

**“Choosing the Son of Jesse to Your Own Shame:  
Neither You Nor Your Kingdom Shall Be Established”**

**1 Samuel 20**

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**Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service**

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We return tonight to First Samuel after six weeks away from it. We'll be looking at chapter twenty, and as we prepare to turn to it, some review is in order.

Back in chapter eight Israel demanded a king from the Lord, from Yahweh, and in the chapters that follow Saul was chosen, anointed, and installed as Israel's king. Though he seemed to have a good beginning, things took a turn as Saul increasingly closed his ears to the word of Yahweh, disregarding his commands and disobeying Samuel his prophet. As a result of Saul's persistent and unrepentant rebellion, in chapter sixteen God directs his prophet Samuel to anoint David as Israel's next king. Because of his service to Saul, both as a musician and as a warrior, David was brought into King Saul's court, but it was not long before Saul became envious of David's popularity and hostile towards him, though David continued to serve in Saul's court faithfully. David also became close friends with Jonathan, Saul's son. Jonathan, we have seen, is faithful to Yahweh, as David is, and in chapter eighteen Jonathan makes a covenant with David that not only gives structure to the faithfulness of their friendship, but also acknowledges that David will succeed Saul to the throne, rather than Jonathan. Though the loss is not due to any sin on Jonathan's part, Jonathan accepts it as Yahweh's will. At the same time, Michal, Saul's daughter, falls in love with David and they are married.

And as all this goes on, Saul's hostility towards David grows. In chapter eighteen, under the influence of a harmful spirit and in the impulse of anger, Saul hurls a spear at David, trying to kill him, but David escapes.

From there, Saul's murderous impulses towards David become more calculating, as he sends him into battle situations with the hopes that David will fail and be killed.

Finally, in chapter nineteen Saul's murderous hostility towards David becomes overt and open. He announces to Jonathan and his servants that they should kill David. Jonathan talks him down and Saul swears an oath in the name of Yahweh that he will not harm David, but that does not last long.

A few verses later Saul hurls his spear at David in the king's court once again. When he misses, he then sends thugs to David's house to kill him – ordering them at one point to bring David to him so that he might kill him himself. But Michal, Saul's daughter, David's wife, deceives them and David escapes to the prophet Samuel.

Next, Saul sends three waves of soldiers to attack David while he is among Samuel and the prophets, but the Holy Spirit stops the soldiers in their tracks. Finally, Saul goes himself with soldiers to attack David, and the Holy Spirit stops him as well – causing him to strip off his clothes and lie on the ground all day and night.

And so, as our text tonight begins, it is likely telling us how David fled from the camp of Samuel – from Naioth in Ramah – *while* Saul and his soldiers were disabled by the Spirit of God, and where he went after fleeing from the presence of Saul.

So, with all that in mind, we turn to First Samuel 20. Please listen carefully, for this is God's word for us this evening:

<sup>20:1</sup> 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?" <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> 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 Yahweh lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death." <sup>4</sup> Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.' <sup>7</sup> If he says, 'Good!' it will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him. <sup>8</sup> Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of Yahweh with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?" <sup>9</sup> 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?" <sup>10</sup> Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?" <sup>11</sup> And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field.

<sup>12</sup> And Jonathan said to David, "Yahweh, 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?" <sup>13</sup> But should it please my father to do you harm, Yahweh 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 Yahweh be with you, as he has been with my father. <sup>14</sup> If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of Yahweh, that I may not die; <sup>15</sup> and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when Yahweh cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." <sup>16</sup> And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May Yahweh take vengeance on David's enemies." <sup>17</sup> And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

<sup>18</sup> Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. <sup>21</sup> 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 Yahweh lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger. <sup>22</sup> But if I say to the youth, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then go, for Yahweh has sent you away. <sup>23</sup> And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, Yahweh is between you and me forever."

<sup>24</sup> So David hid himself in the field. And when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. <sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> 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?" <sup>28</sup> Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. <sup>29</sup> 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.”

<sup>30</sup> 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? <sup>31</sup> 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.”<sup>32</sup> Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” <sup>33</sup> But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. <sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him a little boy. <sup>36</sup> And he said to his boy, “Run and find the arrows that I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. <sup>37</sup> 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?” <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> But the boy knew nothing. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter. <sup>40</sup> And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, “Go and carry them to the city.” <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of Yahweh, saying, ‘Yahweh 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Let's pray ...

Lord, with the psalmist  
we ask that your steadfast love would be upon us,  
according to your promise.  
Take not your word of truth from our lips,  
for we know that our hope is in your revelation spoken to us.  
Help us to keep your commands continually,  
to walk in your ways in all areas of life,  
to speak your truth to the people and the powers around us,  
to find our delight in your testimony to us,  
and to love your revelation to us.  
Grant this now as we turn to your word together,  
and all the days of our lives.  
In Jesus name, Amen.  
[Based on Psalm 119:41,43-47]

Section headings in our English Bibles are not part of the original texts, as many of you will know, but are added by the editors. They are often helpful guides if you are looking through a book of the Bible and trying to find a particular story or text. But sometimes they can be a bit misleading.

I don't often feel that way about the headings in the ESV, but I do in this case. If you have an English Standard Version of the Bible before you, then you probably saw that summary statement at the top of the chapter. It says "Jonathan Warns David." And I want to start by arguing that that is *not* really what this story is about.

As we come to our text, David had no need for anyone to warn him about Saul.

In the last chapter alone, Saul had openly and publicly tried to murder David seven times! Once in the king's court, twice while he thought David was at home, and four times at Ramah. That's seven murder attempts in a fairly short period of time in chapter nineteen. And chapter nineteen is not even the first time that Saul had tried to kill David! So David had no need to be warned of Saul's murderous intentions towards him!

What I want to argue is that this chapter is not so much about Jonathan warning David, as it is about David warning Jonathan. It is Jonathan's heart, Jonathan's spiritual state, Jonathan's ultimate allegiance and loyalty that is really at the heart of this text.

Our text is a long one. And since length is often an indicator of importance in Biblical stories like this, we are meant to take notice. [Leithart, 120]

And in its length, it breaks down into four major sections. In verses one through eight we see *confrontation* between David and Jonathan. In verses eight through seventeen we see *covenant* between David and Jonathan. In verses eighteen through thirty-three we see *testing* – both of Saul and of Jonathan. And then in verses thirty-four through forty-two we see the *commitment* of Jonathan. So: Confrontation, Covenant, Testing, and Commitment.

Tonight I want to walk through each stage of the story to see what it has to say about Jonathan and what it has to teach to each of us.

So first, in verses one through eight we see *confrontation* between David and Jonathan.

David flees from Samuel's camp in Ramah, where he is under attack from Saul ... and he flees to Jonathan, presumably nearby the courts of Saul. He seems to be fleeing from a land of danger to a land of even greater danger. Why? Well, it would seem to be in order to confront Jonathan and to bring him to a recognition of the truth about Saul. In other words, it was to save Jonathan from misunderstanding the heart of David and from misunderstanding the heart of Saul. [Alter, 124; Davis, 203-204; Leithart, 121]

David comes before Jonathan and the statement we have from David in verse one comes to Jonathan as a legal plea. David is making a formal appeal to Jonathan concerning whether he is guilty and deserves the death sentence that Saul is trying to carry out against him.

And while David may be open to hearing out a claim that he *does* deserve this treatment, he and Jonathan both know that he does not. As one commentator points out: "Throughout the story, it is only the *good* things that David did that aroused Saul's hatred." [Leithart, 118] And in that way especially, David, the Son of Jesse, is here a lot like our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David. It was the good things that Jesus did that led to the hostility he faced. To borrow a phrase from one commentator, it was when Jesus did *good* that "the Sauls of the world reach[ed] for their spears." [Leithart, 118]

David has only done good, yet Saul wants to kill him. David knows this. But it seems that Jonathan does not yet realize it.

Jonathan declares that Saul would not seek David's life. Jonathan declares that his father's kingdom bears no hostility to David.

Jonathan *should* know better. After all, Jonathan himself was almost a victim of his father's rageful violence, back in chapter fourteen, when the people of Israel had to stop Saul from carrying out the unjust death sentence he had declared against Jonathan.

Jonathan *should* know better because he'd heard Saul declare his desire for the murder of David back in chapter nineteen.

Jonathan *should* know better because, though Saul apparently hid these actions from Jonathan, Saul had sent troops and gone himself to try to kill David, and Jonathan as a high-ranking leader in Saul's army would presumably have access to that kind of information.

As commentators point out, Jonathan seems incredibly naïve in verse two. That is true. But I wonder if we do not often make the same mistake that Jonathan does here. I wonder if we do not also sometimes join him in being willfully spiritually naïve. I wonder if we too avoid seeing the hostility between the kingdom of Saul and the kingdom of David in our lives.

We, as Christians, have declared our allegiance to the kingdom of David just as Jonathan has – to the kingdom where Jesus, the Son of David, is king – for remember, Jesus Christ is not only the Son of God as we considered this morning, he is not only the Son of Man as was mentioned in this morning's text, but he is also the Son of David – an actual descendant of David and the covenantal heir to David's throne. The kingdom of David present in seed form in this text, not yet sprouted even, will grow into the kingdom where Jesus now reigns. Jonathan has pledged his faithfulness to that kingdom – the kingdom of David and the kingdom of Christ, and we have pledged ourselves to that very same kingdom, and to the Son of David who sits on its throne.

We, like Jonathan, have pledged our loyalty to the kingdom of David ... but also like Jonathan we live our lives in the kingdom of Saul ... in many kingdoms of Saul, really.

If the kingdom of David has its continuation and fulfillment in the kingdom of Christ, David's son, then what are the forms of the kingdom of Saul in our lives?

Well, let's consider the kingdom of Saul. The kingdom of Saul was initiated and created by God and was meant to be good. It is something God intends to work through for good. But ... when it is disconnected from the obedience to God to which it was called ... then it can also be turned *against* God ... it can even be turned into a rival to God. That is, at this point, what has happened in the kingdom of Saul.

The kingdom of Saul was something that Jonathan had a natural membership in – something he had a moral and spiritual obligation to even, for Saul was Jonathan's father, and the command remained for Jonathan that he was to honor his father and mother. [Firth, 223]

The kingdom of Saul was a good thing made by God, which Jonathan had a natural participation in and a spiritual obligation towards, but which could ... and in this case *had* ... been turned into a rival to the kingdom of God – a rival to the kingdom of David.

And when we think of it that way ... we should begin to see that there are many things that can be kingdoms of Saul in our lives.

Think of our financial, vocational, and economic lives. God made work. He called us to be active in the world, subduing his creation, providing goods and services for others, providing for our own needs and the needs of those under our care. These are good things we are called to. But whether by ambition, or greed, or faithless anxiety, or disregard for the impact of our work on other people, or any other number things, the realm of work and money can quickly become a kingdom of Saul – turned into a rival against the kingdom of the Son of David.

The same can be true of other tasks or relationships or communities in our lives – whether our family, our nation, our political tribe, or something else. Something created to be a servant of Christ's kingdom in our lives can threaten to become a rival.

And getting even closer than tasks and activities and social structures, it can even be true of aspects of our created nature. We were made to be creatures who need rest and sleep, but rest and sleep when twisted into idleness and sloth become rivals to our calling in Christ's kingdom, rather than reflections of that kingdom. We were made to be strong and beautiful, but when our own strength or our own beauty become the thing in which we place our trust, then they have been twisted against their original purpose. We were made to take and eat God's good creation in the gift of food, but when our belly becomes our god [Philippians 3:19] then our appetites have begun to resemble the patterns of Saul. We were made to be sexual creatures, but disconnected from God's calling and intention, sex quickly becomes a rival kingdom set against the calling placed on us by the kingdom of the Son of David.

We could go on and on, but what might it be for you? What good thing made by God in your life threatens hostility to Christ and his kingdom?

Like Jonathan, we have pledged our loyalty to the kingdom of David. And like Jonathan we too find ourselves in the midst of our own kingdoms of Saul.

And again like Jonathan ... we too can be willfully blind to the hostility which the kingdoms of Saul in our life can bear towards the kingdom of David.

In Jonathan's case, willful blindness seemed to grow out of a desire to believe the best of his father in spite of the facts ... but even so ... even if that was the cause ... it was still a willful blindness that threatened the life of David and the relationship between Jonathan and the kingdom of David. And so David shows up and confronts Jonathan, and urges him to *see* the hostility.

And David's Son often does the same thing for us. And like Jonathan, we too so often deny it. Our focus on finances is not greed or faithless anxiety ... it's just being prudent. It's not a threat to our faithfulness to Christ. Our focus on achievement – our own or our children's achievement – it's not selfish ambition, but making the most of what God's given us. Our fixation on our appearance, or our emotional over-eating, or our lack of sexual chastity – it's not something that's hostile to Christ or to his calling on our lives ... it's just a natural part of our creatureliness.

Now, of course in many situations our enjoyment of and participation in the good gifts God has given to us *is* right and proper.

But sometimes we are like Jonathan, standing there denying the reality that is obvious to everyone else. Some aspect of our lives is set to rebel against the kingdom of David and his Son ... and now we must clarify our allegiances.

Where has Christ, the Son of David, come to you, through his Word or his people or his Spirit ... and confronted you about such hostility? ... And where have you, like Jonathan denied it? Where has Christ called *you* to clarify your allegiance to him?

And clarification of allegiances is exactly what follows. David confronts Jonathan in verses one through eight, and then from verse eight to seventeen the story turns from confrontation to covenant.

And the focus on covenant involves both *recollection* and *reaffirmation*.

First, David calls on Jonathan to *recollect* his covenant with him. This is the covenant they made together back in chapter eighteen. “Deal kindly with your servant,” he says, “for you have brought your servant into a covenant of Yahweh with you.” David reminds Jonathan of their covenant, and in verse nine Jonathan declares his intention to keep that covenant.

Then in verses twelve through seventeen David and Jonathan reaffirm their covenant of faithfulness to one another. And as we consider that, we need to recognize how radical the commitments they were making to work for each other’s good really were. One commentator summarizes it well. “That is why this covenant is so unusual,” he writes. “One simply didn’t do what Jonathan does! You didn’t hand over your place to your rival and promise to protect him, especially when your place was that of crown prince. [...] Jonathan’s covenant commitment to David flies smack in the face of all political sense.” As for David, he promises in this covenant that “When he came to power he would preserve both Jonathan’s life and that of his descendants [...]. But according to the wisdom of the age such promises would be regarded as the height or depth of folly. When a new regime or dynasty came to power, the name of the game was purge.” We see this both in the ancient world in general and in Israel’s later history in particular. “Both Jonathan and David made commitments to each other that trample on customary human standards. Covenant has become the vehicle for uncommon faithfulness.” [Davis, 209-210]

“Covenant has become the vehicle of uncommon faithfulness.” And in the kingdom of God that is indeed often the case.

Think, for example of marriage. In marriage, two people make a covenant in which they promise that they will remain faithful to their husband or wife, “for better or for worse.”

That line has a kind of romantic glow to it now, but try to set that aside and think about it. A new husband and wife promise to remain faithful to each other not only if that faithfulness overall improves their lives, but even if their faithfulness makes their lives worse – even if cutting ties would improve things for them, even so they will not do it. Now, of course, the Bible recognizes there are specific things a spouse can do that breaks the marriage covenant and then leaves the innocent part free to go ... but it’s a pretty short list of things that the Bible says will justify that. Even with that list taken into account, there are still *a lot* of ways that remaining faithful to your spouse could bring pain, frustration, suffering, and loss to your life, including many when it’s not even your spouse’s fault. There are many ways that remaining faithful could be “for worse.”

Now, some of those “for worses” can be big while others might be smaller. I’m sure that if my wife were less kind she could share with you a few “for worses” about being married to me ... I hope more of them would be on the smaller side than on the bigger side.

But there are big ones out there that many Christians have to deal with. Some are the result of sin, but many are things that are no one’s fault. Nonetheless, the marriage covenant, as Christians are called to practice it, as the Bible describes it, as God intended it to be, is one in which we make that promise anyway – the promise of faithfulness for better *or for worse*.

That’s kind of insane ... right? *Or it least it certainly seems so in our culture more and more.* And that should not surprise us. In a culture that places such value on freedom, on looking out for ourselves – in an atomized culture that isolates us as individuals – in a culture like that, a life-long covenant promise for-better-or-for-worse sounds insane. So we should not be surprised by the decline in marriage. We should not be surprised by the redefinition of marriage that comes with no-fault divorce. Covenant calls for uncommon faithfulness.

And the same is true in our covenant with Christ, David’s Son. As Jonathan has entered a covenant with David, so we – every baptized Christian – have entered a covenant with Jesus, David’s Son. And covenant calls both us and Christ to uncommon faithfulness.

It calls Christ to the bafflingly uncommon faithfulness of the Gospel – the foolishness of the Gospel in which the Son of God gives himself to die on a cross in order to save his people. In order to save us.

And it calls *us* to faithfulness to Christ and his kingdom even when it flies in the face of worldly wisdom. It calls us to faithfulness to Christ and his kingdom even when it closes doors to opportunities that we long for. It calls us to faithfulness to Christ and his kingdom even when, in this life, such faithfulness seems to be “for worse.”

Every faithful Christian, by faith and by baptism, is in covenant with Christ, our king, the Son of David. And as Christians we too reaffirm that covenant every Lord’s Day as we gather in worship and profess our faith and allegiance to Christ. Like Jonathan, we stand in covenant with Christ and we together reaffirm that covenant.

But, of course, it is easy to make, and to reaffirm such covenants when things are going well – when it doesn’t really cost us anything. When things get harder those covenant commitments can be put to the test. Which is what we see in the very next section of this story.

David confronts Jonathan. David and Jonathan reaffirm their covenant. And now comes the testing – the testing first of Saul and then of Jonathan. This plays out in verse eighteen through thirty-three.

Jonathan has claimed that Saul is not hostile to David and David has pressed Jonathan to put that claim to the test. And once that claim is tested ... then Jonathan’s covenant loyalty to David will also be tested.

In verse eighteen Jonathan agrees to test Saul as David suggested. He will tell Saul that David has not come to Saul’s feast because he has instead attended a feast of his clan back in Bethlehem. There is a lot of ambiguity to such an action. It could be read as David just fulfilling a family obligation. But it could also be viewed as a form of subtle subversion. And David knew

Saul. David knew Saul would interpret it in the most negative light. And so David expects Saul's reaction to reveal his hostility to David before Jonathan. [Leithart, 121]

Of course the story of David going to Bethlehem is also a lie. A theme that continues to come up, and which we will still need to address in a more full way in the future.

But for now, the test for Saul's feelings towards David is set.

Jonathan delivers the story to Saul ... and Saul flies into a rage. Saul rails against Jonathan. He declares that Jonathan has chosen the son of Jesse to his own shame. He urges Jonathan that as long as he remains faithful to David, neither he nor his kingdom shall be established. He declares that David must die. Jonathan has tested Saul, and Saul's heart has been revealed.

But now we need to recognize that Jonathan faces a test and temptation of his own.

First, it is the temptation of his own kingdom. Saul reminds Jonathan what he is giving up ... and in this Saul is right. As long as David lives, neither Jonathan nor his kingdom will be established. The cost is real. Jonathan is urged not to accept it.

Then, right behind the temptation of his own kingdom, Jonathan also faces the threat of his own harm. Saul, who just appealed to the kingdom he wanted his son Jonathan to have, now threatens Jonathan's life for resisting – he hurls his spear at him, just as he did at David.

And when our kingdoms of Saul bare their teeth – when the rivals of Christ in our life reveal their hostility to Christ, then we too often face the same kind of temptation and testing.

“Don't you see what I can give you, what I *want* to give to you?” they say to us. They hold out a vision of power, or security, or approval, or pleasure. They say to us: “Don't you see that as long as your ultimate allegiance is to the Son of David you can never have these things? Don't you see that if you choose the Son of David, you choose him to your own shame? Don't you see that as long as you choose him, neither you nor your kingdom will be established?”

Like Saul, they tempt us with a kingdom.

And if we continue to resist, then like Saul they threaten us with harm. They turn on us. Whether by threat or by action, they lash out at us, attack us, and we see that they want to be our masters, not our servants.

What do you do when that happens? How do you respond when the hostility between something in your life and Christ is laid bare? What do you do when it holds out a promise of your own kingdom – of some vision of the life you desire? What do you do when it threatens you with harm if you do not obey it?

Jonathan rejects it, and then he mourns.

He leaves the table of Saul. He is filled with righteous anger at Saul's hatred for David. And he mourns the hostility that is there. He knows that that is not the way it is supposed to be, and so he grieves.

And then, Jonathan commits himself to David once more.

We see that in the last section of our text – in verses thirty-five through forty-two. Since he is not sure if they will get a chance to be alone in the field and talk face-to-face, Jonathan carries out the signal promised, alerting David that he now knows of Saul’s hostile intent towards him. [Davis, 204] But then, by God’s grace Jonathan is able to be alone in the field, and so David emerges, and they embrace, and talk, and weep together before David flees.

By signaling David, by sending away his weapons before meeting with him, by embracing him and repeating their covenant, Jonathan has confirmed his covenantal commitment to David. And after weeping and grieving together, they part ways.

David departs ... but far more striking is Jonathan.

Because after confirming his covenant commitment and ultimate loyalty to David ... Jonathan now returns to the house of Saul.

And an important and hard truth is found there. When faced with the possible hostility between some aspect of our lives and our ultimate loyalty to Christ, David’s Son, there are two major temptations ... not one. One, of course, is to deny the hostility, and to slowly transfer our ultimate loyalty away from Christ and to his rival. As we have seen, Jonathan has rejected that temptation.

But the other temptation is to abandon the callings God has placed on our lives in the world. While money can tempt us toward greed or covetousness, we are in fact called to handle money and live economic lives. While our career or our family can tempt us to ambition, we are in fact called to work – whether inside or outside of the home. While sexuality can tempt us to lust and rebellion, we are in fact called to be sexual beings. Escape from a world that can be twisted against God is not actually an option. We are called to live *in* the world, but not be *of* the world. We are called to live *in* the house of Saul without being *of* the house of Saul.

And so Jonathan, who has real moral and spiritual responsibilities both to Israel in general and to his father in particular – Jonathan returns to the house of Saul. His calling is *not* to give his ultimate loyalty to the kingdom of Saul. But his calling is also *not* to flee from the kingdom of Saul. His calling is to live in the household and kingdom of Saul, while his ultimate loyalty is to the kingdom of David. [Firth, 230]

And to choose such a life is for Jonathan to choose a life of voluntary obscurity for the sake of the kingdom of God. Jonathan will not excel in the kingdom of this world as much as he could have had he abandoned his faithfulness to the Lord and his anointed king, David. But he also will not experience the freedom of simply abandoning the obligations the Lord had placed on him in this world, as he would if he had fled from Saul’s household with David. Jonathan, in serving the Lord, in serving Yahweh faithfully, chooses a life of voluntary and faithful obscurity. As one commentator puts it: “Jonathan follows Yahweh’s costly will where Saul does not.” [Firth, 224] For at the heart of this chapter “is the question of faithfulness to Yahweh. What does this mean, and what does it cost? Although David is an important character, this is really Jonathan’s chapter.” [Firth, 230]

Another commentator shares similar reflections – he writes: “The Bible, usually so succinct, tells about the parting of Jonathan and David in considerable detail [...], and the scene lingers on the page and in the mind. Two sons of Saul [a natural son, and a son-in-law], twins in their devotion

to Yahweh and in their courage, separated. Even in this last major scene, the character of Jonathan glows; he returned to his father's doomed house, virtually disappearing from the text, not thinking equality with David something to be grasped but making himself of no account and leaving the stage to another son of Saul." [Leithart, 122]

"Paradoxically," the first writer adds, "it is perhaps because he chose the path of decreasing that David might increase [...] that we see Jonathan's greatness, a greatness that knows that one's commitment to God must have priority." [Firth, 230]

As we reflect on this chapter and its implications for what will follow, Jonathan's greatness is indeed seen – his character does indeed "glow." As we look at Jonathan, we see the beauty of holiness. And it is a holiness not shaped or motivated by an abstract ideal, or a determined stoicism. It is a beautiful holiness rooted in a covenantal commitment to a specific person – a person Jonathan loved, a person he wept over being separated from.

And we are called to the same kind of beautiful holiness: A beautiful holiness that accepts confrontation, that is established in covenant, that stands against testing and temptation, and that does it all out of love for a specific person – love for the heir of David.

Look to Great David's Greater Son. Look to Christ our king. See him as he is across the pages of Scripture, as we sing of him in worship, as we experience him at the Lord's Table. Look to Christ our king ... and let who he is evoke the same kind of love in you that Jonathan had for David. Look to the Son of David, and ask him to help you follow in the footsteps of Jonathan our brother. Ask him to embrace you as David embraced Jonathan, and strengthen you to live a life of beautiful holiness, devoted to our Greater David and his kingdom.

Amen.

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**This sermon draws on material from:**

- Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000.
- Firth, David G. *1 & 2 Samuel*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009.
- Leithart, Peter J. *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003.