
A Much Loved Friend

1 Samuel 20¹⁹

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The deepest friendships...

The Scriptures have many deep friendships in them. One of them is Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas advocates for Paul in the church at Jerusalem, brings him to the church at Antioch, travels with him in mission work, has a breach of the fellowship that is later restored.

Here is another of those deep, loving and sacrificial friendships. It is even more amazing when you consider that Jonathan is the prince-regent, the lineal heir to the throne of Israel. David, however, has been anointed the true future king.

David has served the Lord, the kingdom and Saul well. He has married one of Saul's daughters and his best friend is Saul's son. He has received the adoration and adulation of the people in the kingdom, particularly the ladies. He has soothed Saul during Saul's afflictions. Yet, David has become the object of King Saul's jealousy, hatred and murderous plots. Saul has attempted to kill him in the palace, broken a covenant before God with Jonathan and has now attempted to kill him publicly.

Yet the Lord has protected the future king. He was escaped the spear, been shielded and protected by Saul's children, Jonathan and Michal. And finally, The Spirit of God protected David when He humiliated Saul before the prophet of God, the prophetic band and his assassins.

David is still on the run. This will begin the long hard years of being a fugitive, on the run. He seems to be truly baffled by Saul's hatred. So he leaves Samuel and the house in Ramah. He meets up with Jonathan. And so the camera focuses in on this meeting...

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Declaration: I began with you**(v. 1-17)**

Family conflict can and often does destroy friendships. But not so here. Jonathan declares, "I began with you..." Their friendship is unshakable.

A Surprising Protest**(v. 1-4)**

These words will be repeated several times in several ways. "What has David done?"

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?" ² 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." ³ 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." ⁴ Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

David does not understand why Saul is seeking to kill him. He has done nothing to deserve this. In some sense his innocence and naivety is charming. He does not see how his popularity and growing power is a threat to Saul. He has no mind to overthrow Saul so he cannot see why Saul is jealous. But all this is about to change. God is going to take him through a number of years of maturing, developing and naivety stripping hardship.

Jonathan is unaware of what has transpired in chapter 19. His father has sworn not to kill Jonathan. Besides, Saul tells Jonathan everything. He doesn't hide anything. David has an explanation, though. Saul does not want to grieve Jonathan. But be assured, David is so close to losing his own life.

An Earnest Plea**(v. 5-11)**

So let's have a test to see what Saul's intentions are.

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. ⁶ 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.' ⁷ If he says, 'Good!' it will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him. ⁸ 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?" ⁹ 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?" ¹⁰ Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?" ¹¹ And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field.

It is the time of the month when normally Saul's family gathers for meal, a feast. Normally David is there. However, he is going to hide in the field and not attend. Jonathan

will say that David has gone to his family home for the holiday. Saul's reaction to David's absence will show his intention. If Saul is angry that David is not there then he has evil intentions.

David pleads with Jonathan to not hand him over to his father, Saul. Jonathan is horrified. He not only will not hand David over, but will warn him of how Saul responded and what Saul intends. Jonathan knows David is innocent. If there is any intent by David to take the throne by force, then Jonathan should just kill David now.

David is saying, "We have begun together, will we finish together..."

A Shared Promise

(v. 12-17)

So they go out into the field where David will hide during the holiday.

¹² 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? ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the Lord, that I may not die; ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the Lord take vengeance on David's enemies." ¹⁷ And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

Jonathan and David share a covenant. Jonathan promises to tell David what he finds out about Saul's intentions and plans. He invokes God's blessing on David and vengeance on David's enemies. And he obtains from David a promise to protect and provide for Jonathan's descendants. And, oh, what a story that is.

I love verse 17: "Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own." What is there to say? They loved each other even as they loved their own families. So they swore to each other. Theirs is a covenant of love to protect and provide that will extend to sons and daughters.

Determination: I will finish with you

(v. 18-42)

True covenant love will never quit. It will be determined to stay faithful to the end. Jonathan is saying, "I will finish with you..."

A Clever Plan

(v. 18-23)

¹⁸ Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. ²¹ 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. ²² But if I say to the youth, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then go, for the Lord has sent you away. ²³ And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the Lord is between you and me forever."

They need a way for Jonathan to tell David the result of the scheme. They don't want to possibly expose Jonathan to his father's anger. Jonathan wants to continue to be David's friend in the palace. So they devise this scheme to let David know the king reacted. It is simple. Shoot arrows from one end of the field to the other where David is hiding. What he says to guide the lad retrieving the arrows will tell David whether to come out of hiding or to flee.

An Exposing Ploy

(v. 24-34)

So the plan is executed...

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

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

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

The scene is the room where so much has happened. Saul in his corner. Saul's right hand man, Abner near. Jonathan at his place. David's place is empty. No comment from Saul on the first day of the festival. But on the second, Saul asks. Jonathan answers as planned. So what is provoking about this answer? After all, what is so wrong about David going to be with family?

David asked Jonathan's permission not the king's. This would feel to Saul like David was ignoring the Saul's authority and going around him to ask Jonathan.

Jonathan embellished what they had agreed to say. The little phrase "so that I may escape..." is added and gives a clue as to what was actually going on. "Get away..." – yes as he often has before.

Saul may have had a "surprise" for David. There by Saul's side is the next best warrior in the army. Wonder how close his spear is? Once again, Saul's plot is thwarted.

Is Saul ever angry! And like much jealous anger it gets focused on the wrong person. Saul's anger against David pours over Jonathan. This is strong language. This is profane in a cutting, horrible, hurtful way. "You are just like your mother – perverted and rebellious. You make shameful, lewd choices just like she did. You have chosen him over me. You have jeopardized your future throne. None of us is safe as long as he lives." Sadly, Jonathan is actually the son of shameful, perverse, degraded man – Saul. But Saul would never admit that.

These words cut deep. But not as much as what follows:

Saul: (Authoritative command) You bring that son of Jesse here so he can be killed.

Jon: (Rising righteous anger) Why, what has he done to deserve the death penalty?

Whizzzzz – the spear at Saul's right hand flies to strike through Jonathan's heart.

Thudddd – into the wall as Jonathan dodges and rises to flee.

John woodhouse writes, "The significant thing for us to see is that Saul now identified Jonathan with David. Three times that same spear had been hurled by that same hand at David. Now Jonathan, by his allegiance to David, had become the target of the spear." (Woodhouse, p. 403)

Jonathan is grieved for David. He knows their lives are in danger. He now joins David in absenting himself from the festival. Jonathan publicly identified himself with David. With delicious irony and understatement, the author says, "Now Jonathan gets it. Saul means to kill David no matter what."

A Loving Promise

(v. 35-42)

So Jonathan keeps his word...

³⁵ In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him a little boy. ³⁶ And he said to his boy, "Run and find the arrows that I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. ³⁷ 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?" ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ But the boy knew nothing. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter. ⁴⁰ And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, "Go and carry them to the city." ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² 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.

Jonathan executes their plan. Arrows fired. A lad sent. A guiding shout that tells of imminent danger. And when the lad returns with the arrows, he is sent into the city with them.

Ah, what a poignant farewell. David on his face before Jonathan. Jonathan pulling him up as tears run down their faces. In the custom of their culture, they kissed on the cheek (away, away, away with any lascivious thoughts!!!!) They wept. Here is friendship true. There is the benediction of peace and affirmation of promise and a departure not united again in this life.

Reflect and Respond

How does the Spirit want us to see and hear this story?

Connection - Jonathan stands between two kings, Saul and David.

Covenant - Jonathan is loyal to the true King.

Cost - Jonathan gives up the kingship to follow the future King.

Here is the story in other words:

I love you, my friend, with all my heart.

I made a covenant with you forever.

I knew the danger and went anyway.

I paid the cost and made the sacrifice.

Familiar story that. Of a great relationship, an enduring covenant, a deep sacrifice all for provision and protection of someone much loved.

Is this about true friendship? Do we draw from this that we must have true friends? That we must be prepared to sacrifice for them? Yes, it is. But this story says that to us because of Jesus Christ. He is the faithful friend, the true king, the costly sacrifice and loving promise. And because of Him, our love for one another can say:

I have begun with you...

I will finish with you...

Because of Jesus.