

Introduction

This introduction this morning is going to be hard for me to make it through without a tear. I want to mention one of my favorite songs about marriage. It was written by Andrew Peterson. It is called "Dancing in the Minefields." The song is Peterson's own testimony of meeting and marrying his wife and living the life of committed marriage despite the struggles and trials. He compares life in marriage to dancing in minefields and as sailing through storms. He says, it's harder than they could have dreamed, but his refrain says it all. "It's harder than we dreamed, but I believe that's what the promise is for." Marriage is based on covenant promises for a reason. Life will put those promises to the test. But that is why we make them. They are covenant vows to provide security, protection, confidence, hope, and peace. They are the foundation to go live life for the glory of God with abandon and intensity. They are comfort and stability when challenges arise. 1 Samuel 20 is a narrative about covenant. It is not a marriage covenant, but it is about a covenant nonetheless. This covenant is between men in the pursuit of the kingdom of God. The text provides a rich depiction of the importance and beauty of the making and keeping of promises.

[Read text and Pray]

David defeated Goliath of Gath and a great victory was achieved for Israel. Shortly thereafter, the souls of David and Jonathan were knit to one another. They both loved the Lord and they both loved his people and nation and admired these aspects of one another. As we said back there in chapter 18, this was not a romantic relationship at all. This was a relationship of brotherhood and shared devotion. In the context of that relationship, Jonathan committed himself to David by covenant. Jonathan removed his own royal robe and his armor and sword and bow and belt and gave them to David in expression of his commitment to David and his eventual kingship. As we turn our attention to 1 Samuel 20, we see that the covenant Jonathan made is put to the test. We also see that Jonathan seeks covenant assurances from David. We will see that covenant faithfulness is the ground of peace between the two.

We will start with

I. The Covenant Faithfulness of Jonathan.

David seeks the covenant faithfulness of Jonathan. At the beginning of chapter 19, Jonathan had interceded with his father for the life of David. And Saul had made a vow that he would not put David to death. Subsequently, however, after David was again successful on the battlefield, Saul reneged on his vow. Apparently without the knowledge of Jonathan, Saul attempted in wave after wave to take David's life. Each time David fled and escaped. He was on the run. He ran to the prophet Samuel. That's where the Holy Spirit came upon Saul and neutralized him for a time. The threat was not ended, however. David ran again. This time he ran to the man who had pledged himself to David. He ran to Jonathan.

When you are on the run, when the enemy is chasing you down, when you feel like the devil is on your heels, don't fail to turn to those people God has put in your life to strengthen you and build you up. Friendships in the Lord are given for a reason. Listen to how this is evident in Paul's exhortation to Timothy. Second Timothy 2:22 says, "So, flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, ALONG WITH those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart." The Lord has given us one another for a reason. Let us run to the Lord, indeed. But let us also run to those who will point us to him and encourage us in him.

Well, Jonathan apparently was not privy to the attempts Saul had just made on David's life and is skeptical that David's life is really in such grave danger. He can't imagine that his dad would not tell him about such a thing. But David reminds Jonathan that Jonathan's favor of David has greatly changed things. David reiterates his desperate situation. Look in verse 3. He vows, "But truly, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death." Then, despite his skepticism, Jonathan commits himself to whatever the anointed king says: "Whatever you say I will do."

Jonathan's soul was knit to David's. He had made a covenant with David. Now David appears to Jonathan not to be thinking clearly. But his commitment to the Lord's anointed is stronger than his perplexity. He will do whatever his friend tells him to do. This little nugget here is such a colorful example of how we are to come before David's greater son. Think of the many times Jesus instructed his disciples to do something that did not make sense to them. Thousands of people are hungry and without food. The disciples discover a young boy with two fishes and five loaves. Jesus says, "Tell the people to sit down." Huh? Do what? But he fed those thousands with one boy's lunch. The world and everyone in it say that the way up is on the backs of others, but Jesus says if you want to be great, you must be a servant. His thoughts and his ways are so different from all that surrounds us. What will we say when his commands seem odd? And when our own reason says, "Do what?" True followers of Christ repeat the words of Jonathan whenever Jesus speaks. "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

So David shares his plan with Jonathan. Saul's reaction when David is not present at the new moon feast will tell the story. If Saul is angry, they both will know that Saul is determined to do harm to David. At this stage we come to the critical point in grasping the basis of David's appeal to Jonathan. Look at verse 8. "Therefore, deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you."

I need to point out something to you that seems to fly under the radar in the translation here. When David says, "deal kindly," he is using language that is strikingly similar to something Jonathan says down in verse 14. There he says back to David, "Show me the steadfast love of the Lord." Demonstrating steadfast love is intertwined with the idea of keeping covenant. It is the steadfast love of the Lord, you see, that provides hope and confidence to the one who trusts in the Lord.

Psalms 13 provides a vivid example. If you turn over there in your Bibles, you will see in this psalm of David that he is facing enemies and he feels as though the Lord is absent. He feels abandoned. You and I are going to FEEL this way sometimes. It may be hum-drum. It may be some sense of lacking. It may be the sense of imminent defeat. How can we sing in those times? How can we rejoice? How can we hope in times like these? Look what David writes in verse 5. "But I have trusted in your steadfast love." However I FEEL, this I KNOW: the Lord is steadfast in his love. He keeps his covenant. I can depend upon his covenant promises no matter how I feel or don't feel. My heart is not buoyed by feelings but by the covenant faithfulness of God which I know.

David, you see, is coming to Jonathan with an appeal to his steadfast love. It will be marked by his keeping the covenant he has made. He will be faithful to David even at expense to himself. Jonathan assures David that is what he will do. Jonathan has a plan for alerting David whether there is danger or not. David will hide. Jonathan will shoot arrows. His instructions to his young servant will be the means of communication.

Well, the covenant faithfulness of Jonathan was put to the test. When David was missing from the feast the second day, Saul asked Jonathan about it. Jonathan answered with David's proposed tale, and Saul knew that David and Jonathan were in it together. His anger was kindled now against not only David but also Jonathan. The pressure against Jonathan intensified. And it is graphic! Calling Jonathan the son of a rebellious and perverse woman is to say that he was conceived outside the marriage. In essence, "Jonathan, you are an illegitimate child. You cannot be my son!" Your joining with that son of Jesse is shameful. Saul heaps on the guilt for breaking with his father by speaking also of his mother. Choosing the son of Jesse over me shames your mother's nakedness. That is, you have brought shame on the mother who gave you birth. See, "you are not my son and your mother is ashamed of you." And then Saul appeals to greed for earthly gain. He says, "As long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established." If we do not do away with David, you will not be king! Don't you want to be king? I sure want you to be king after me and my descendants through you. Do not disappoint your father! Now, go get David and bring him here, for he shall surely die.

What pressure! Your father engages in manipulative tactics, guiltning you and shaming you for what a disgrace you are bringing on your family! What an appeal to the attractiveness of being a king on the earth! The covenant Jonathan made with David faces a thoroughgoing test, but Jonathan withstands the appeal and manipulation of his father. He withstands the powerful weight of allure and shame and temptation by one simple determination. He is determined to be faithful to the covenant he made.

He did so because he first and foremost loved God. He embraced the will of God. He had joined in covenant with David because he knew it was the will of God for David and not for Jonathan to be king. He was alright with that. His focus was on faithfulness to his covenant not what the cost would be for him personally. So his duty to God and his devotion to God's anointed king trumped his duty to his father. Jonathan was seeking not his own kingdom but the kingdom of God. True disciples of Jesus love not father or mother or son or daughter more than him. That is the steadfast love of Jonathan.

True disciples of Jesus keep their word at great cost to themselves. One of the most obvious areas is in our marital vows. But another area is in our church covenant together. Becoming a member of Grace Community Church involves a covenant consisting of promises. We promise to promote unity and order our lives according to the Bible, to be just and faithful and exemplary, to be faithful and prompt and support the Lord's work, to encourage one another toward love and good deeds, and so forth. These are not idle words simply to be repeated at a ceremony of membership induction. They are promises to be kept even at cost to ourselves.

Our covenant to Christ is not a covenant we can keep on our own. Praise God he supplies the followers of Christ with the power and strength to faithfully follow. He provides his Holy Spirit. He provides the new birth. He supplies the inner provision through our union with Christ. We keep covenant faithfulness while depending on Christ. We withstand the assault of the world to be faithful to him by his grace and for his glory.

II. The Covenant Faithfulness of David.

David comes to Jonathan appealing that he deal kindly with him, that is to keep steadfast love or covenant faithfulness. Jonathan absolutely assures David that if harm is determined for David he will disclose it to him. Subsequently, Jonathan asks David for the same thing. Look to verse 14. "If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the Lord that I may not die; and do not cut off your

steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.”

In the ancient world when there was a change in dynasty, the new king would kill off the household of the former king. It was an effort to remove all threat of subversion to the new dynasty.

If there is one thing of which Jonathan is convinced, it is that David will be crowned king of Israel. Jonathan’s prayer is for the blessing of God to be on David. He even hastens the day when the Lord will execute vengeance on the enemies of David. His father, Saul, is one of those, but an enemy of David Jonathan is NOT. And as one who acts with loyalty to David, Jonathan asks that his life and the lives of his family be spared by David when he takes the throne. It is not merely a request, however. It is an appeal based on the covenant between the two of them. And it is a promise David then swore to keep. David would preserve the life of Jonathan if he was still alive and he would not cut off the house, that is the family, of Jonathan.

In Jonathan this approach to David is in fact a fine demonstration of a faith that is alive and strong. He as the prince of the kingdom possesses all the resources of the kingdom, yet he comes to make a request for life from a helpless outlaw. From the outside, this looks silly. Why would the prince ask for a covenant promise from a nobody who is running from the king for his life? It is because of the word of God. God has spoken. Saul is rejected. The man after God’s own heart is David. He is the Lord’s anointed. He will be king.

Now don’t miss another striking aspect of this account. In verses 7-8 David refers to himself three times as the SERVANT of Jonathan. For a moment let’s think in terms of types and shadows with David as the type or foreshadowing of Jesus Christ and Jonathan his true follower. What we have here then in Jonathan’s appeal for his life and for the lives of his descendants is, in effect, an appeal for covenant promises that can only be granted by a servant. The greater of the two here is the one who serves.

When David sits on Israel’s throne, he will be the only one who can sustain the line of Jonathan, one whom he first related to as his servant. Before rising to the throne, he served Jonathan. The one who once served Jonathan would eventually rise to be his king.

Again what a graphic portrayal of our Lord is this. For Jesus himself, the path to the throne was the path of servanthood. He was in the form of God but did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If Jesus does not serve you, he will not be your king. Remember when Jesus took the role of servant and was washing the feet of the disciples? He came to Peter and Peter said, “Oh no! You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus replied, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” The provisions of the covenant of Jesus are accomplished through his serving us. We identify this very point every time we take communion. For we recall that Jesus said of the cup, “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” You can never be reconciled with God through your own effort, through your own deeds. All our deeds are filthy rags. For us to be acceptable to the king, we must accept and rest in the work he himself performed for us. May it

never be that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the basis of his goodness and faithfulness toward us.

But we are reminded as we think about David as a servant that even among ourselves, the one who is truly great is the one who serves. God prizes humility. He is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. What a difference in the account before us as we contrast David with Saul. Saul is all about holding on to what God said is not his. Meanwhile David is concerned whether he has done some wrong that justifies Saul's hostility. He has the mind and heart of a servant. Saul is a covenant-breaker. But we will see that David is the true covenant-keeper.

All of us are covenant breakers. That's the essence of sin. We owe God our lives, but our sin is a repudiation of his righteousness. We need to be reconciled to God. It is a task we cannot do. A lawbreaker standing before the judge cannot undo his crime. The only hope we have is for someone to take our judgement for us. That is what Jesus did. That is the service he rendered. He will not fail to keep you if you will entrust yourself to him through faith.

We finish with . . .

III. The Peace of Covenant Faithfulness.

We look now at the conclusion of the chapter. Here the dreadful news has been communicated by Jonathan to David. "The arrows are beyond you" was the codeword. Saul indeed is determined in his hostility against David. He cannot return. The Lord has sent him away from Saul's household. The stealthy move preserves the safety of David. The coast is clear so the two men can meet and speak to one another before David departs. They weep and demonstrate their deep affection to one another. It is a painful parting. Richard Phillips states, "Anyone who is put off by this show of affection between godly men knows nothing of the close bond of wartime comrades, childhood friends, or covenant brothers in the Lord. Nor do we appreciate the gravity of their lamentable situation if we think their tears an unmanly display."

Phillips tells of such manly devotion as was evidenced by soldier friends who fought in opposition to one another. "On the eve of the American Civil War, Lewis Armistead and Winfield Scott Hancock spent a night weeping together as they departed for the war, one to assume command in the Southern army and the other in the North. Both would bitterly lament their parting, especially on the day when, as Armistead died and Hancock lay bleeding, their respective commands clashed in the climactic assault of the Battle of Gettysburg. Men of great feeling will exhibit emotion not only over their victories and losses, but also over lost and parted comrades."

Parting is what David and Jonathan now did. Their duties were on opposite sides. They met only once more and briefly before Jonathan went home to the Lord. Jonathan speaks what may seem a strange word to David on this occasion. He says "Go in peace." How could this be? They would be in conflict. Jonathan answers. It is because of the covenant they had made before the Lord. They would take their respective roles but they would not oppose one another as individuals. David would depart and live as a fugitive. Jonathan would go back to that dark-hearted, maniacal father of his. The world itself around each one would know much chaos and tumult, but when your heart is pure before the Lord, there can be peace even though you live through a storm.

We can know such peace if we know David's greater son Jesus. Jesus spoke of peace that transcends the turmoil and affliction and disarray of this life. He said (John 14:27) "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." He continued (16:33) "I have said these things to you that in

me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

It may be said that for both David and Jonathan, their peace flowed not merely from their covenant with one another but from the God who makes and keeps covenant himself. The two men spoke of the steadfast love of the Lord. They had peace because the Lord is steadfast in his love. He keeps his covenant. This clarity of the Lord’s covenant is expressed in Romans 5:1: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” That peace is the foundation of living peacefully in this world of tumult and suffering.

Conclusion

Andrew Peterson sung it this way:

. . . He promised not to leave us
And his promises are true
So in the face of all this chaos
Baby, I can dance with you

Oh, let's go dancing in the minefields
And sailing in the storms
Oh, this is harder than we dreamed
But I believe that's what the promise is for
That's what the promise is for

He is talking about the promise in marriage. But it applies to the promises of God as well that supply peace and hope in the midst of the minefield in which we live.