

**Jonathan: The Man Who Would Not Be King**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Well tonight in our continuing look at some unlikely heroes in Scripture, and particularly for now in the Old Testament, we come to a man named Jonathan--Jonathan, the man who would not be king. And in order for us to tell the story, we have to begin in 1 Samuel, chapter 8. So take your Bible and open it. And as you know, if you have been with us, this is a little bit of a different approach than taking a text and dealing with that text. We are sweeping through great portions of Old Testament literature and we will essentially do that again tonight as we look at Jonathan. And this kind of fits a Father's Day, because this is about sons and fathers. And as you will hear, when the story unfolds, all kinds of fathers and all kinds of sons will play roles in this part of the saga of the history of Israel and the purposes of God unfolding through them.

But for a beginning text, if you want to write down a passage, it would be 1 Samuel 23, 1 Samuel 23:16 and 17. We'll use that as sort of a launch point, and then we'll back up from there. First Samuel 23:16 and 17 says, "Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God and he said to him, 'Do not fear for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find you, you shall be king over Israel and I shall be next to you,'" 1 Samuel 23:16 and 17.

That picks up the story fairly well down the path when Jonathan has already established a friendship with David and is David's great protector, even though David will be the king that Jonathan might have been had his father's line not been cursed. But let's back up from there.

The last of the Old Testament judges looked in disbelief at the group of Israelite leaders assembled before him. The last of the fourteen Old Testament judges is none other than Samuel. Samuel led the nation with wisdom and with a measure of integrity. Samuel was both God's appointed judge and a prophet at the same time. But now, as we pick up the story in 1 Samuel, chapter 8, he's an old man. And there are no other judges on the horizon, and his sons, according to verse 3, are morally unfit to take his place. They didn't walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, perverted justice. Not the way to behave if you're in a position of authority and overseeing the lives of people and a nation.

So there were no possible leaders coming out of the family of Samuel. There appeared to be none other on the horizon that might take over as the defender and leader of Israel. So the people come up with an idea--they think it's time for them to have a king. All the elders of Israel together in verse 4, they come to Samuel at Ramah; they said to him, "You've grown old, your sons don't walk in your

ways, now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” We want to be like everybody else.

With that one request, the period of the judges came to a screeching halt after 350 years. A divinely appointed judge and a prophet and priests which were the leaders that God had ordered in the theocracy, a theocratic kingdom, a kingdom where God was king, was not enough to satisfy the people. They wanted a king like the surrounding nations had a king. Samuel understandably felt slighted by the Israelites’ impetuous request. He interpreted their words as a personal attack on him. While I don’t think they necessarily were in all cases, that’s how he viewed it.

But the Lord informed him that this was not really an attack on him. Look at verse 7. The Lord said, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.” That is the issue. They’re rejecting their true king in the monarchy, the theocratic kingdom, they are rejecting God.

Reaching back a little bit, you remember that ever since the Israelites promised at Mount Sinai back in Exodus 19 to serve God and obey God and love God, that nation from that moment forward had been a theocracy where God rules. The Lord was the only king in Israel, and He governed through a complex of judges and prophets and priests whom He appointed to represent Him among the people, but He was the ruler.

Now when the leaders of Israel ask Samuel for a human king, they are really articulating their discontent with the rule of God. They no longer want a theocracy; they want a monarchy, just like their foreign neighbors. Throughout the previous four centuries, they had repeatedly forsaken the Lord. You remember the cycle of rebellion and disobedience and judgment, and repentance and rebellion and disobedience and judgment, and repentance again and again and again, over and over through that period of the judges.

Now they come before Samuel again, manifesting this cycle of rebellion, having forsaken the Lord, and they request a human king. That in itself is the final expression of their recycling apostasy--rebellion against the true sovereign. “Like all the deeds,” verse 8 says, “which they have done since the day I brought them up from Egypt even to this day--in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods--so they are doing to you also.” It’s just the same thing; it’s the latest version of their rebellion against Me.

Samuel justifiably gives the people a warning, and that warning flows down through the remainder of that eighth chapter, and I’ll just let you know what the warning involves. He warned the people that if you have a king, you’re going to have to have some very clear understanding of what it’s going to mean. You don’t want to do this in ignorance, so let me tell you what it will mean to have a king. And this is what he tells them. Kings force their people to labor in their fields for their wealth and their prosperity and their gain and their power. Kings, Samuel tells them, force people to fashion their

military equipment, their weapons. Kings draft sons into armies and put their lives in jeopardy. Kings also conscript daughters, take them captive to work in their royal enterprises as perfumers, cooks, bakers in their service. Kings, Samuel tells them, seize land for themselves, force escalating taxes and demand payment under penalty. Kings take people's possessions at will. Kings make subjects, servants, and slaves out of the population. In all these ways, Samuel says, you will forfeit your freedom. And you will become abused by your kings.

Samuel's final words down in verse 18: "Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day." You're going to hate what you have chosen, and you're going to turn to God and He will not hear you. The monarchy will bring disaster and the monarchy will bring divine judgment and it certainly did. Still the Israelites stubbornly hold their ground. Nevertheless, verse 19, "The people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, 'No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.'" They are resolute. They will not back down. And so the monarchy is launched.

And the first king is a man named Saul. Saul appears immediately, of course, in chapter 9. And with Saul you have all the worst outcomes immediately that Samuel predicted. It doesn't take very long; the first king begins to manifest the tragic realities that a unilateral monarch can bring to a people.

Now that gets us into our story. The story is about the kings. Now we're in to the kings and the first one is Saul. So we're going to look at this story; we're going to look at relationships, okay? Our first beginning point will be Israel's first royal family. And we're going to be looking at that family, namely Saul, and in particular a son of Saul by the name of Jonathan. He doesn't get introduced till the thirteenth chapter, so it will be a little bit before we get there. But he's going to be our target person. We're going to see the monarchy through the experience of Jonathan.

He grew up not in the house of a king, because Saul was not a king until he was appointed a king. He was a farmer; he was a farmer. He's an interesting person. When he was a teenager, according to the opening verses of chapter 9, several of his grandfather's donkeys went missing, and animals were very valuable. So Jonathan's father, Saul, went looking for his father's, Jonathan's grandfather's, donkeys. An extensive search for the donkeys failed to locate the missing animals and Saul ran into the prophet Samuel while he's looking for his father's donkeys. And we pick this up down in verse 20 of chapter 9, so we're moving rapidly. And Samuel says to Saul, who is a farmer looking for his father's donkeys--nothing more than that--"As for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's household?"

What does that mean? Samuel is explaining to him that he, Saul, the farmer looking for the donkeys, will be Israel's first king. The desire of Israel for a king will fall to his house and his father's house. He

will be that first king. Started out as a low-level hunt for missing donkeys, and it ends up with unexpected elevation and heights--startling promise that the donkey hunter would become Israel's first king. Now we learn from the Word of God that Saul was tall, dark, and handsome. He was even from the warrior tribe of Benjamin. So he from a human viewpoint looked like the perfect choice, judged by external appearances. In reality, his character did not match his physical attributes--tall, handsome, from a warrior tribe--but weak in character, weak below the surface, and that would be unmistakably manifest during his long tenure as king. And in Acts 13:21 it says that Saul reigned for forty years. That is a long time, forty years.

It didn't take very many years for all of his weaknesses to surface, and then the people had to deal with him for four decades. When Saul went home, as we get into chapter 10, he went home from his meeting with Samuel, he shyly kept his coming elevation to king a secret--chapter 10, verse 16 tells us that. And when it was time for him to be brought forward, down in verse 22 of chapter 10, he's hiding in the baggage. This is tall, dark, and handsome Saul who is a coward of sorts--timid-- and that insecurity and cowardice and timidity continually characterized his rule. He was a man full of fear, faltering in his confidence, paranoid of potential rivals, acting rashly as paranoid people do to compensate for his ineptness as a leader and his lack of fortitude.

Into that family comes this young man Jonathan. And one wonders how Saul's family, and especially Jonathan, responded when they first heard the astonishing news, that their father, the farmer, who looked good on the outside but was weak on the inside, was going to be the king--the first king of Israel's monarchy. No doubt Jonathan's mind was spinning as he was thinking what that meant for him, all kinds of expectations for him. Kings were very often killed, killed in battle, even killed by an enemy. People died from illnesses and diseases. Jonathan must have anticipated that, as the prince, he would one day become the king. Aware of his father's weaknesses, familiar with his role as a farmer, and knowing that he was no soldier, Jonathan perhaps thought he would be king soon. And by the way, the same fears, the same weakness, the same lack of fortitude that characterized Saul as a farmer continued to characterize Saul as a king, and Jonathan was never intimidated by his father when he became king. He did not hesitate to defy his father's bizarre orders when he acted in utterly irrational ways.

>>>>So that's an introduction to the first sort of relationship between Saul and Jonathan. I want to follow that a little bit further, the relationship of Jonathan and Saul as it kind of develops. Going back to chapter 8 for a moment, we got ahead of ourselves but we're going to be doing this. Israel's primary expectation for its new king was that he would protect them--chapter 8, verse 20--he would be their great protector. He can go out before us and fight our battles. That's what they expected.

Well, no sooner had Saul been put into place--go over to chapter 11 and you can try to find your way as we move--the Ammonites are engaged in a battle, in a war; 1 Samuel 11:13, Saul led the Israelites to a God-given victory, a God-given victory, over the Ammonites. "The Lord has

accomplished"...verse 13 says..."deliverance in Israel." So this is what kings do, and it started well with a victory.

A greater challenge, however, came less than two years into Saul's reign when he was accompanied by a standing army of three thousand men and he found himself in a dangerous conflict with the Philistines. Now remember, Samson had earlier already dealt a devastating blow to the Philistines. You remember--Samson the judge that brought down the house on the Philistines and massacred several thousand of them? But they had continued to gain some force and escalated in their animosity toward Israel. So they present a military threat to Israel again. They're back, you might say, in Saul's day.

However, Israel's king, Saul, has no need to fear because, according to chapter 9, verse 16, the Lord promised to deliver Israel from the Philistines. It is in the context of this conflict with the Philistines two years into Saul's reign that Jonathan first appears, probably a teenager, maybe at most in his early twenties. Old enough, however, according to chapter 13; look at it: "Saul chose for himself three thousand men of Israel," and then, "one thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin." Jonathan as a teenager, or at most in his early twenties, is in charge of a thousand men, a thousand soldiers in the army of Israel. Saul is waiting at Michmash in the hill country of Bethel, and he's waiting.

Jonathan, however, doesn't wait. While Saul waits, Jonathan with his men attacks the Philistine garrison at Geba and captures it. Geba's about three miles from the original capital in Israel called Gibeah. We don't know whether Saul ordered this attack or not, or whether Jonathan acted independently. It seems as though he acted independently. It was Jonathan, however, who gained the victory. It was Jonathan who initiated the critical military action. It was his plan; it was his triumph. But that conflict escalated into full-scale war, which gave Jonathan more opportunity and more opportunity to prove himself courageous, prove himself a capable leader--much more so than his apprehensive father who would rather sit and wait until something good might happen.

The Israelites perhaps expected only a small retaliation, a measured retaliation from their enemies. But instead the Philistines were furious at this assault and victory at Geba, and so they came back with thousands of chariots, thousands of horsemen, and infantry men. According to chapter 13, if you look down at verse 5, they numbered 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance--an unaccountable number to rain vengeance on the Hebrew army for the success of Jonathan's campaign at Geba. And Israel's army was massively outnumbered. Saul's men reacted not in faith and courage but in total fear. Look what happened to Saul's men. Verse 6, "The men of Israel saw they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, and thickets, and cliffs, and cellars, and in pits." Those people hiding themselves are the soldiers. That's the army. More of them crossed the Jordan River and just went AWOL, fled.

So many of them fled, down in verse 15, "Saul numbered the ones that were left, and there were six hundred." They've all fled with the same kind of cowardice and fear that was characteristic of their king. And so there sits Saul waiting in mortal fear in Gilgal with nothing left but 600 men.

And by the way, he had no reason to be so paralyzed and traumatized. He had no reason to fear a massacre because Samuel had earlier said to him, and I quote from chapter 10, verse 8, "You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and make sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait till I come to you and show you what you should do." You are going to be at Gilgal. You stay there, wait seven days and I will come. And so there sits Saul at Gilgal waiting, knowing the Philistines are amassing the army of vengeance. On the seventh day, then, Saul collapses in fear. Samuel had not arrived. In desperation he could wait no longer. His enemy is getting stronger and bolder. His own forces are dissipating in cowardice. And so he decides not to wait for Samuel, who was an authorized offerer of sacrifice, and to do it himself. Chapter 13, verse 9: "Saul said, 'Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offering.' And he offered the burnt offering."

He invaded the priesthood and that was a tragic thing to do. He sought blessing through disobedience; blessing doesn't come through disobedience. And like a scene from some classic comic sketch, as soon as Saul offered the sacrifice, the next verse says Samuel showed up. As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering in verse 10, "Samuel came." Saul went out to meet him and to greet him. But this was no comedy. The old indignant prophet was not amused. This egregious invasion of the sacred priestly office was going to bring down judgment. Way back in Numbers 3:10, back in Numbers 18:7, the warning had been given by God against those who usurp the role of a priest--that was strictly forbidden. A later king, by the way, of Judah named Uzziah did that and God took offense at that (2 Chronicles 26) and hit him with leprosy and he died. And he's the one that Isaiah refers to when he says in Isaiah 6, "In the year King Uzziah died."

Saul is soon to be severely condemned for this intrusion into the sacred office. So Samuel says to him, "What have you done?"...in verse 11..."What have you done?" And it rocks Saul's conscience like God's question to Adam in Genesis 3:9. Samuel's words to Saul were a stinging indictment. There's no adequate answer; there's no valid excuse; there's no defense.

But that didn't stop Saul from trying to explain it away. And here comes the blame shifting, the kind of thing that Adam did as well. He blames Samuel for coming late. He blamed his troops for running away. He blamed the Philistines for the ominous threat that they presented. But this blame shifting only intensified his disobedience. Samuel's devastating response to his blame shifting is given to us as well in this section, and it's in verses 13 and 14. Listen to what Samuel said: "You have done foolishly, you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, but now your kingdom shall

not continue. The Lord has sought for himself a man after His own heart and the Lord has commanded him to be a commander over His people because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

Samuel’s command to Saul to stay there in Gilgal for seven days was a test of whether or not he would be obedient to God, because that command was from God through Samuel. Earlier Samuel had warned the Israelites that even under their new monarchy, if they failed to obey the Lord, they would be swept away in judgment along with their king. That’s in chapter 12, verse 25. Obedience is always the way to blessing, disobedience always the way to judgment. And so Saul was disobedient, thinking in his foolishness that his disobedience could bring about victory. He could somehow elicit the help of God by disobedience, and he would be replaced. The monarchy then passed from him to a man after God’s own heart. We’ve grown to love that phrase, haven’t we--somebody who worships God, loves God, obeys God.

Now evidently when Saul is disobeying God, and doing this sacrificing in Gilgal, Jonathan’s not there. As we put the story together, apparently Jonathan was not there. Saul is dishonoring the Lord. Saul has doomed his dynasty. No son of his will ever reign. Jonathan doesn’t know that. He will never be king; he doesn’t yet know that. In fact, you would assume that the realization that he would never be king would kill some long-fed expectations that a young man might develop and be devastatingly disappointed. Yet, as we will see, Jonathan’s response was completely different than that, which is what makes him such an unlikely hero.

By foolishly offering sacrifices, Saul violates the sanctity and uniqueness of the priestly office. He fails to obey the Word of God through Samuel. He fails the test that God gave him. The consequences are severe, and he is removed from the monarchy.

On the other hand, Jonathan decides to attack the Philistines. Remember now, he doesn’t know about this as you come into chapter 14: “Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man carrying his armor, ‘Come let us cross over to the Philistines’ garrison that is on the other side,’” but he didn’t tell his father. So he wasn’t with his father. He doesn’t know about the curse that’s come on the family. He and his armor bearer are going to attack the Philistines. This is a risky plan. Two people? This is an irrational plan. And if you look at the entire story, this involves a free climb up the craggy face of a cliff and a surprise attack by two men on a Philistine garrison that is holding up there. In fact, verse 4--it’s so interesting--between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistine garrison, there was a sharp crag on the one side and a sharp crag on the other side. And the name of the one was Bozez and the name of the other Seneh. Bozez means “slippery” in Hebrew, and Seneh means “sharp, pointed, thorny.” So he and his armor bearer have to scale some cliffs that are both slippery and sharp, slippery rocks and sharp edges, to get access into an enemy garrison. This is a suicide mission. Two men?

But notice verse 6: “And Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, ‘Come, let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the Lord will work for us, for the Lord is not restrained to save by many or by few.’” That famous statement came from the lips of Jonathan. He is fearless because he has placed his faith firmly in the promised will and power of God, who has declared that God will deliver His people from their enemies. And Jonathan will put himself in a position to see God fight for them. The Lord will honor Jonathan’s faith. They scale the cliff, he and his armor bearer, they come into the garrison and, according to verses 13 and 14, they are very successful. The slaughter involves twenty men; the two of them basically kill twenty Philistine soldiers.

Even Josephus, the Jewish historian, writes that this attack, according to tradition, took place early in the morning, and the element of surprise was increased by the fact that the Philistine soldiers would never have expected this because they thought they were in a place where they couldn’t be assaulted or attacked--who’s going to scale a cliff? And they may well have been asleep, and if not, barely waking. The Lord gave Jonathan and his armor bearer power over twenty of the men who were killed.

When the Philistine army began to realize what was happening, fleeing soldiers from the garrison, going every direction, struck with fear, began to scatter. At that point, according to verse 15, the Lord struck further terror into their hearts by bringing an earthquake--an earthquake, a great earthquake, a great trembling (verse 15).

And then what happened? Verse 20: “Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and came to the battle; behold, every man’s sword was against his fellow and there was very great confusion.” By the time Saul arrived the Philistines had killed each other. Same thing that happened with Gideon. The Lord was able to deliver with many; the Lord was able to deliver with few.

Now back before the battle began; remember now, Jonathan is acting independently. Saul had been losing his troops. They had been defecting. The desperate king didn’t know what to do. So the desperate king makes a really stupid statement. That’s chapter 14, verse 24: Meanwhile, back at Gilgal, we would say, Saul places his men under an oath: “Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.” Saul says, “You’re going to be cursed if you eat anything before we triumph over our enemies.” He’s down to 600. They number in the multiple thousands. He’s going to try to motivate them that way?

“You’re not allowed to eat until we win this victory.” Well, guess what? As we follow the story in chapter 14, his troops are hungry so they don’t fight very well. They’re less and less effective. Eventually God grants them a victory and when they are allowed, finally, to eat, they gorge themselves ’cause they’re famished and they eat meat mixed with blood. That’s from Leviticus 17 that forbids that eating meat mixed with blood.



So his small-minded oath is a stupid thing, it makes his troops weak, it prolongs their ineffectiveness. When victory finally comes, they gorge themselves, violating another command of God. Everything this guy does is wrong, is wrong. He finally goes to a priest to seek some divine help, does Saul, and the Lord refuses to answer. Again Saul takes no responsibility for his part in the actions. He blames this and that and the other.

And he finally comes to this point. He says, "The problem with this difficult battle is that somebody broke the rule, somebody ate, somebody ate." And he says, "I don't care who it is, whoever ate is going to die; whoever ate is going to die."

Well, this is just another stupid idea on his part. It just so happens that Jonathan is in his army, though he wasn't there. Jonathan hadn't heard the edict. Jonathan was running through the woods in the fourteenth chapter here, and he saw some honey on the ground and he stooped down, scooped up the honey, and ate the honey. Only at that moment did some soldiers come to him and say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, you just violated your father's curse and you could be killed."

Go down to verses 29 and--29 and 30. Listen to what Jonathan says. "My father has troubled the land. See now, how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey?" This gave me some energy. "How much more, if only the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great." It was not nearly the victory that it could have been if we had been fed.

Well, the word comes back to Saul that Jonathan, ignorant of his father's edict, had broken his father's edict--his ridiculous oath--and Saul determines to maintain his puny pride by killing his son, killing his son. Down in verse 43, Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done."

"So Jonathan told him and said, 'I indeed tasted a little honey with the end of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am, I must die!'" Is that it? But Saul was dead serious. In the face of this idiocy, the people begin to intercede on Jonathan's behalf. And if not for that intercession, the king would have executed his own son.

All of this crazy intrigue is simply a kind of an insight into the kind of person Saul was. In his first major skirmish with the Philistines, it is chaotic and ridiculous, ridiculous. Highlighting extreme differences in the family between father and son, they're poles apart. The king is fearful, indecisive, reactionary, disobedient, reckless, proud, heavy-handed. Jonathan, just the opposite. He took initiative, showed courage, acted humbly, purposefully exposed his father's folly, exhibited trusting confidence in the Lord. By God's power, Jonathan, not Saul, was the one who set in motion Israel's victory. He is the one who launched the victory with his thousand men.

The weakness of Saul continues to be made manifest. The contrast between him and Jonathan, more pronounced. And that contrast becomes crystallized into clarity when a young shepherd arrives on the scene by the name of David. And now we move from the relationship of Saul and Jonathan, to the relationship of Jonathan and David. This is where we come to know and love the story.

By failing to trust the Lord and offering sacrifices before Samuel arrived, Saul proved and there were other ways that demonstrated that he was an incompetent leader who turned everything into a royal mess. He only accelerated his own self-destruction as his reign continued. God commanded him to completely destroy the Amalekites, including all their livestock. Again he disobeyed. He left captured King Agag alive and allowed the troops of Israel to take the best of the sheep and the oxen and keep them--again, disobeying the Lord. And the consequences were very severe. Samuel again shows up, confronts Saul, and he says in 15:14, chapter 15, verse 14: "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" You know God told you to kill all of the Amalekites and all of the their animals.

And then those amazing and very memorable words of Samuel. Go down to verse 22 of chapter 15, if you're catching up with us, 15:22. "Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices?'" Why does he say that? Because Saul's fallback position is he tells Samuel, "Oh, oh, I was going to use them all for sacrifices to the Lord." And it is at that point, Samuel says, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offering and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king."

Here is a reiteration of the fact that this man not only will not have an heir on the throne, he doesn't have long on the throne himself. Well, Saul's sad about that, so he tears his robe, but I love what Samuel did. Samuel, that old man, that old prophet, picked up a heavy sword (verse 33) and hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal. Splattered with blood and flesh, Samuel showed Israel's rebellious king what obedience looked like, what it looked like. Then that famous statement from the Lord in chapter 16, verse 7: "The Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'" And that is the rejection of Saul. First his house is rejected; then his throne is rejected; then he is rejected.

But while he is still hanging on to the throne for a while, David's royal training begins. It is in chapter 16 and verse 12 that we begin to meet David. In fact, his name appears in verse 13; that's the introduction that we have to David. When the king was terrorized, you remember, by an evil spirit, David, already a gifted musician, was chosen to play the harp for him; that's from verse 14 on down to verse 23. David becomes the official royal harpist, still living in Bethlehem, by the way. He would

go to the palace and he would soothe the king with his music. When the Philistine giant, Goliath, threatens the Israelites in the seventeenth chapter, this young boy goes from being a musician to being a killer--great soldier who brings down Goliath with a slingshot, cuts off his head, secures the victory. David had the opportunity to be in the palace then on a permanent basis, to learn the elements of royal life. But most importantly, to prove that he could be used powerfully in the hands of God. And sparked by the incident with Goliath, a deep friendship develops between Jonathan and David. Let's pick that up in chapter 18. We're moving fast, I know.

"It came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, Jonathan loved him as himself." This is just an amazing thing. Here is the one chosen by God, anointed by Samuel—David--to be the king that Jonathan will never be. Jonathan's love and loyalty is amazing. He loved him as his own soul. Jonathan means "gift from the Lord." And he would prove to be that for David.

David is a victorious leader, as indicated in his great victory over Goliath. And after that, because he is now the giant killer, Saul invites him to come and live at the palace. Then he gives him his daughter to marry, a girl named Michal (M-i-c-h-a-l in the Bible), and he marries her.

So now he is a leader in the army. He has royal musician duties in the palace. And he has married the king's daughter; so the king's his father-in-law and the prince is his brother-in-law. And to add to that, the story begins to tell us that David is immensely popular with the people. And Saul becomes more and more threatened with David. His dynasty is cursed. His throne is cursed. He is cursed. His kingdom will not last. And he continually grows suspicious of this young, powerful champion, and he decides he needs to murder him. And this is where we say the plot thickens.

Verse 3, again of chapter 18: "Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. He stripped himself of the robe that was on him, gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt." He wanted to do anything he could for his friend and brother-in-law. He knew that David would have no human capability of surviving unless he had some friend in the court, somebody to warn him, somebody to protect him. And he had an ally in the royal court, his friend and brother-in-law, Jonathan. Their hearts had been knit together because they made a covenant of loyalty to each other.

>>>>And do you know how that story plays out? When Saul threatened to kill David, the prince would warn David, the prince would come to David so that he could escape Saul. When first Jonathan told David that Saul wanted him dead, he was really surprised. But he wanted to be sure of the evil king's intention, so go down to chapter 20 and we're skipping a lot, I know. "And David says to Jonathan," down in verse 5 of chapter 20, let's have a simple test here to remove any doubt; David has a hard time believing that this king really wants him dead. And so David says to Jonathan, "Indeed, tomorrow is the new moon, I shall not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go that I may hide in the field until

the third day at evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly ask permission of me that he might run over to Bethlehem his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family,'" which was true, "If he says thus, 'It is well, your servant will be safe. If he's very angry, be sure that evil is determined by him.'"

David has a simple plan. There's a big dinner, there's a big feast. David is supposed to be there. David says, "Let me go and not be there; say that you gave me permission to go. If it doesn't matter to Saul that I'm not there, then I have nothing to fear. If he is very angry, then I will know that evil has been determined by him on me."

The plan is set in motion. Go down to verse 30, "Where is David? Why is he not here?" Verse 28, "Jonathan says, 'He has to go to Bethlehem.'" Verse 30, "Saul's anger burned against Jonathan, and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman.'" (That has a modern equivalent, by the way.) "Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as a son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die." This exposes the venomous hatred of Saul for David. That's the test that validates Jonathan's warnings to David. And David says, "Okay, I get it, I get it."

Jonathan defends his friend's honor and it infuriates the king even more. Do you remember what happened? Saul grabs a spear and in a fit of rage, launches it across the dinner table at his son Jonathan's head, narrowly missing. And Jonathan made a fast exit.

Now everybody knows that he wants David dead. And you remember how the story goes from here. Jonathan goes out into the field now to tell David how the test went. Takes a servant; shoots some arrows. Remember, they had a little code? If the arrow goes beyond the servant--David's hiding--he shoots an arrow, goes past his servant. David knows that if it goes past the servant, that's code for Saul is angry and set to kill you. The servant heads back to the city. David emerges from hiding, says good-bye to Jonathan. Two men wept, and they wept out of this amazing love and affection that they had for each other.

Verse 42, Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch we have sworn to each other in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.' Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city."

David went back into hiding, Jonathan back into the city. Listen, Saul spent the rest of his life hunting David, the rest of his life. Why this irrational passion? 'Cause he knew the Lord had chosen David to be the next king of Israel. David spent that same amount of time fleeing, hiding, surviving until Saul finally died. You know the story; Saul nearly captured him on several occasions. The Lord always protected David, and all of this activity made him an even greater general, a greater military man in

the future when he took his throne.

During those same years with Saul trying to kill David and David trying to escape, Jonathan found ways to meet his friend, to encourage him, to reiterate his loyalty, his love. Chapter 23, verse 17, the prince once explains to David, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that."

This is the character of Jonathan, willingly giving up his own claim to the throne 'cause he understood that the Lord had chosen David instead of him. No jealousy; this is a rare character quality, is it not? Jonathan's character is evident most clearly in his attitude toward David. Jonathan was a mighty warrior, a noble prince, loyal friend. But it was unwavering faith in the purpose and word of God that makes him an unlikely hero. Jonathan didn't just merely accept his non-kingly role--he embraced it with all his heart and became the friend and protector of the one who was put in his place. This is a man of great character, great character.

And that brings us to a final relationship. We've seen him up between Saul and Jonathan, Jonathan and David, and now David and Mephibosheth. The inner action that I just talked to you about in chapter 23, verse 17--the last conversation that we have recorded there between David and Jonathan--is all we hear until a catastrophic battle with the Philistines. And we don't hear anything from Jonathan; but all the way into chapter 31--Saul, Jonathan, and two of his brothers are killed in a battle with the Philistines (chapter 31, verse 2). The slaughter produces a broken heart in David, shatters him. And David gives a tribute to his friend, and that's how the book of 2 Samuel begins with that tribute. Second Samuel 1:25, "How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women. How have the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

This is melancholy, the melancholy driven of the, by the affection of David in saying that their friendship surpasses the love of women. What does he mean? What is he saying here?

He's not demeaning the love that a man has for a woman. The Bible exalts that. Not demeaning the love between a husband and a wife. But he is emphasizing the fact that his love for Jonathan was a love without any physical attraction. It was a love without any physical element. It was a love without any physical interest. It was a love without any physical fulfillment. It is altogether unlike the affection shared between a man and a woman, which is a physical attraction. Jonathan had a manly commitment with no physical components. It was noble, loyal, selfless friendship--a camaraderie born out of confidence on the part of both men that God's Word was to be fulfilled. They were two men who obeyed God. And their common obedience gave them a common friendship.

Well, Jonathan died. Saul killed himself. Jonathan's two brothers were killed. Years before, David had sworn to Jonathan...Remember?...that they would, that they would be friends permanently, that they would support each other's families forever. David wanted to fulfill that. And he sets out to do that.

In 1 Samuel 20:14 to 16, we read, "You shall not only show me the kindness of the Lord while I live, that I may not die, but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever. No, not when the Lord has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, 'Let the Lord require it at the hand of David's enemies.'" In other words, we have a covenant that transcends death. David's love for Jonathan transcended his death. He wanted to honor that covenant beyond the death of his friend. How does he do that?

Jonathan had a son. He had only one son and his name was Mephibosheth, Mephibosheth. When he was five years old, Jonathan was killed. So he was without a father at the age of five. His nanny was carrying this little five-year-old. She heard the horrible news. She was afraid that whoever killed Saul and killed Jonathan and killed the brothers would come to kill the child. So she clutched him and began to run. In her mad dash, according to chapter 4 of 2 Samuel, she dropped him and broke both his legs. Without the benefits of modern medical care, Mephibosheth was permanently crippled as a result of the accident. So, many years later when David seeks to keep his covenant with Jonathan after his death, he seeks out Jonathan's only child, sole descendant; and the wonderful, wonderful story, 2 Samuel chapter 9, he invites him to the palace, this disabled man, welcomed him as one of his own sons, and had him sit with the royal family at all the meals. Then he gave Mephibosheth the land that had previously belonged to his grandfather Saul, and then he instructed Saul's former servants to work the land for the benefit of Mephibosheth. David's kindness to this son of his friend was motivated by nothing more than gracious love, nothing more than covenant faithfulness. And this is where we see a beautiful analogy of God's unmerited love for sinners. Let me just give you some thoughts.

With regard to Mephibosheth, David took all the initiative. He sought him out. He welcomed him to the palace. He did so even though he was the grandson of Saul, Israel's cursed king and David's greatest enemy. Mephibosheth could do nothing to repay David, could not offer him any significant service. Nevertheless David brought him into his family, invited him to his table, granted him an inheritance of land to which he was not legally entitled, and in grateful response Mephibosheth became a lifelong loyal servant to David.

What a picture of God's love for sinners, God's love for sinners. Though the lives of most of Saul's descendants were taken, David was careful to protect this one son because of the Lord's oath that was between David and Jonathan. And Mephibosheth had a son named Micah who sustained the lineage of Jonathan's house for many generations, and through that crippled son came many, many noble warriors, according to 1 Chronicles chapter 8.

As the prince, Jonathan had protected David. Now as the king, David had honored his covenant promise to Jonathan by embracing his son as a member of his own family. This is the kind of character that is so rare, so rare.

What is Jonathan's legacy to us? What makes him an unlikely hero? Selfless, humble obedience to God, and love toward one who fulfills what he had hoped would be his own life ambition. Jonathan's first recorded words evidence his faith in the Lord when he said to his armor bearer, these are the first words the Bible gives us from his lips, "Come, let us go over to the Philistine's garrison that is on the other side....let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us for nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few." And his last recorded words, "Do not fear for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you, you shall be king over Israel and I shall be next to you, even my father Saul knows that." Noble prince, humble, loyal, loving, eager to obey God, giving up all personal honor, personal power, position for a friend because he knew that was God's will.

If jealousy is the ugliest of human virtues, its absence is the most beautiful. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for journey through an awful lot of history and for the lesson of the life of this remarkable man, Jonathan. What a privilege it is for us to have the story in so much detail, and this is only a portion--a small portion--of it. Not only is it a story about Jonathan, but it's a story about Your faithfulness to Your people, to Your covenant, to sustain Your people even in horrible times, even in a disastrous monarchy that became more and more troubled and brought more and more judgment. You have remained faithful to the promise of Your people, and we know that You are a God who keeps covenant forever and You will fulfill all Your promises. We rest in that for the promises that came to us through Christ. We're so thankful that You are seen in Scripture presented as a faithful God who honors covenant faithfulness, even among Your people. Make us a community of Jonathans: selfless, humble, loving, loyal, and grateful when someone else is elevated in a place we thought might belong to us. Thank You again for Your Word and its glory. It shines every time we open it up--has again tonight, and we're grateful for it in the name of Christ. Amen.

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