

May 1, 2016  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Life of David  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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To ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from 1 Samuel 20.

1. When Jonathan agreed to do whatever David required, what was at risk?
2. What significance was involved in Jonathan invoking God's name in the agreement he made with David?
3. How do we know that Saul was not watching out for Jonathan's future by desiring to kill David?
4. What kind of love was demonstrated by Jonathan and David when they made their covenant?

### **A COVENANT IN THE LORD** **1 Samuel 20:1-42**

David had escaped from Saul to Ramah where he stayed with the Prophet Samuel for a short time. When Saul came to Ramah, God delivered David by sending a debilitating spirit upon Saul. David fled Gibeah where he sought help from his trusted friend Jonathan. Seeing David in this panic, running for his life, makes us wonder what happened to the brave shepherd boy turned warrior who killed bears, lions, giants, and hundreds of Philistines. What happened to that brave warrior who now appears as a frightened fugitive who was running for his life?

Sometimes life throws curve balls at us. We can appear to be secure, confident, and in charge in one situation and then virtually fall apart when a different kind of trial comes along. It would appear in David's case that he felt like his hands were tied regarding Saul. Later,

when David was hiding out in the wilderness, there were two occasions when he could have killed his enemy. He explained to those who egged him on that he would not lift his hand against God's anointed.

Try to empathize with David's dilemma. He was an able enough warrior to take out Saul in a brief sword duel. But David's obedience to God's law prohibited him from lifting his hand against God's anointed leader. Therefore, David was under intense pressure. He would not defend himself against Saul but waited for God to vindicate him. Is that not the theme and message of so many of his psalms?

And yet there is an important addendum to the story line. While David trusted in God to deliver him and vindicate him, he also turned for help to the friend that God had supplied to him for just a time like this. Real friends are God's blessing to us in times of conflict. Therefore, it is not surprising that the focus of this chapter is Jonathan's loyalty in this time of great conflict for David. He teaches us great lessons about how we should be loyal to the covenants we have made with fellow humans, especially in the time of need.

These are important lessons for us who tend to flee from friendships, agreements, or covenants the moment a conflict shows up on the horizon. We are easily good friends when the sea of life offers smooth sailing. But when the storms of trial and conflict arise, we jump in the lifeboat and paddle for shore with all our might. Solomon wrote, *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17)*. Jonathan and David show us how that works.

### **The Lord God be Witness (vv.1-23).**

This part of the story begins with a disagreement (vv.1-4). Friends have those. It's okay. They can still be friends. In this case the disagreement was introduced by David's questions based on conclusions he drew. They were conclusions with which Jonathan disagreed. *Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came and said before Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" (v.1)*.

To our eyes and ears it seems quite obvious that Saul was seeking David's life. We have read how Saul had thrown his spear at David twice by now. He had shrewdly arranged to have the Philistines kill him, but that failed. He had told his son, servants, and daughter that he wanted to kill David. Each time God had delivered David. That Saul wanted to

kill David could not be any clearer. The question was, “Why?” David wondered, “What have I done? What is my guilt?” Because he had been such a faithful servant, David was honestly perplexed.

His response has to be somewhat unlike conflicts we experience when we are tempted to cover what we have done. There are times when we know we have said or done something that caused the conflict. But when confronted, we plead innocence until we can discern how much the other person really knows. How much better to be truly innocent as David was. He had faithfully and with good conscience carried out all that his superior told him to do.

But now to make matters worse, David’s trusted friend and confidant disagreed with his conclusion. *And he said to him, “Far from it! You shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. And why should my father hide this from me? It is not so”* (v.2). How could Jonathan come to such a conclusion in light of past evidence that we know? *And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul’s son, delighted much in David (1 Samuel 19:1)*. Maybe in light of Saul’s feigned repentance Jonathan concluded that all was well. It is true that after Jonathan had confronted his father, *Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, “As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death”* (1 Samuel 19:6).

What was the truth in the matter? Sometimes in conflicts not everyone is perceptive. An old saying is: “perception is truth.” That is not an altogether accurate conclusion. Truth is truth regardless of whether everyone perceives it. The problem is that when a person sincerely thinks that error is truth, the conflict cannot be resolved. Then there are times when a person’s perception is skewed because his conclusion is strongly influenced by other relationships, such as Jonathan being Saul’s son. Often parties involved in conflict have already made up their minds before the evidence is presented.

Those things happen. When they do, there will almost always be disagreement. Be that as it may, go ahead and present the evidence in hope of enlightening the other party. That is what David did when he laid out the circumstantial evidence to help Jonathan see the truth. *But David vowed again, saying, “Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he thinks, ‘Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.’ But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death”* (v.3).

David was correct on this matter. Saul was well aware that Jonathan had defended David. We can see back in 19:4-5 how Jonathan laid out the evidence that David was Saul’s faithful servant. Didn’t Saul remember that defense? So powerful was the argument that Saul changed his mind for a period of time. Surely Saul was aware that *Jonathan his son greatly delighted in David (19:1)*.

Also certain was the fact that David’s life was in continual danger. It is easy for the person who perceives himself as the victim to exaggerate the potential problem. Threats always look bigger and more damaging if I am the intended target. But sometimes the threat in a conflict is real, as in David’s case. Because that is so, it is necessary to state the case and present evidence to substantiate the case. But this is where we need to guard against the futile, “He said, she said” kind of evidence. The evidence of opinions and personal preferences are seldom very convincing. But when a person’s actions validate their threatening words, that is valid evidence that should lead to conviction.

Saul’s actions lend indisputable truth to David’s argument. Therefore, Jonathan had no choice but to concede and agree with David. *Then Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you say, I will do for you”* (v.4). Jonathan had to concede that Saul really did threaten David’s life. Being a genuine friend, there was only one proper response for Jonathan . . . “What can I do to help?”

Jonathan and David agreed to a plan that would flush out and identify the danger from Saul if it really existed (vv.5-23). As we read about this plan, we are going to be forced to answer an important question. Did David actually ask Jonathan to lie for him? *David said to Jonathan, “Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit at table with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field till the third day at evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, ‘David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the clan.’ If he says, ‘Good!’ it will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him”* (vv.5-7).

David, being part of the family and also the king’s body guard, would be expected to attend the three day feast. He would not be able to attend because he was going to Bethlehem. But was he? Was it right for David to expect Jonathan to participate in dishonesty? We do not know for sure that David did not go to his family in Bethlehem. If he did not, we cannot justify this as simply a “test” to determine Saul’s attitude

toward David. This is probably another example of God working with us humans in spite of our tendency to fail in righteousness.

Better to be honest. David appealed to the established covenant. *“Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?”* (v.8). Earlier both David and Jonathan had agreed to a covenant. The covenant was more than a friendship but the expression of certainty that David would be king. We read, *Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 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 18:3-4). According to the agreement, if David was guilty, the covenant was broken, and Jonathan owed him no allegiance.

The covenant was a serious matter. Therefore, Jonathan held true to the covenant, but at the same time he was a bit naive. *And Jonathan said, “Far be it from you! If I knew that it was determined by my father that harm should come to you, would I not tell you?”* (v.9).

In light of Jonathan’s naivety, it was good for him and David to renew the covenant (vv.10-17). To that end, Jonathan promised to inform David about his father’s intent (vv.10-13). *Then David said to Jonathan, “Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?” And Jonathan said to David, “Come, let us go out into the field.” So they both went out into the field. And Jonathan said to David, “The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? But should it please my father to do you harm, the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father.”*

More importantly, Jonathan reassured David that their covenant was in the Lord. This means that they would both draw on God’s grace to keep it. God Himself would be the Judge. Notice the repeated appeals to God. *“The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness!”* (v.12). *“The LORD do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it.”* (v.13). *“May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father”* (v.13b). That final statement indicates that both men knew that this covenant would effect future actions and attitudes (vv.14-17). When David became king, he would show mercy to Jonathan if he was still alive (which he was not).

Jonathan requested, *If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die* (v.14).

Furthermore, when David became king, he would show kindness to Jonathan’s household (which he did). The covenant stipulated, *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* (v.15). In fact, Jonathan agreed to his own disadvantage because he had to fight alongside David’s enemy. *And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the LORD take vengeance on David’s enemies”* (v.16). It was a covenant rooted in mutual love. *And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul* (v.17).

Because of the covenant, Jonathan and David devised a plan so they could communicate (vv.18-23). Jonathan would use the unsuspected practice of archery to warn David (vv.18-22). It was all rooted in the covenant as Jonathan pointed out, *“And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever”* (v.23). In a covenant established before God, He acts as the Mediator, the Judge, the one who holds it together by His grace.

Those thoughts should lead us to consider the serious covenants we have made with other people in the Lord. For example the covenant of marriage in which a man and woman agree before God to be faithful. Or how about the covenant with a church in which individuals agree before God and other believers to maintain a host of relational behaviors and practices. Do we take these covenants as seriously as David and Jonathan did? We should.

### **We Have Sworn (vv.24-32).**

There was a real danger for David (vv.24-34). The danger became obvious again when Saul revealed his hatred of David (vv.24-29). As planned, David’s absence was noticed. *David’s place was empty* (v.25b). That first, evening Saul allowed for the absence. Yet Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, *“Something has happened to him. He is not clean; surely he is not clean”* (v.26). On the second day things changed. Saul did not excuse David’s absence. *But on the second day, the day after the new moon, David’s place was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, “Why has not the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?”* (v.27).

In that setting with all the important people of the king's house gathered for the feast, Saul revealed his anger toward his own son (vv.30-33). He accused Jonathan of foolish rebellion. *Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die."* Not only did Saul say these nasty things to Jonathan, but then he really lost his temper and tried to kill his own son (vv.32-33). *Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death.*

Okay, let's try to make sense of this whole thing. Saul wanted to kill David so that Jonathan would be the next king. But he was so mad at Jonathan that he tried to kill him too. Such is the angry man who will not control his temper. Rage is deadly. Consider some of Solomon's principles about angry people. *A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated (Proverbs 14:17). Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly (Proverbs 14:29). Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man (Proverbs 22:24). A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression (Proverbs 29:22).*

It is easy to try to excuse failure to control anger as an inherited deficiency. We might tell people, "I was born this way. My grandfather and my father both had short fuses." Actually anger is sin like all the other sins we are born with. Do we excuse a tendency to murder, or a tendency to be a liar, or a tendency to commit adultery because of our inherited genes? Anger not controlled leads to the dangerous condition Saul was in, where he would destroy his own family.

What a contrast to the angry, blustering Saul is Jonathan who told David to *"Go in peace"* (vv.34-43). A peaceful man is going to experience grief for his disgraced friend. *And Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had disgraced him (v.34).* Finally Jonathan acknowledged that his father intended to destroy David. He himself was infected with the same anger, but obviously got control

of it. His lingering attitude was not anger or wrath or bitterness because of his father, but grief for David. His grief was rooted in the way his father had disgraced David. David was a faithful and loyal servant. Saul insisted that everyone view him as an enemy.

How do we respond when an authority has it wrong and paints our friend with unfair, unjustifiable colors? Would we, like Jonathan, try to make correction? We already studied how Jonathan went to Saul with the attempt to correct him—to no avail. Do we grieve for the friend who is victimized? Or do we separate from him or her lest our reputation be tainted by the same disgrace? Paul had to deal with that very issue. He was God's chosen servant to tell the good news about God's wonderful plan of salvation. In response to the good work, authorities put him in prison. Because he was a prisoner of the Lord, other so-called representatives of the Lord forsook him. *"For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia"* (2 Timothy 4:10). And so he encouraged his friend Timothy, *"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God"* (2 Timothy 1:8).

Jonathan was grieved but quickly got to work with his friend David to work the plan they devised (vv.35-40). Jonathan kept his word and signaled by shooting his arrows that David would need to escape (vv.35-38). No one was the wiser about what just happened (vv.39-40). But now it was time to face the hard decisions because they had sworn in the name of the Lord (vv.41-42).

David was also grieved because he would need to leave his friend. *And as soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times. And they kissed one another and wept with one another, David weeping the most (v.41).* As far as the Bible record shows, there would only be one more meeting between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 23:18). Parting with dear friends is part of the grief we must endure while living in a world infected with sin. Apart from Saul's sin, Jonathan and David could have spent a lifetime together encouraging each other.

And so, for the next to the last time, Jonathan encouraged his friend. *Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD shall be between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever'"* (v.42a). In absence of friends, we still have peace in the Lord.

A covenant established in the name of the Lord is a great antidote to the grief we experience in a world of sin. Confidence in a covenant is a great source of blessing. It helps when it is time to do the tough things. *And he rose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city (v.42b).*

Do our friends have confidence in us that we will keep our side of the covenants we have made with them? Do our spouses trust us to keep our end of the agreement? Does a covenant established in the name of the Lord mean anything to us?