

Introduction.

Slide (Shaping a Heart for God)

The story of David and Jonathan is one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible. As a boy growing up in England I was a bit of a loner in the English equivalent of Middle School, and perhaps this made the story of the friendship of David and Jonathan particularly attractive to me. Whatever the reason, when our third child and only son was born, Beverly and I named him Jonathan, in the expectation that a real love and friendship would develop between him and me. It did not work out that way at first; he was an adventurous child with a gift for giving his parents a hard time, and at one point Beverly made the statement “if Jonathan had been our first child, he would have been an only child.” And I can remember a canoeing trip on the New River in West Virginia about 20 or so years ago when Jonathan was about 14 years old. I made the tactical mistake of letting him sit in the back of the canoe, so he was the one to steer our path. My idea of a good canoe trip and his diverged significantly. My idea was to make it down the river without dumping the canoe and its occupants. His idea of a good time was to find the steepest and most challenging route through each of the numerous rapids, and this inevitably meant that we dumped on just about every rapid of any size. Well, I survived that trip, and so did the canoe (although only just barely), and I am happy to say that Jonathan and I remained friends after this bonding experience and continue to have a deep love for each other. So there is hope for all you parents of teenagers!

Slide (David and Jonathan)

And so as we continue today in our series on the life of David “Shaping a Heart for God”, our topic is the friendship of David and Jonathan. And as we study the friendship of David and Jonathan, we can look on it on two levels; first as a historical record of an actual friendship, and secondly as an illustration of the greatest love and friendship of all, that of our Saviour Jesus Christ for us.

Let us begin then with the actual historical friendship of Jonathan and David. The last time I preached I did so on the story of David and Goliath, and today’s story begins where that one left off, with David returning from the fight holding Goliath’s head in his hand:

Slide (I Samuel 17:57 –18:4)

1 Sam 17:57-18:4

As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head.

"Whose son are you, young man?" Saul asked him.

David said, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

As we look at this passage, we see the first two characteristics of true friendship:

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1. True friends care deeply about each other

We see this immediately from our passage, where we see that “Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.” This is a remarkable statement, because at this point in their lives Jonathan was a prince, and David just a young shepherd boy from a minor family in the tribe of Judah. We could almost call this the

story of the prince and the pauper. And although David had just killed Goliath, Jonathan himself was no mean warrior. In 1 Sam. 14 we have the amazing story of how Jonathan and his armor-bearer climbed up to a Philistine garrison post and overcame it. After trusting God for a sign, which is given them, they climb up to the Philistine outpost:

Slide (1 Sam 14:11-14)

1 Sam 14:11-14

So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel." Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.

This act of daring courage by Jonathan and his armor-bearer led to a rout of the Philistines. So Jonathan knew what it was to attack superior odds, but even he had been unwilling to face Goliath. So what attracted him to David was no doubt David's courage in facing Goliath. He also probably was an observer when his father Saul tried to make David wear his armor, and had been impressed by David's quiet confidence in God, when he had said to Saul 1 Sam 17:37 "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Jonathan no doubt understood that David's victory was evidence of God's hand on his life, and this must also have attracted him to David.

But whatever the reasons, the fact remains that "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself." Jonathan's friendship was not something that depended on the circumstances, something that could be discarded if it proved inconvenient. It was instead something built into the fabric of Jonathan's nature and being, something that he could not explain, but something that was just there.

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2. True friends are generous.

We read that Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. Jonathan, the King's son, was probably dressed in some costly robe, while David would most likely have been wearing a simple shepherd's tunic. So Jonathan gives David his robe and, what is most significant "even his sword". Why was this significant? Because swords were very precious in Israel at that time. In 1 Sam 13:22, just before Jonathan's adventure with his armor-bearer, we read "So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them." The situation may have changed in the years following this event, but even so swords were highly valued, and Jonathan's sword would have been a prized possession. But he willingly gave it to David as a token of his friendship.

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3. True friends are loyal.

Fast forward a few months or years (we do not know exactly how long) and Saul has become insanely jealous of David and his military success. He first tried to kill David by hurling his spear at him, and he then tried to get David out of the way by offering his daughter Michal in marriage in exchange for a "bride price" obtainable only by killing 100 Philistines, hoping of course that David would himself get killed in the process. When David succeeds in his task, and when Saul realizes that his daughter loves David, he becomes even more jealous, and he tries to get Jonathan himself to kill David. Jonathan refuses, and instead speaks well of David to his father, and Saul swears that he will not kill David. This vow does not last long, and soon Saul is in pursuit of David again. David goes to Jonathan for help, and Jonathan promises to find out his father's true intentions:

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1 Sam. 20:12-17

Then Jonathan said to David: "By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family-not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account." And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

So here we see Jonathan, knowing by now that David, and not himself, was the one God had chosen to replace his father, still showing his loyalty to David by offering to protect him from Saul. That is true friendship!

We can also note that David and Jonathan were continually committing themselves to their friendship by making covenants or oaths with each other. They do this in chapter 17: "And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself." And here in chapter 20 "And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself." And again in chapter 23 "The two of them made a covenant before the LORD."

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4. True friendship can be costly.

Jonathan's friendship was costly, because it led to estrangement from his father. In a continuation of the passage we just read, Jonathan promises to find out whether Saul is still intent on killing David. It was the New Moon festival, and David was expected to be at the palace to celebrate it with Saul, but he tells Jonathan he will not show up so that Jonathan can see how Saul reacts. Let's read part of the story:

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1 Sam. 20:30-34

Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."

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Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!" "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David. Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

We do not know what went on between the two of them after this, because this is the last time we see Jonathan and Saul together, but it is fair to infer that life in the palace was probably pretty tense after this. So Jonathan's friendship with David cost him his father's approval.

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5. True friends encourage each other

The last time we see Jonathan and David together is while David is on the run from Saul.

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Jonathan misses his friend David and so he leaves the palace and travels south to Horesh in the desert

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1 Sam 23:15-18

While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

There he encourages David in the Lord; helped him find strength in God.” What a friend! Not only does he lose his relationship with his father, he even travels out to the desert to encourage David.

Before we move on to consider what we can learn from these stories about our friendships, we need to deal with more issue. Some modern scholars claim that the relationship between David and Jonathan was not just friendship and love, but also involved an erotic homosexual relationship. This is based on their reading of 2 Sam 1, where David laments in vivid and poetic imagery the deaths of both Saul and Jonathan at the hands of the Philistines:

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2 Sam 1:23

"Saul and Jonathan-
in life they were loved and gracious,
and in death they were not parted.
They were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions.

2 Sam 1:26

I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;
you were very dear to me.
Your love for me was wonderful,
more wonderful than that of women.

Thus the Methodist scholars Jennifer Wright Knust and Michael Coogan state “there can be little doubt that the love that David and Jonathan shared involved eros (erotic love) not just philos” In response to this the distinguished Methodist scholar Ben Witherington writes on his blog for Valentine’s day:

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“The Bible is not an ink blot which one can read whatever way one pleases on controversial issues such as sexual ethics, and when the pontification involves absurd remarks like, “Paul has no sexual ethic” (has the author actually read 1 Corinthians 7?), or “there can be little doubt that the love that David and Jonathan shared involved eros not just philos,” then it is indeed time to say, enough is enough. These are not only not plausible interpretations of key Biblical texts, in light of the highly conservative sexual ethic of honor and shame cultures in the ancient near east and in particular Jewish culture when it came to such matters, they are not even very possible interpretations of such material.

(Ben Witherington <http://www.patheos.com/community/bibleandculture/2011/02/14/eros-defended-or-eros-defiled-what-do-wesley-and-the-bible-say>)

A part of what Ben Witherington means by the “highly conservative sexual ethic of honor and shame cultures in the ancient near east” is that homosexual acts were clearly regarded in Israel as wrong and were condemned by God. Thus in the book of Leviticus God gives these laws in successive verses:

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Lev 18:20-22

“Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her.

“Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

“Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

So God puts homosexual acts in the same category as adultery and child sacrifice. Parenthetically it is a sign of the decadent times we are living in that all three of these sins are widely practiced in the USA today, with over 40 million children sacrificed not to Molech but to abortion over the last 40 years.

But the point here is that when David committed adultery and murder we read in 2 Sam 11:27 “But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.” The God who saw and judged David’s adultery would also have seen and judged any homosexual acts with Jonathan, but we do not read any such condemnation from the Lord, and David would not have been called “a man after God’s own heart” if he had been guilty of such acts.

This is not the time to expound Biblical teaching on this subject, but I do want to tell any women who have had an abortion or anyone who has engaged in homosexual acts that these are not unforgivable sins. God is a God of grace and mercy. When Nathan the prophet charged David with his sin David repented and was forgiven.

2 Sam 12:13

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin."

In the same way God can and will forgive all who confess their sins, whether homosexual or illicit heterosexual relationships or other equally grievous sins such as grumbling, greed, and gluttony.

But now let us turn to a much happier theme; the theme of God’s friendship with and love for with us through His son Jesus Christ. Jonathan’s friendship for David turns out to be a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ’s love for us. Let us look at the similarities:

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<i>Jonathan’s love for David</i>	<i>Jesus’ love for us</i>
True friends care deeply about each other.	Jesus loves you and me
True friends are generous.	Jesus is generous towards us
True friends are loyal.	Jesus is faithful to us.
True friendship can be costly.	Jesus loved us in a costly way
True friends encourage each other	Jesus encourages us through the Holy Spirit and through His body

So let us take a few moments to unpack these truths: since God’s love for us and Jesus’ love for us come from the same source, we can look at both aspects of it.

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1. Jesus loves you and me.

This is one of the great central truths of the Bible, that we are loved by the Lord Jesus Christ. His love for us is not based on our worth or our merit, just as Jonathan's love for David was not based on his worth or merit; Jonathan was the prince, and David the pauper.

God's love for us is a primary love; it is not conditioned on us or our goodness. We cannot earn God's love; it just *is*; an essential part of His being and nature.

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1 John 4:9-10, 19

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. We love because he first loved us.

It is an everlasting love

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Jer 31:3

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love;

I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Dr. Karl Barth was one of the most brilliant and complex intellectuals of the twentieth century. He wrote volume after massive volume on the meaning of life and faith. A reporter once asked Dr. Barth if he could summarize what he had said in all those volumes. Dr. Barth thought for a moment and then said: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

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2. Jesus is generous towards us

In 1 Samuel 18 Jonathan laid aside the symbols of his royal status; his robe, his tunic, his sword, his bow and his belt, and gave them all to David. Jesus too laid aside his position at God's right hand in heaven as he humbled himself and came to earth:

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Phil 2:5-7

Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

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Spurgeon comments on this theme:

And when Christ's love led him to come here, and take our nature, was it not wonderful? He reigned enthroned in heaven; seraphim and cherubim gladly did his bidding. He was God, and yet he came down from yonder royal palace to that stable at Bethlehem, and to the manger where the horned oxen fed. As George Herbert reminds us, he hath unrobed himself, and hung his azure mantle on the sky, and all his rings upon the stars; and there he lies, a babe in swaddling bands, taking human nature into union with his divinity because he loved us.

Jesus in his great love gave up all his position for us!

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3. Jesus is faithful to us.

Jesus is faithful by his abiding presence:

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Matt 28:20

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

God is faithful in protecting us from temptation:

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1 Cor 10:13

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

God is faithful in showing His love to us:

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Deut 7:9-10

Know therefore that the LORD our God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

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4. Jesus loved us in a costly way

This is the crux of the comparison, and we tread here on holy ground. Just as Jonathan risked incurring his father's anger by protecting David from Saul's wrath, so Jesus incurred His Father's wrath by bearing our sins on the cross.

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2 Cor 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Rom 5:9

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

The price Jesus paid for us was enormous. As he hung on the cross he was experiencing not only the excruciating physical pain of the nails in His hands and his feet, not only the emotional pain of being abandoned by his disciples, but also the spiritual pain of being separated from his Father as the weight of our sins was laid on Him. It was this crushing burden that wrung from His lips the cry recorded in Mark's gospel:

Mark 15:34

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Truly Jesus loved us in a costly way!

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5. Jesus encourages us through the Holy Spirit and through His body

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John 14:25-26

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

The very name Counselor (or Comforter, in some translations) that Jesus uses here for the Holy Spirit teaches us that His function is, at least in part, to encourage us, just as Jonathan encouraged David.

Jesus also encourages us through His body; that is, other Christians.

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1 Thess 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Heb 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This is why it is so important that each of us keeps in close relationship with other believers, whether this relationship is one-on-one or a small group of some kind. We each need a Jonathan in our lives!

Conclusion

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Just two thoughts in closing

1. Jonathan was a true friend to David, loving him, giving generously to him, being faithful to him at significant personal cost, and encouraging him. What an example to us! We all need Jonathans in our lives; men and women who will encourage us and support us. Are we willing to encourage one another and to be strengthened by one another?

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As John Piper says "Don't ever think that a man is so strong that he does not need to be strengthened in God. And don't ever think that someone is so far above you that you can't be God's instrument to give strength."

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2. And the wonderful thing is that as Christian believers we have a God who knows us and loves us in a much deeper way than Jonathan loved David. God knows us and He loves us; what a wonderful thought!

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Though you are one of the teeming millions in this world, and though the world would have you believe that you do not count and that you are but a speck in the mass, God says, "I know you."

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones in *The Best of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*. Christianity Today, Vol. 38, no.

Or as Tony Campolo puts it:

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God carries your picture in his wallet. Tony Campolo.

May God help us to be true friends to one another, secure in the knowledge that God loves us with an everlasting love.