philistines had come up with a clever tactic: They had deported all of the blacksmiths, and without blacksmiths, God's people couldn't forge any weapons.

Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears" (1 Samuel 13:19).

By controlling the blacksmiths, the Philistines made sure that God's people could not arm themselves for battle. God's people became dependent on their enemies. If farmers wanted their tools sharpened, they had to go to the Philistines and pay for a blacksmith.

But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle, (1 Samuel 13:20).

God's people were under the thumb of their enemies. The Philistines had rendered them defenseless. Without weapons, there was no way for God's people to fight back. So the LORD's armies of God's people were hiding in holes and in caves in fear of their enemies. But Jonathan had a sword and a spear. We read in verse 22, that,

on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people... but Saul and Jonathan his son had them (1 Samuel 13:22).

So Jonathan, the crown prince, decided to take an initiative:

Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us,

for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6).

It's clear from this that Jonathan knew, and loved, and trusted the LORD. He believed that God could save, whether by many or by few. Like David, Jonathan was a man of faith surrounded by people who lived in fear. So he says to his armor-bearer, 'Let's take this initiative, let's go over and see what God will do. Perhaps God will work for us.'

And his armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul" (1 Samuel 14:7).

The path to where the Philistines were camped went through a narrow pass between two rocky crags. Jonathan climbed one of the crags and then this one man, with his armor bearer, launched a surprise attack on the Philistine garrison. And what happened next was absolutely amazing!

And there was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic (1 Samuel 14:15).

God at that very moment sent an earthquake. And God sent the panic. If you look at the footnote in the Bible you will see that it says, "a panic from God." The whole garrison, even the raiders, trembled at the power of God that day. Jonathan stepped out in a risky and courageous venture of faith and when he did that God worked in extraordinary power. God could have sent the earthquake and the panic without Jonathan and his armor bearer, but that is not how God normally works. God honored the faith of Jonathan, the crown prince who refused to live in defeat. Jonathan stepped out in faith and God honored what he did.

The parallels between this story of Jonathan's courage when all the people around him were full of fear, and the story of David standing up to Goliath, are obvious. God's people were living in fear again. They lined up in the morning, but when Goliath appeared *they fled from him and were much afraid* (1 Samuel 17:24). God delivered His people through the faith and courage of one man—a shepherd from Bethlehem. David heard the enemy defy the armies of the living God, and he refused to live in defeat: He said to Goliath,

"You come to me with a sword and with a spear... but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts... This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand," (1 Samuel 17:45).

Jonathan was there. He saw David's faith and courage. And when David triumphed, he must have thought, 'This is my kind of guy!'

There is a special bond between people who love God and are ready to step out in faith and serve Him. So we read,

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul (1 Samuel 18:1).

Jonathan and David were cut from the same cloth. Jonathan saw in David a man of the same courage, same faith, same soul and same spirit: a man who truly believes in God and ready to trust Him to do great things.

The covenant

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul
(1 Samuel 18:3).

Remember that Jonathan was the crown prince, and David had been anointed as the future king. You would expect these men to be bitter rivals, and if it was not for the grace of God, they would have been. But God's grace can make men, or women, who would have been bitter enemies into the closest of friends. That's what God's grace can do. Jonathan made a covenant with David in which he pledged himself to God's anointed king. And then we read,

And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt (1 Samuel 18:4).

Jonathan seems to have known from early on that God had anointed David to be the future king. And he responded by pledging his loyalty to David. He took off his royal robe and gave it to David: 'God has anointed you as king. You will be my king, and I will be your servant.'

The world puts a royal robe on us and tells us that we are kings. You can be your own God, the world says. You must live your own best life. You can decide what's right and wrong for yourself. You are a king. Live like a king, the world says to us. But God calls us to pledge our loyalty to His anointed King Jesus. Have you taken off the robe, and given it to Jesus?

But Jonathan isn't done. He takes off his armor, his sword, his bow and his belt. He pledges his sword to David: 'I will stand with you. I will fight for you. All that I am and have is yours.' We often speak about coming to Jesus in our weakness, and rightly so. But in Jonathan's covenant with David we are reminded that we are to offer Christ our strength.

What is your sword? Your bow? Your spear? We must lay what He has given to you at His feet. 'All that I am and all that I have, I place at Your disposal. I will go any place for you. I will fight any battle with you.' Have you come to a place where you have pledged all that you are and all that you have to King Jesus?

Why would you do that? Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him *as his own soul* (1 Samuel 18:3). This is what love does. Love makes commitments and promises, and it does so freely and gladly. It was love that led Jesus to give Himself for us and it is love that leads us to give ourselves for Him.

Listen to how Paul puts it,

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that... he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Does the love of Christ control you?

- Can you say, *the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me!*
- Do you believe that *God demonstrates His love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- Do you see that *greater love has no one than this, that someone should lay down his life for his friends.*

When the love of Jesus Christ grips you, you will take off your robe and place it on Jesus, you

lay down your arms at His feet and pledge yourself to Him. That's Jonathan's story. Jonathan became David's most loyal, trusted, and dearly loved friend. And I want us to see from Jonathan's example what it means to be a true friend. There are many things to be said about true friendship. But I want to draw out three that are clear in this story.

1. A true friend will remind you of God's grace

And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt (1 Samuel 18:4).

Saul had rebelled against God. God's Spirit had departed from him. David saw the wickedness of Saul. He saw him throw the spear. He saw Saul's attempts to manipulate his own son and his daughter. Saul was wicked, and David might easily have gotten the idea that God had chosen him because he was good.

William Blaikie, says that seeing Saul's wickedness, "might have encouraged the thought, so agreeable to human nature, that as Saul was rejected for his wickedness, so David was chosen for his goodness."¹

'God must have chosen me because I have a good heart.'

But then David meets Jonathan, the crown prince.

- Jonathan knows God and loves God.
- Jonathan is a man of extraordinary faith and courage.
- Jonathan has won an extraordinary and miraculous victory over the enemy.

Jonathan could have been a great king. And when David got to know Jonathan, he must have been saying, ‘Lord, why did you choose me? Why me and not this man?’ Jonathan was a constant reminder to David of God’s marvelous grace. Brother and sister in Christ, why are you ‘in Christ’ today? Why has God given you a new heart? Is it that you are better than your neighbors, or other members of your family? No, of course not.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Savior's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love how much I owe. Robert Murray M'Cheyne

2. A true friend will be there at the right time

“But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death” (1 Samuel 20:3).

Last week we saw David at the height of his powers. His faith was strong and resilient. God gave him success in all that he did. Here we see David's faith at a low ebb. He says to Jonathan,

¹ W G Blaikie, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 214.

“Truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death”
 (1 Samuel 20:3).

This is the man who stood strong against Goliath. But Saul has got to him. His relentless attacks have worn David down and discouraged him. Even the strongest believers have times when their faith burns low. Jonathan was there when David’s faith burned low. A true friend will be there at the right time.

Jonathan did not believe that David’s life was in danger. He had spoken to Saul on David’s behalf (1 Samuel 19:4). And Saul had made a promise:

As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death (1 Samuel 19:6).

David didn’t believe this. ‘Saul knows your love for me. He’s just saying this to please you.’ So Jonathan agreed to test Saul’s promise, and then to report back to David who at this point was in hiding. They agreed on a sign: Jonathan would come to a field and shoot arrows. He would bring a boy with him to retrieve the arrows. If he shouted to the boy “the arrows are **beside** you” that would mean all would be well. But if he shouted to the boy, “the arrows are **beyond** you” that would be the sign that Saul’s heart was set on destroying David.

Some days later, Jonathan came out with the boy and with the arrows. David hid behind a pile of stones and watched. Jonathan shot an arrow high over the head of the boy and then David heard the word he dreaded: *“Is not the arrow **beyond** you?”* (1 Samuel 19:37). **“Beyond”**

That single word meant that the next years of David’s life would be in exile. He could not return to the comforts of his wife and his home. He would no longer enjoy the company of his dearest friend. For Jonathan it meant returning to a father who did not understand him. For the rest of his life, he was torn between his loyalty to his family and his higher loyalty to God’s anointed king. Some of you know how painful that can be.

Saying goodbye to a dearly loved friend is never easy. Jonathan sent the boy back home with the arrows, and David came out of hiding. The Bible tells us that they wept. Jonathan said to David, *“Go in peace,”* (1 Samuel 19:42). And then they parted.

Jonathan was there for David when David needed him most. But then he was taken away. Why would God give David this wonderful friend and then take him away? God gave Jonathan to David as a support, but God would not allow Jonathan to become a substitute. David must learn to put his trust in God. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. God works through what we gain in life and through what we lose in life. David became the man he was because God gave Jonathan to him **and** because God took Jonathan from him. If God gives you someone who you love as your own soul, thank God for that precious gift and treasure it. But don’t let the strength of that love become a substitute for loving and trusting Him. And that brings us to the last thing today.

3. A true friend will strengthen you in God

And Jonathan, Saul’s son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God (1 Samuel 23:16).

Jonathan met with David one more time and we are told about it in 1 Samuel 23. David was hiding in the wilderness at a place called Horesh. Saul was hunting him, still intent on taking his

life. And we read that,

Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God (1 Samuel 23:16).

How do you bring strength to another person? How did Jonathan strengthen David in God?

And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you" (1 Samuel 23:17).

Jonathan said two things to David: One was what Jonathan hoped: *I shall be next to you*. The other was what God had promised: *You shall be king over Israel*. What Jonathan hoped didn't happen, but what God promised certainly did. A true friend will have many hopes and many desires for you, but the best things that a true friend can do is to bring you strength by reminding you of the promises of God. Do not be afraid. God is with you. His promise will not fail.

Is there a David to whom you can be a Jonathan? Is there someone to whom you can be a true friend who is there at the right time to bring God's strength and God's grace? We've heard Jonathan's story. We've seen how he was a true friend to David, and in these last moments I want us to see how Jonathan points us to Jesus. We often think about how David points us to Jesus because he was God's anointed king. But in this story, Jonathan points us to Jesus because he was the friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Scripture says that,

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

Jonathan was like a brother to David. But Jesus is a better friend than Jonathan could ever be. He sticks closer than any brother ever could. His promise will never fail, and His presence will never be taken away. Jonathan risked his life for David. By standing with David, Jonathan made himself a target. Saul had thrown his spear at David, and when Jonathan stood up for David, Saul threw his spear at him. Jonathan risked his life for David. Jesus gave His life for us.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.
(John 15:13)

When Jonathan said to David, "go in peace" he was expressing a desire, a prayer: 'David, I want you to have peace.' We may have friends who say, 'I wish you peace,' or 'I am praying that you will have peace.' That is a great gift, but here is something greater: Jesus is able to **give** us peace. Only Jesus Christ is able to say to you,

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid (John 14:27).

Walk with Him and you will receive the peace that He alone can give. Jonathan said to David, 'I shall be next to you' (1 Samuel 23:17). That was the sincere desire of Jonathan's heart, but it was a promise he could not fulfill. He was not next to David when David became king because he died on the field of battle. But Jesus is the friend who can never be taken away. He alone, in all the universe is able to say to you,

I will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).

I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord,
(Romans 8:39).

What a friend we have in Jesus. Place the robe on Him. Place your arms at His feet. And pledge yourself to God's anointed King.

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