

Embracing 2nd Place

(David's friend Jonathan)

1 Samuel 17:55-18:4

July 22, 2018

Back on July 1, we began a series on King David. Some of you were here and remember that we talked about David and Goliath and how it is a story about passionate spirituality. As we study the life of King David, we'll learn more about his passion for God. We'll also run into some pretty amazing people. One of those people is a guy named Jonathan. Today we're going to talk about how his life intersected with King David's. Next week, we'll talk about an amazing woman named Abigail.

>>> **Read 1 Samuel 17:55-18:4.**

There are 4 things that we need to know about Jonathan. **Jonathan was a...**

1. Prince. The 1st thing we should understand about Jonathan is that he was a prince; royal blood flowed in his veins. His dad was none other than KING Saul. And, as Saul's oldest son, Jonathan was in line for the throne. Saul puts things in context when talking with Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:31, "As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die!" The fact is, David was an immediate threat to Jonathan's reign, and King Saul knew this.

But here's the 2nd thing we need to know about Jonathan. He was a...

2. Loyal Friend. The friendship between David and Jonathan is easily one of the most powerful and intimate friendships in ALL of the Bible. It's interesting to note that this friendship is solidified right AFTER David finishes slaying Goliath. 1 Samuel 17:57-18:1 tells us, "As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head. "Whose son are you, young man?" Saul asked him. David said, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem." After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself." This is no ordinary friendship. 1 Samuel 18:1 clarifies that they "became one in spirit" and that Jonathan loved David "as himself." This friendship is really better described as a spiritual brotherhood. We're not talking about a man crush here but rather more of a mutual godly affection that formed a deep, soul connection between these two men.

Jonathan was drawn to David's heroic act and he was drawn to become his very close friend, but why SO strongly? What would cause them both to bridge this immense gap between a shepherd boy and a prince? We find the answer to this question earlier in 1 Samuel. We learn two more things about Jonathan that turn out to be key areas where David/Jonathan share an affinity; they have significant things in common. Not only was Jonathan a prince and a loyal friend, Jonathan was also a...

3. Fierce warrior. The scene is set several chapters back we learn about a time when King Saul got impatient waiting for the prophet Samuel to come and bless the troops before battle. So, Saul offered up the burnt offering before God himself, without waiting for Samuel. Right after Saul does this, Samuel shows up and expresses his disappointment in Saul's poor leadership decision. 1 Samuel 13:13-14 explains, "You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command." After this, Samuel leaves and 1 Samuel 13:15 tells us that, "...Saul counted the men who were with him. They numbered about six hundred."

Saul had gone from thousands of men down to just 600.¹ You see, most of Saul's army had hidden and run away. The Philistines, however, were locked/loading. 1 Samuel 13:5-6 tells us, "The

¹ In 1 Samuel 13:2-4 we learn that, "Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Mikdash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. The rest of the men he sent back to their homes. Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba..."

Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore...When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns.”

This was not shaping up to be a fair fight.² This should ring a bell for us: an army of Philistines, unfair odds, and fearful Israelites. It sounds a little bit like when Israel faced the giant Goliath, who was none other than... a PHILISTINE. Let’s remember that before David conquered Goliath, 1 Samuel 17:11 tells us, “On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.”³ So we need to consider the parallels here between 1 Samuel 13 and 1 Samuel 17. We have the same two armies battling one another.⁴ Saul is a part of both of these different battles. There are two key figures who come to Saul’s aid in these different battles. One of those key figures was David when he slayed Goliath; he helped with that particular battle. But in THIS particular battle, SOMEONE ELSE helps Saul win.

We read an intriguing story in 1 Samuel 14:6-10, “**Jonathan** said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.” “Do all that you have in mind,” his armor-bearer said. “Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.” Jonathan said, “Come on, then; we will cross over toward them and let them see us. If they say to us, ‘Wait there until we come to you,’ we will stay where we are and not go up to them. But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands.”

Now, I’ve got to be honest, this does not seem like the best battle plan. Another confession, when I read this, I can’t help but think of the Lord of the Rings movie, “Two Towers.” There’s a scene where Aragorn and Gimli, just the 2 of them, need to fight a whole mess of other soldiers. Rather than explain it, if you’d like, you can watch this brief 30-second clip by searching YouTube for “I cannot jump the distance, you’ll have to toss me!” or by clicking

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=gimli+you%27ll+have+to+toss+me

Much like Gimli and Aragorn, Jonathan and his armor bearer were fierce warriors. Remember Jonathan’s reasoning in 1 Samuel 14:6, “...Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.” Their fierceness was not based on their personal prowess or superior weapons and numbers; their confidence was based on faith in God. Now, watch what happens next. 1 Samuel 14:11-12a says, “So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. “Look!” said the Philistines. “The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in.” The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, “Come up to us and we’ll teach you a lesson.”

“Come up to us” was the sign that Jonathan was listening for! These Philistines are going to wish that hadn’t said those words because now God was going to teach everyone a lesson. The story continues in vv. 12-14, “...So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.” Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.” Here is where we discover yet another strong connection between Jonathan and David. Not only were they both fierce warriors who fought for Saul, but Jonathan, just like David, was a...

4. Devoted Follower of God. For each of them, their faith gave them courage to face even the most intimidating odds. If 2 guys killing 20 men hasn’t quite impressed you, consider what we learn in the very next verses, 1 Samuel 14:15-16, “Then panic struck the whole army—those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties—and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by

² The Philistines were a tough opponent. They often had Israel shaking in their sandals. They were also a sly opponent. We learn in 1 Samuel 13:19 that, “Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, “Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears!” You see, the Philistines had a monopoly on the metal trade. We learn in 1 Samuel 13:22, “So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them.”

³ 1 Samuel 17:24 adds that, “Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.”

⁴ Consider 1 Samuel 14:52.

God. Saul's lookouts at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the army melting away in all directions." Jonathan's act of faith set in motion a move of God. We learn in 1 Samuel 14:20 & 23, "Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords... So on that day the LORD saved Israel...."

This event sheds light on why Jonathan was so drawn to David. Jonathan and David "discovered in each other a common factor that made their friendship unique. They both were men after God's heart. They both had a dynamic relationship with their Lord."⁵ Let's fast forward again to David's battle with Goliath. Bible commentator, Gene Getz, suggests that on, "...that day as Jonathan stood in the wings watching David accept Goliath's challenge and, single-handedly, without Saul's armor, slay the giant, memories of his own experiences must have flooded his mind and heart. There was immediate identification with David's experience and Jonathan felt his soul strangely drawn to this new and God-honoring Hebrew brother... They were both men whose hearts were in tune with God."

For me, this begs an interesting question. If Jonathan was such a great guy, then why didn't God just make him the king? Why not just let him replace his father Saul and lead Israel as the natural heir to the throne? After all, Jonathan was a godly man too; he seemed to be just as much a "man after God's own heart" as David was. The answer is simply this: that wasn't God's plan. God had other plans; other plans for David and other plans for Jonathan. Here's the most beautiful thing we can learn from Jonathan: **Embrace 2nd place!** Embrace it! Don't resist it. Submit to God's will rather than your own. Do God's will above all else.

You see, the longer Jonathan's father, Saul, was king, the more his personal pride increased. He refused to be 2nd to anyone!⁶ We can only imagine how hard this made it for Jonathan to show respect for his earthly father, while at the same time to follow God's plan. Jonathan realizes and accepts it early on, that David would be Israel's next king. This explains what he does in 1 Samuel 18:4, "Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt." The NIV Zondervan Study Bible has a helpful footnote here, "Jonathan, as Saul's firstborn, holds the hereditary right to the throne of Israel. Giving David his robe and armor symbolizes that David is Saul's successor. Giving one's sword is a sign of submission to one who is greater."⁷

You see, Jonathan could have demanded his right to the throne: "I am entitled to this! This is MY birthright!" He could have dug in his heels and embraced his pride just like his father, but instead, Jonathan embraces 2nd place. He puts David first because he recognizes God's sovereign right to choose Israel's next king. Rather than fight against God, Jonathan trusts God fully and joins Him in His plans for Israel. What an example for all of us! Humility. Submission. Honoring one another above ourselves. Jonathan, rather than trying to please his earthly father or anyone else, chooses to please God.

Saul, on the other hand, becomes more and more intensely jealous of David and he actually begins trying to kill David. Jonathan honors David above himself by protecting him. Jonathan becomes the mediator between his father Saul and his friend David. David and Jonathan had a covenant with each other. And this covenant lasted for their entire lives. However, Saul tries to hunt David down. We don't have time today to go through that part of the story but it would make a great quiet time this week. For now, let's fast forward to 1 Samuel 23:15-18, "While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." The two of them made a covenant before the LORD..." You see, Jonathan could have easily joined Saul in hunting down and killing David but he didn't. They shared a common devotion to following God.⁸

⁵ Getz, Gene A., *David: God's Man in Faith and Failure*, Ventura, CA, Regal Books, 1983, p. 64.

⁶ Consider 1 Samuel 18:7-9.

⁷ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 523.

⁸ In fact, David honors this covenant even until after Jonathan is dead. David asks a specific question in 2 Samuel 9:1, "David asked, 'Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?'" David then learns about Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, who was lame

Here are 2 takeaways from the story of David/Jonathan. This first one is that...

1) As Christ-followers, you and I have the potential to find some very close, loyal friends.

Believe it or not, Christian bonds can sometimes go even deeper and last longer than biological bonds. There's something special/powerful about the connections that we can have in/through Christ. The early church in Acts 4:32 is described this way, "All the believers were one in heart and mind." When Paul talks about the shared gospel mission of fellow believers, he says this in Philippians 1:27, "...I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel." So, do you have a Jonathan in your life? And, can you be a Jonathan in someone else's life?

A 2nd takeaway from the story of David/Jonathan is that...

2) As Christ-followers, every single one of us is called to "Embrace 2nd Place." But this doesn't come naturally to most of us. It's our natural tendency to put ourselves first. If Jonathan had had access to the New Testament, I think one of his favorite passages would have been Philippians 2:1-4, "Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Now, I'm not sure which Bible translation Jonathan might have preferred. Perhaps Hebrew but the New Testament was written in Greek! Philippians 2:3 in the *ESV* says,

"...in humility count others more significant than yourselves." The *NKJV* says, "...in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." The *NASB* puts it this way, "...with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;"

Regardless of the translation, God's Word teaches us some amazing faith lessons. Jonathan's life reminds all of us to embrace 2nd place!

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