

Two Testimonies; One of Honor, One of Shame

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:33-40 Hymn #119E (Psalter Insert)- *That I Might Keep Your Statutes*

1st Scripture: Romans 9:1-29

Hymn #17 (Supp)- *Blessed Assurance*

2nd Scripture: 1 Samuel 31:1-2

Hymn #700- *Trust and Obey*

Introduction:

This morning, we come upon a very sad and disheartening text of Scripture. And yet, its great spiritual value to us, is indeed priceless! We last found Saul, seeking a medium, to call up Samuel from the grave, as a means of discovering God's will, concerning Saul's present predicament. The Philistines had gathered together at Aphek, and were preparing to attack Israel. After gathering the Israeli troops together, Saul got a good look at the large Philistine army (from a distance), and he became terrified. He sought the Lord's guidance through various means, but God did not respond to him. Saul had chosen the path of rebellion, all along, and now he was on his own. And so, he decided to pursue Samuel, through the wicked means of a medium, since God was not responding to Saul, through any other means. God, indeed, sent Samuel to speak to Saul, but the news was not good. After rebuking Saul for disturbing him, and after assuring Saul that David would replace him as king (because of his wicked acts of disobedience), Samuel told Saul that he and his sons would be killed in the present battle against the Philistines. Needless to say, King Saul left that place terrified, and without an ounce of hope.

This morning, we come to the scene of that battle, where Samuel's prophetic utterance comes to pass. The Philistines defeat the Israelites, Saul and three of his sons are killed in the battle (with Saul dying as shamefully as he had lived), and Israel goes through a time of great mourning...indeed, a great cloud, which will soon pass unto a new sunrise, with David reigning as king.

As you know from the past, I generally believe it to be important, to stop and carefully consider, when the Scriptures carry us to the "life's end" of any of its well known characters. Here, we find two, fitting into the category of the "well-known;" a father and his son, King Saul and Jonathan, entering the presence of God on the same day. Two testimonies are forever sealed on the scroll of eternity, leaving us with the obligation of considering them both, especially since one is a testimony of shame, while the other is a testimony of honor. A father and a son, with

two very different, sealed paths of faith, and a sobering message for *us*, regarding a glorious salvation that contains boundaries, which are "thicker than blood."

[Note: Not addressing Saul's other two sons, because little is known of them]

I. A Testimony of Honor [Read verses 1&2]

The Philistines fought against Israel, and prevailed. The Israelites fled, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons, and they first succeeded to kill Saul's three sons, one of whom was Jonathan, that dearly beloved friend of David, and man of God. And here, we have the sealing of another testimony; in this case, a testimony of honor!

In the past, we have already seen, on at least a few occasions, the unique and precious faith of Jonathan. I want to do something a little unusual this morning, as a means of highlighting the testimony of honor, which Jonathan has left behind for us. I want to present his testimony, in the form of a summary eulogy, as if we were standing there by his grave, following his death. I hope, by this means then, to lead us into some relevant applications for us.

Jonathan, son of the king, beloved husband, caring father, faithful soldier and treasured friend, has just left us, only to be ushered into the presence of his God, forever. His life, though cut short in war, has left us with many precious seeds of faith, testifying to the fact that he trusted in the invisible God. In fact, his fear of God, and the guarding of his integrity, has led him to sacrifice much in this life, even unto the very end, as he bore a portion of his father's curse, in his own death. Here are some of the numerous ways, in which his faith, or better yet, God's evident grace toward him, has been manifested in our presence:

1) Indeed, he was a decorated soldier, the oldest of his father's sons, who proved his faith greatly during times of battle. Who can forget the time, he and his armorbearer had gone up against an entire Philistine Garrison, on their own? His words to his armorbearer will never be forgotten: "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few." Indeed, from the standpoint of the average man, it was a dangerous and foolish risk. But Jonathan's confidence was in the power of his God, and not his own strength. And God met his faith with a great victory! After receiving a sign from the Lord, they went up against an entire garrison and about twenty men fell before Jonathan! [1 Sam. 14]

2) So respected was Jonathan by the entire army at that time, that when his father had made a foolish and rash oath, which Jonathan had unknowingly violated, they stood between him and Saul, so that the king could not kill Jonathan, in keeping with the oath he had made. [1 Sam. 14]

3) And not only was he a decorated soldier, but he was a true and faithful friend, often times, to his own hurt. In fact, consider how Jonathan, natural heir to the throne of Israel, willingly and joyfully conceded this great privilege to the shepherd boy, David, even to the great disapproval and shame of his father.

It began when David, exercising an amazing confidence in the Living God, slew the great giant, Goliath, near the Valley of Elah. For, the entire Israelite army was terrified by this giant; and even Jonathan himself, dared not step forward to accept his challenge. But David, in the name of his Lord, without armor, without sword; indeed, with a sling, a stone and a shepherd's staff, defeated the well armored, giant. So impressed was Jonathan; so impressed with *David's great faith*, was Jonathan, that he immediately covenanted with David, and gave him his robe, his armor, his sword, his bow and his belt. Jonathan loved David as his own soul, from that point on, and his humbly stripping off all of his armor and delivering it over to David, was his means of saying, "You will be the king, who follows my father, and not I." It were as if, he were saying, "David, you must increase and I must decrease." Clearly, Jonathan's love and respect for God, drove him to have such a humble and willing heart. For, even his father, shortly thereafter, grew exceedingly jealous of David, when others began to recognize David's greatness as superseding the greatness of Saul. [1 Samuel 18]

4) The line in the sand, concerning Jonathan's faith, was especially drawn in the sand, not only when he willingly walked away from the crown, but when he further walked away from the great respect that his father had for him. On at least a few occasions, Jonathan stood in the gap, between the king and David, seeking to reason with Saul, concerning David's innocence. In fact, on one such occasion, Jonathan's defense of David earned him public shame, as his father had spoken harshly against him at a special feast, where other key officers were present. And furthermore, he had to dodge a tossed spear, on that same occasion. And rather than turn away from David that he might salvage his father's respect, Jonathan left and warned David to flee, as soon as possible. [1 Samuel 20]

5) Indeed, the close relationship that Jonathan once enjoyed with his father; that relationship which led Saul to confide in his son and to set him over a significant portion of his army, was greatly fractured because of Jonathan's unwillingness to turn against the innocent David; the very David, who would assumably one day reign over Jonathan. Clearly, nothing less than divine grace, compelled Jonathan to persevere in his godly convictions.

6) This is greatly confirmed on the final occasion, when Jonathan and his beloved friend David had met. David, being exhausted, weary and disheartened from Saul's relentless and ungodly pursuit of him, was in need of great encouragement to press on. And who could we imagine, God would send to offer words of encouragement and strength, during such a difficult and trying time? Indeed, the Lord sent Jonathan! Jonathan, at the risk of his own life, snuck out and found David in the woods (in the Wilderness of Ziph), and there, we are told that he "strengthened [David's] hand in God!" Only a beloved brother in Christ could do this! Consider his words to David, as they covenanted yet again, before the Lord: "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. Even my father Saul knows that." Indeed, Jonathan was a faithful and true friend, and a man who maintained his integrity before God, at the expense of much, from the standpoint of this world! [1 Samuel 23]

7) But lastly, Jonathan was also a faithful son, to his mad and contrary father. Indeed, Jonathan sought to honor God above all else, and that got him into a lot of trouble with his father, but he also willingly submitted to his father's authority (as a father and a king), in so far as his conscience would permit him to do so. One might think, "Ok Jonathan, your dad has been beyond unreasonable with you all along. Your dad is opposed to God on many fronts. Why not curse him and walk away?" But Jonathan remained a faithful son, in so far as he was able, amidst the sin and shame of his father.

How do we prove this? Indeed, where does Jonathan take his last breath? Alongside of his brothers, fighting both for his country and his father. Though his father was cursed, rather than walk away, Jonathan defended the king, against his Philistine enemies. In fact, we would better say that Jonathan was a faithful soldier, a faithful countryman and a faithful son. He fought hard, right to the end. and unlike his father, he died a noble death, in battle.

And so, as we commemorate the home going of Jonathan, all of these things, and much more, testify, above all else, to the fact that Jonathan was a servant of the living God. Though

naturally in a very high position (the son of a king), he sacrificed much, in the trials and testings through which God brought him. He could have taken a much more selfish and easier route, had he chosen what was "seen" above what is "unseen!" But here, by his grave sight, it all pays off! For he has left us, who mourn for him now, a faithful testimony, evidencing the grace and power of God, at work in the soul of a man of clay!

Next time, Lord willing, brethren, we will step away from Jonathan's casket, as it were, and move into the viewing room of his father, King Saul. For now, we behold a testimony of honor, to be followed by a testimony of shame, next week.

II. Concluding Thoughts and Applications, Part I

1) Let us first note, that there are certain things in life, which you cannot purchase, and which are most precious and valuable in the sight of God. In fact, I can recall a popular song in the past, which was called, "The Best Things in Life are Free!" Now, while I don't recall the context of that particular song (a love song of some sort, I believe), the general statement is true. And God has ordered things in this way. You see, the things which are most valuable in life, are actually things which people of all cultures, races, financial means...etc, can access, by the grace of God. For one, salvation is a free gift of God, given in Christ!

But I want to highlight this morning, especially the immeasurable value of a "good testimony!" Indeed, there are many, many things in life, which are considered valuable, by the world's standard, but which are really worth very little in light of the big picture. For example, all of this world's material riches; gold and silver and dollars and cars and yachts and priceless artifacts and etc, will all perish one day, will they not? None of the material things, found in this world, will pass through the filter of the grave. But a good testimony, though immaterial, is not only most valuable in this life, but it actually passes through the filter of the grave, and into eternity. And this is what Jonathan had! In fact, when you look at the decisions Jonathan had made; when you consider all that he had lost, the perpetual conflict with his father, and all that he had given up, so that he might maintain his integrity before God and protect David, you would have to say that he was a man, most to be pitied, if his testimony had no considerable value.

How many kings, like Saul and Herod, went to great lengths to establish and secure their reign, sacrificing much blood and committing many atrocities for material gain? And in doing so, they had no problem sacrificing their integrity and testimony in the process? But in the end,

what did it all matter? In the small time slot of life, given all of us, what do such things really matter? Nothing! But with Jonathan, to invest in maintaining a faithful testimony; to walk with God with Enoch, is worth more than all of the riches, prestige, sexual pleasure, and power of every kingdom combined, since the beginning of time!

Young people, learn from Jonathan! Learn from all of those in Scripture, who believed that the security of their never dying souls, was worth more than all of this world's goods and pleasures combined! For, God will bring all of us to the kinds of life tests, which will reveal where our hearts really are. There is no avoiding it. The "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," will be placed before each and every one of us, on numerous occasions, and the desires of our hearts will be revealed. Will you walk with God or will you take of the forbidden fruit, which looks good, which looks tasty, and which promises to make one wise? The one with the most toys does not win in the end! The one who brings God glory, wins!

2) And the one who brings God glory, is only the one, who is in Christ! Let me close, friends, by saying this in the most emphatic way possible. We are fallen human beings, naturally bent toward and bound for destruction. A good testimony; pursuing a life that is fixed on knowing, loving and serving God, is an impossible mission, if such a life is pursued outside of Jesus Christ. You may as well try to lift a million pounds, and that, while standing on top of the weight itself. It is an impossible endeavor...for us!

But God is in the very business of enabling us to do, what we could never do on our own. The God who created all things by speaking, the God who healed the lame, the deaf, the blind and the leper; the God, who walked on water and whose voice the winds and waves obey; indeed, the God who raises the dead and can bring a camel through the eye of a needle...He can do in us, what we could never do in ourselves! He can change our hearts, giving us the unnatural desire to forsake all else, and follow Him.

Let me then point you in the proper direction, indeed, the *only* direction, where a faithful life and testimony can be found. This can only be found in The Lord Jesus Christ! [In closing, consider the example of the blind beggar, desperately shouting aloud, refusing to quiet down at the command of others around him; "Son of David, have mercy on me!"]

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper