

Message #10

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Life of David

2/16/2020

DAVID AND JONATHAN AND FRIENDSHIP

1 SAMUEL 20

INTRODUCTION

Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen is regarded as one of the greatest playwrights in European history. He once declared, **“When one stands... in so intensely personal a relationship to one’s lifework, one cannot really expect to keep one’s friends.... Friends are an expensive luxury, and when one invests one’s capital in a calling or mission in this life, one cannot afford to have friends.”** (Johnson, *Intellectuals*, p. 96)

The Bible has a different take on friendship. In Ecclesiastes #4 vv. 9-10 the inspired preacher (PROJECTOR ON--- ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10) wrote, **“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!”** Aristotle argued that there are three kinds of friendships. There is the friendship of pleasure. That is being around people who have fun together. Then there is the friendship of utility. This is having relationships with people who provide some kind of practical value to an individual. Then there is the virtuous friendship. This is a deeper relationship where two or more people truly want good for the other person or persons. (PROJECTOR OFF)

It is this third kind of friendship that E. B. White described in his children’s book *Charlotte’s Web*. For those of you who don’t know or don’t remember, the story is about a pig named Wilbur who is being raised to be slaughtered. Charlotte is a spider who becomes aware of the situation, and she proceeds to weave words and short phrases in her web which praise Wilbur. These remarkable web writings make the barn and the pig a tourist attraction, which ends up saving Wilbur’s life.

At the end of Charlotte’s brief lifespan, Wilbur asks her, **“Why did you do all this for me? I don’t deserve it. I’ve never done anything for you.”** **“You have been my friend,”** Charlotte replies. **“That in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I liked you. After all, what’s a life, anyway? We’re born, we live a little while, we die. A spider’s life can’t help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a**

trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life could use a little of that." "Well," said Wilbur. "I'm no good at making speeches. I haven't got your gift for words. But you have saved me, Charlotte, and I would gladly give my life for you--- I really would."

Who would not want to have that kind of friendship? Our passage this morning describes such a friendship. It has lessons for us about having and being a good friend.

We are at the point in the story of the life of David where Saul is king of Israel. His disobedience to God has resulted in the appointment of David to replace him. David has been successful in defeating the Philistine giant Goliath. He has led Israelite armies in defeating the Philistines. His musical abilities have been useful in calming King Saul when an evil spirit plagues him. But Saul has come to realize that David is his divinely intended replacement. So his jealousy has prompted him to try to have David killed. He has used his daughters as bait to get David to undertake dangerous military missions. But all of the king's efforts have been thwarted. Today in #20 of 1 Samuel we see that Saul's own son becomes instrumental in preserving the life of David.

I.

In 1 Samuel #20 vv. 1-11, which is p. 243 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we learn about THE COST OF FRIENDSHIP. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE COST OF FRIENDSHIP) According to v. 1, **"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?'"**

Last time in #19 we saw King Saul's murderous jealousy toward David become more open. Saul threw a spear at David, and then he sent men to David's house to arrest him. David's wife helped him to escape. David fled to Samuel, who had anointed him to be the new king. The Lord divinely intervened when soldiers and then Saul himself went to capture David at Ramah. We are told that the Spirit of God came upon these people and prevented them from accomplishing their evil plan.

(DAVID 6 MAP) So while Saul was delayed at Ramah, David went ten or fifteen miles south back to Gibeah, which was the capital city and home of Saul and his family. There he met up with Jonathan.

We were introduced to this friendship between the two men in #18 v. 1. (PROJECTOR OFF) After David's victory over Goliath, we were told, **"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.” Jonathan witnessed David’s bravery and skill and good words and commitment to the God of Israel, and recognized a soulmate. For Jonathan had a similar commitment and had displayed similar bravery. We earlier saw that Jonathan had military success in defeating the Philistines. The basis of their friendship was a common, heartfelt commitment to the God of Israel and His will.

The most fascinating thing is that Jonathan is the crown prince. He is next in line to the throne of Israel. David is a potential rival to that claim. But somehow Jonathan humbly recognizes that it is God’s plan for David to be the next king. For in v. 4 of #18 we are told, **“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.”** Jonathan, in effect, was giving up his position as crown prince to David. Friendship for Jonathan was costly.

In v. 1 of our passage David does not understand the reason for Saul’s jealousy. David has only been loyal to the king. David has been given the promise that some day he will be king. But he is relying on God to bring that about, and he has only done the right things in serving Saul.

Verse 2: **“And he [Jonathan] said to him [David], ‘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.’”** Early in #19 Saul vowed before Jonathan that he would not hurt David. But Saul quickly changed his mind. The king is aware of Jonathan’s friendship with David, and he begins to keep him out of the loop. Jonathan has a hard time imagining that his father could change his mind so quickly and act so evilly against his friend.

According to vv. 3 & 4, **“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.’ Then Jonathan said to David, ‘Whatever you say, I will do for you.’”** The cost of this friendship is working against the will of Jonathan’s father.

Verse 5: **“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.’”** Israel operated on a lunar calendar. The Old Testament law spoke of a special offering that was to be made on the first of the month at the beginning of the new moon. Saul had apparently made it into a three day deal. (Numbers 10:10; 28:14) The top officials were expected to be present for this

celebration, including David. Why would Saul expect David to be present after his recent attempts to capture and kill him? Perhaps he hopes that David is not fully aware of his motives in seeking to bring David back to the palace. Perhaps he hopes that David will think that his spear throwing was the result of his temporary bouts of insanity, which the king had previously demonstrated.

The story continues in vv. 6-11: **“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. 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?’ 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?’ 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.”** The cost for this friendship to Jonathan is giving up his claim to the throne and going against his father’s will. He is making himself subject to his father’s anger.

There was an article in last Sunday’s *Review Journal* about a mobster by the name of Frank Calabrese who decided that he needed to get out of the Mob. He was in prison with his father as the result of a loan shark conviction. His father had been involved in much worse crimes than that. Frank Calabrese developed a friendship with an FBI agent, whose name was Michael Maseth. The two of them spoke at the Mob Museum last month. Frank’s determination to do right and his friendship with this representative of the FBI meant that he was rejected by his father and much of his family and his former associates. His own life was endangered, but he has survived. Friendship can be costly.

Friendship for most of us is not so costly, but it necessarily involves a commitment of time and energy. It means the sacrifice of other priorities. Jesus Himself (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 15:13) declared, **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”** Jesus did that for us, demonstrating that He is our friend. For the gospel message is that Jesus as both God and man died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He rose again from the dead to demonstrate that He is God. When we put our trust in Him and what He did for us, we receive forgiveness for our sins and eternal life.

II.

In vv. 12-17 in our passage we learn about THE COVENANT NATURE OF FRIENDSHIP. (II. THE COVENANT NATURE OF FRIENDSHIP) According to vv. 12-15, **“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. 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.” We see something more here about the costly nature of this friendship for Jonathan.

A key term in vv. 14 and 15 is “steadfast love.” In Hebrew the word is *hesed*. It is variously translated as “steadfast love,” “mercy,” and “lovingkindness.” It is obviously a strong, committed kind of love. It is the love that God has for His people. It is the kind of love that Jonathan is asking for from his friendship with David. It is this kind of love that is associated with God’s covenants with Israel.

Notice v. 16: **“And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, ‘May the Lord take vengeance on David’s enemies.’”** Back in #18 v. 3 we read, **“Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.”** In v. 16 in our passage this covenant is being extended to the two dynasties, to the descendants of David and Jonathan.

Jonathan is the heir apparent. But he is asking David to have mercy and lovingkindness in v. 15 toward his descendants. In v. 16 he is calling for vengeance upon the enemies of David, which now includes his own father.

The literal terminology that is used in v. 16 and in other parts of the Old Testament that make reference to the making of a covenant is “to cut a covenant.” The origin of this term seems to go back to the early custom of cutting animals in making an important agreement. Animals would be sacrificed and cut in half. The two parties making a covenant would then walk between the pieces, signifying in the process that violating the covenant would mean death to the person who does not follow it.

With that as background, notice the terminology in v. 15 where Jonathan calls upon David not to cut off his *hesed*, his steadfast love, from Jonathan’s descendants. In turn, Jonathan expects the Lord to cut off all of David’s enemies. In v. 16 the word covenant does not actually appear. Instead the text says that Jonathan cut with the house of David. The idea of a covenant is implied.

Verse 17: **“And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.”** Today countries and leaders make formal agreements, or covenants. It is not very often that we as individuals make covenants, although we do sign things like business contracts. Perhaps the closest thing that we have to the friendship agreement that Jonathan and David made with each other is a marriage contract. Normally we make vows and sign a marriage license when we get married. Marriage is probably the strongest form of friendship that we can have on this side of the grave.

Covenants have historically played an important role in God’s relationship with His people. After the flood in Noah’s day God made a covenant with Noah’s offspring that he would never again cause a universal flood to happen. The sign of that covenant was the rainbow. God later made a covenant with Abraham whereby He promised to bless all of his descendants. The sign of observance of that covenant was circumcision. Later God made a covenant with Moses and the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. The sign of that covenant was observance of the Sabbath. We will soon see that God makes a covenant with David and his descendants.

We Christians are involved with a covenant with God that is referred to as the New Covenant. (LUKE 22:20) In Luke # 22 v. 20 the author describes the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, **“And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”** Jesus at the crucifixion created a new covenant by virtue of the sacrifice of himself. The sign of our connection to that covenant is observance of the Lord’s Supper. It is by virtue of this covenant that we can have a kind of friendship with the living God.

III.

In vv. 18-34 we come to THE TEST OF FRIENDSHIP. (III. THE TEST OF FRIENDSHIP) According to vv. 18 & 19, **“Then Jonathan said to him, ‘Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. On the third day go down quickly to the place where you hid yourself when the matter was in hand, and remain beside the stone heap.’”** The place where David previously hid himself is described in the first part of #19. It was there that Jonathan convinced his father not to kill David.

Verses 20-23: **“And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. And behold, I will send the boy, saying, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I say to the boy, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you, take them,’ then you are to come, for, as the Lord lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger. But if I say to the youth, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you,’ then go, for the Lord has sent you away. And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the Lord is between you and me forever.”** The Lord being between you and me means that the Lord will avenge any breach of this covenant. This covenant has now been extended to their respective descendants.

Verses 24 & 25: **“So David hid himself in the field. And when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. The king sat on his seat, as at other times, on the seat by the wall. Jonathan sat opposite, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty.”** Abner is the commanding general of the army and Saul’s cousin.

The story continues in vv. 26-29: **“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.’ 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?’ Jonathan answered Saul, ‘David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. He said, “Let me go, for our clan holds a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be there. So now, if I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away and see my brothers.” For this reason he has not come to the king's table.’”** Jonathan and David are involved with deception here. The narrator makes no comment on the ethics of this. We don’t have any indication here about God’s view of this.

Look at v. 30: **“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?’”** This is a strong curse. It is something like: “You son of a rebellious slut!”

From Saul’s perspective Jonathan has become a disgrace to the family. But, as is so often the case, the one uttering such curses is the one who is disgracing his family. Jonathan’s commitment to friendship, and to doing what is right, is being severely tested. He is choosing his friend over his father.

According to vv. 31-34, **“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.’ 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. 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.”** Jonathan was choosing his friend over his father. But it was also the right thing to do. It was an act of obedience to God.

Jesus in Matthew 10:37 (MATTHEW 10:37) said, **“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son of daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”** This is the kind of situation that Jesus is describing. Sometimes doing the right thing and being faithful to the right friend may mean going against what parents want.

Friendship can be tested not only by family ties but also by other people and by circumstances. (PROJECTOR OFF) John Adams and Thomas Jefferson became close friends when they were members of the Continental Congress. After the war they were both sent to Europe as diplomats. That friendship deepened when the two of them explored the English countryside together. Adams’ wife Abigail said of Jefferson that he was **“the only person with whom my companion could associate with perfect freedom and reserve.”**

When the two men returned to the States, they began to have political differences. Their relationship soured. Their friendship was tested. But in retirement they both softened and renewed that friendship. Ironically they both died on the same day. In a bit of double irony, they died on July 4, 1826.

George Whitefield and John Wesley became close after George became a Christian at Oxford University. John was eleven years older and helped George grow in his new faith. They both became flaming evangelists. But as they developed their theological thinking, John became an Arminian and George became a Calvinist. This tested their friendship. They said and wrote things that were sharp criticisms of each other and their beliefs. It was only in their maturity as they recognized that they had more in common than they had in difference that their friendship was renewed. George Whitefield died first. John Wesley led his memorial service in England.

It is a great thing to have a Christian friend, or friends, upon whom we can always depend. At times deep friendships may be tested. But if there is a common and mature commitment, that friendship will endure. Jesus is that kind of friend to us. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 TIMOTHY 2:13) In 2 Timothy #2 v. 13 the Apostle Paul declares, **“...if we are faithless, he remains faithful--- for he cannot deny himself.”**

IV.

Consider, finally, vv. 35-42 and THE SEPARATION OF FRIENDSHIP. (IV. THE SEPARATION OF FRIENDSHIP) We read in v. 35, **“In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him a little boy.”** Probably this was a young assistant who had been given the task of collecting arrows many times.

Verse 36-40 tell us: **“And he said to his boy, ‘Run and find the arrows that I shoot.’ As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. And when the boy came to the place of the arrow that Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the boy and said, ‘Is not the arrow beyond you? And Jonathan called after the boy, ‘Hurry! Be quick! Do not stay!’ So Jonathan's boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master. But the boy knew nothing. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, ‘Go and carry them to the city.’”** Jonathan had set up this arrangement because he was unsure if he could get along with David. Knowing that his father was suspicious and upset about his connection with David, Saul might have people spying on him. But it appears that Jonathan is now alone.

Thus the story concludes in vv. 41 & 42: **“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. 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.””** And he rose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city.” Such was the depth of this friendship.

With the exception of a very brief meeting, this was to be the last time that the two friends would have meaningful interaction with each other. David was going to be left very much alone. He was going to be treated as an outlaw. He has lost his position, his wife, his connection with the prophet Samuel, and now his close friend. This was a severe testing time for David. It was also an opportunity for the development of his faith.

In our modern and mobile society, most of us know a lot about separation of friendships. Fortunately we have electronic means of communication that can be useful in maintaining these friendships, at least to some extent.

Separation of friendships has special meaning to the followers of Jesus. In John #15 Jesus called his followers friends. In #14 He announced that He was leaving them. (JOHN 14:1-2) In the first three verses He told them, **“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (JOHN 14:3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”**

In the context of #15 when Jesus said that He was the friend of His followers, He also commanded His disciples to love one another. (PROJECTOR OFF) Certainly this involves the task of cultivating friendships.

Friendships need to be cultivated. It takes time and energy to do that. In my experience women tend to be better at it than us men, especially after marriages and families and careers come along. Christian author and commentator Eric Metaxas observes, **“Far from being unnatural, heartfelt male friendships are clearly healthy--- even essential. As the Church, we’ve got to encourage boys and men to invest in each other’s lives on more than a superficial level.”** (Breakpoint, 9/22/2014)

In our church we have a men’s Bible study group that meets on Saturday mornings at 7 AM. Our moving ministry, which has an opportunity for service Saturday, mostly involves men. Occasionally we have a breakfast. One of the things that I have found to be most helpful in cultivating friendships among men in the church is the annual men’s retreat that we have in April. I would encourage you men to consider participating in it. This year it will take place the last weekend in April. We will go down on Friday to Prescott, Arizona, where there is a Christian camp high up in the pine forest above that town. We have great food and music and a Christian speaker and various activities and recreation. Don and I make it a priority to go. I hope that many of you men will consider joining us this year. We usually bring along two or three teenage boys who don’t have their fathers around. It is a great opportunity to model Christian manhood for them. So consider joining us.

Cultivating friendships takes time and energy. We need to make it a priority.