

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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1st Samuel: Samuel to King David

Chapter 18 - David and Jonathan

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Greetings and welcome to this broadcast, from Truth for Today, where we have reached chapter eighteen in our study of 1st Samuel. Today, we have before us the lovely account of the relationship between David and Jonathan, which is also the title of our talk today. The friendship between these two men, one a shepherd and the other a prince, beams ever brightly from the pages of Scripture, with such radiance that it is difficult to find a greater example of self-denial and sacrifice than Jonathan's love for David. It seems to have arisen from the great victory of David, when he defeated Goliath in the valley of Elah. Goliath, a seasoned warrior and the champion of the Philistines, was utterly vanquished by David, the shepherd boy. To set the scene for the introduction of Jonathan into our talk, I will read verses 57 & 58 of chapter 17 of 1 Samuel:

“And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, ‘Whose son are you, young man?’ And David answered, ‘I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.’”

No doubt, you will have noticed that Jonathan was not mentioned in that verse because I have an important point to emphasise from that extract, before I proceed to Jonathan's feelings for David. When the young conqueror returned from the battle with Goliath, he had the head of Goliath as proof of the final end of the Philistine, the sworn enemy of David's fellow Israelites. King Saul's enquiry concerned the identity of the young victor. I have paused our talk at this juncture because I want to bring to our attention an important reminder from this verse that is critical for our understanding of the Christian faith. Just as Saul desired to know the identity of David, I am persuaded that the identity of the Lord Jesus, as the Son of God, is a crucial element of our belief in Him. When we say that we are believers in Jesus it must include believing that Jesus is the Son of God, as John's Gospel chapter 20, and verses 21 and 22 states:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”

The New Testament is consistent in proclaiming the identity of Jesus. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus is a mystery that thrills the heart of us believers, making us kneel in praise at such a demonstration of God's love, as John 3:16 states,

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...”

The identity of the Lord Jesus was, and ever remains, a constituent part of our faith. I would suggest that the incarnation is the greatest wonder put forward on the pages of Scripture. I trust that all who listen today are believers in Jesus.

Jonathan and David meet

Except for emphasising the identity of Jesus, I would have joined verse one of chapter eighteen onto the verses we read from chapter 17, which is what I am going to do now:

“And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, ‘Whose son are you, young man?’ And David answered, ‘I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.’ 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.”

The deep and noble friendship between David and Jonathan seems to have found its origin in the first sight that Jonathan had of David when he (David) was being interviewed by King Saul. He had witnessed the awesome sight of David venturing out towards the giant Goliath unarmed, except for his shepherd’s sling and five smooth stones. He realised that David took upon himself the whole burden of the Israelite’s war with the Philistines. His courage, bravery, and trust, in the living God had triumphed to the effect that his fellow Israelites were freed from the terror of defeat and slavery by the Philistines. No wonder the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David. The Scripture says that Jonathan loved him as his own soul. In other words a most enduring friendship sprang up never to fade or fail.

From the early verses of chapter eighteen it would seem that David was unaware of the effect he had upon Jonathan. He might have the confidence of youth, but he would still be dressed in the garments of the sheepfold meaning he would be out of place in the superior opulence of the king’s tent. Later when Jonathan sent for him, he had not been allowed to return to his father’s house, so in all probability he would still be dressed as he was when he strode into the valley of Elah. Also, we must remember that those garments would be stained with the blood of Goliath, for he carried the giant’s head after cutting it off with the Philistine’s sword.

Jonathan’s gifts to David

Verses three and four of chapter 18 reveal more of the relationship between David and Jonathan:

“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 armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.”

What can be said about Jonathan’s gifts to David? These would not be cheap, run-of-the-mill items, but rather such things as were fit for a prince. I think there is a hint here of Jonathan recognising the future destiny of David. What should have been Jonathan’s natural succession to the throne of Israel was diverted to David, and Jonathan was aware of that. This does not minimise the fact that his gifts were the gifts of love.

There is another factor, in verse 3 of 1 Samuel 18 that I have just read which refers to the covenant between them. The gist of the covenant concerns their links with God and each other. Their joint faith in the Eternal One meant their friendship had a solid base. This was not a fleeting

flash of emotion but rather a sympathetic grasp and empathy of each other's personality - a friendship for life not just for the moment.

There is another factor in the verses that I have just read from 1 Samuel regarding the gifts David received. At this point, I recall some negative comments about Jonathan's action that I heard many years ago, but which I still remember. The speaker on that occasion suggested that Jonathan should have given his shoes to David as a sign that he would follow him wherever he went. This leaves us with the charge that Jonathan was, therefore, wanting in his friendship with David because when the crunch came the two friends went in different directions, as verse 42 of chapter 20 of 1 Samuel states:

“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, for ever.’ And he rose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city.”

Only once more does Scripture ever record that the two friends met again (1Samuel 23:16).

Jonathan's hard choice

Did Jonathan betray the deep friendship that existed between himself and David? I would answer in the negative. Jonathan was following the Scripture, “Honour thy father and mother.” The filial devotion to his parents, especially to his father, was a reflection of his faithfulness to the God of his fathers. He must have known that David was the king-in-waiting, yet his loyalty to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and respect to the anointed King Saul, exercised a greater influence upon the noble prince. Thus I would maintain that the ministry I heard many years ago, suggesting that Jonathan ought to have followed David, was wrong. It did not weaken the bonds that bound the two, for their faith in the living God was the permanent link between them, as we have just read in verse 42 of chapter 20.

Verse 16 of 1 Samuel 23 tells of the deep concern that Jonathan had for David, even though separated by absence. The last time the two met can be considered a marker denoting this concern. Saul was seeking everywhere for David, who was convinced that he would eventually be captured. So Jonathan went looking for him. When he found David hiding in a wood he did a most wonderful thing. He strengthened David's heart in God. Dear listener, I ask you today, “Have you ever been used of God to strengthen the faith of someone who is finding the journey hard?” Jonathan must have kept the channels of communication open or how else would he have known where to find David. There is a favourite verse of mine in Proverbs 18:24 (KJV), or rather a portion of the verse, which states that:

“...That there is a friend who sticketh closer than a brother.”

When a comparison is made between Jonathan and the attitude of David's brothers, in 1 Samuel 17, the truth of the Proverb can be easily seen.

Saul's distrust of David the Son of Jesse

From 1 Samuel 18 verses 6 & 7 we learn that David is greeted with the acclamation songs of the women, as he took his place in the triumphant victory procession:

“As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they

celebrated. 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.'"

It would seem now as if all was set fair for David to progress to the higher echelons of King Saul's court. No longer would he have to keep a lonely vigil looking after his father's sheep, guarding them from marauding animals. His place now, as a favourite of the king, was to enjoy all the privileges and favours that accompanied such a position. Sadly, this did not happen, as matters took a turn for the worse as verses 8 & 9 tell us:

"And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, 'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?' And Saul kept an eye on David from that day on."

We can now judge how and when the enmity between Saul and David arose. It was a matter of blatant envy of the enthusiastic reception afforded to the young shepherd boy. It is the same today, when envy and covetousness stimulate distress and malicious feelings in individuals and families. It certainly destroyed the relationship between David and Saul for the rest of the king's life, all because the women emphasised David's prime part in the slaying of the Philistine giant. And also that Saul witnessed that God was with David.

What is certain is that, despite Saul's enmity David's friendship with Jonathan was not affected. Neither was his relationship with the LORD. Verse 12 states that the LORD was with David, but had departed from Saul. There are Psalms which appertain to this period of David's struggle with Saul. Strictly speaking, they do not come within the remit of 1 Samuel 18, but despite this I shall briefly quote from Psalm 57 to show that David's trust was in God.

"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge, in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfils his purpose for me. He will send from heaven and save me; he will put to shame him who tramples on me. Selah. God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!" (Psalm 57: 1-3).

David's trust in God

A perusal of these verses indicates that David was confident that God's presence was with him. He was certain that God had purposed him for the throne of Israel. Until that time he would trust in the mercy of God and rest in the shadow of His wings. Such faith in God is a challenge to us in our day. We have a greater revelation of the living God, for the Lord Jesus revealed Him as the Father, as He could say to Philip:

"Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father?'" (See John 14: 8 & 9).

I am convinced that one of the greatest privileges of the Christian's life, in this age, is that we have the knowledge of God, knowledge that we do not obtain from the study centres of this world, but from the Scriptures, as emphasised by the Holy Spirit. Let us compare our knowledge of God with that of David's mentioned in the three verses we have just quoted. He became a fugitive from Saul's enmity, meaning he had many occasions when he was grateful for the mercy of God, in whose Presence he found refuge. This was an intimate refuge, for he speaks of sheltering in the shadow of His wings, while the storms of destruction raged. There was always the confidence that God heard his prayers and would bring him through, whatever lay ahead, because God would fulfil

His purposes. His view of God was high and lofty, for David's God, not being an idol made with hands, dwelt in heaven. Finally the LORD was faithful who loved David with a steadfast love. Would that it was the same for all of us listening today, that we had the knowledge of God that David had. If we haven't, the fault lies with each one of us, not with God. You might exclaim now that I have wandered away from my subject, as I have been talking about David's faith, not his relationship with Jonathan. I would answer that we learned earlier in this talk that Jonathan shared David's faith in God and also that he was used of God to encourage David by strengthening his hand in God.

David becomes a member of Jonathan's family

Though we have not reached the end of our chapter we have almost used our allotted time, consequently, I must truncate the concluding verses. Despite the slaying of Goliath, the wars with the Philistines continued. This gave an opportunity for Saul to hatch a plan which could result in David's death. He (Saul) promised David the hand of his eldest daughter in marriage if he would lead a troop of soldiers against the Philistines, or to fight the LORD'S battles, as he put it. It amazed David that such a marriage would elevate him to the position of son-in-law to the king. I suggest that such an attitude tells us something about his friendship with Jonathan. It is obvious that such a friendship was not based upon status, rather upon natural, innate friendliness. It wasn't that his friendship with Jonathan gave him access to the court that counted with David. He was always conscious that he was a nobody (1 Samuel 18: 18 & 19).

Before this happened, however, David had a task to fulfil as part of the marriage settlement. He had to kill one hundred Philistines, thereby being killed himself, or so Saul hoped. Far from being killed in the battle, David and his men were responsible for the demise of two hundred Philistines and not one hundred. What is more, they brought proof of their victory to leave Saul in no doubt. The marriage, which made David brother-in-law to Jonathan, went ahead only the bride was not the eldest daughter, but Michal, a lesser daughter in Saul's eyes.

The last words of our chapter are a pertinent introduction to next week's talk, which is entitled "Saul seeks to kill David."

"Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually" (1 Samuel 18: 29).

All through this time of Saul's enmity of David, Jonathan ever remained a faithful friend, even if they did not meet very often. He never betrayed their friendship in any way at all. To finish, I quote a text which summarises the friendship between David and Jonathan:

"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly"
(Proverbs 18:24, KJV).

Thank you for listening to this talk from Truth for Today number T1344 entitled "David and Jonathan" in the series 1st Samuel: Samuel to King David.

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