

## **Loyalty: A Christ-like Virtue**

### **1 Samuel 20**

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now turn with me if you would to 1 Samuel, to 1 Samuel chapter 20 — 1 Samuel chapter 20. Saul, as you would remember, has had six attempts on David's life — a couple in chapter 18 and four attempts in chapter 19. And we left Saul last time prophesying among the prophets, he and his three groups of hit-men that he had sent to kill David. And the Spirit has come upon them. This is no sign of course that Saul has been converted. Saul, I think, remains unconverted and unregenerate, but he is caught up in this spiritual paraphernalia prophesying and this saying now is going around, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" Now let's pick it up at verse 1 of chapter 20. Before we do so let's look to God in prayer.

*Father we thank You again for the Scriptures. Thank You for this book of Samuel and all that it contains. We remind ourselves again that all Scripture is given by the outbreathing of God and is profitable for doctrine and reproof and correction and instruction in the way of righteousness that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Furnish us then from this chapter tonight unto good works. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

This is God's Word. Hear it:

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

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

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

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

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." 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?" Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. 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 go away and

see my brothers.' For this reason he has not come to the king's table."

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? 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." Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. And Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food that second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had disgraced him.

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

Spurgeon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said that "faith always sees the bow of covenant promise whenever sense sees the clouds of affliction." He's referring, of course, to the covenant with Noah and the promise of God contained in that covenant. And drawing comfort and strength and reassurance from covenant is what this chapter is about. You'll see it in verse 8. It is the heart, I think, of the chapter. "Therefore deal kindly with your servant" this is David to Jonathan "for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you." And you'll see in verse 23 that God is said to be a witness to this covenant. "As for the matter which you and I have spoken, behold, the Lord is between you and me forever." And you see it again in verse 42, the closing verse of the chapter. "The Lord shall be between me and you and between your offspring and my offspring."

Jonathan has entered into a covenant with David. They have this extraordinary friendship, it's a band of brothers kind of friendship. But David, the anointed king by Samuel, is being attacked by Saul. Saul is having his turns, six times in the

previous two chapters, Saul has sought to kill David. And you get the impression in this chapter I think that Jonathan grows up. At the beginning of the chapter Jonathan is remonstrating with David that he need have no fear that Saul has no real intention to kill him because he would know, his father would tell him if he intended this. Jonathan is a little naïve I think at the beginning of this chapter, but by the end of this chapter I think Jonathan has grown up. There are four things that I want us to see, maybe three if we have time.

## **I. Covenant remembrance.**

The first is covenant remembrance. Covenant remembrance, it's what the first eleven verses of this story is principally about. Saul and his hit-men have been prophesying. They have been hindered by the sovereign God. They have been hindered by the Holy Spirit from their intended purpose. It's allowed David time to escape. And David now will miss the little soiree in Saul's palace. Every new moon, the first of the month in the Hebrew calendar, according to Mosaic law they were to go to the temple and they were to sacrifice and they were to meet in their homes and there would be an occasion for feasting. If the new moon didn't actually appear on the first night they would do the same on the second night, hence the reference here to the second and third days in this chapter. And David says to Jonathan in verse 8, "Deal kindly with your servant for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you." Deal kindly — it's a very special word. It's the Hebrew word *hesed* that's often translated "loving kindness" in our Bibles. It's a word that often describes about two hundred and fifty times in the Old Testament — it describes God's relationship to His people in covenant. He deals kindly with them. He deals with them in covenant love and mercy. It combines one of my favorite Old Testament scholars, Alec Motyer says, "It combines the warmth of God's fellowship with the security of God's faithfulness." The warmth of God's fellowship with the security of God's faithfulness.

You remember in Exodus 34 when Moses is asked by God to go up the mountain a second time with fresh tablets of stone and God appears to him and God reveals to him His name, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love — abounding in the very thing that David is now invoking from Jonathan. This covenant has bound them together in a relationship of kindness, of kindness. He's remembering this covenant. It's a beautiful example I think of what covenants mean in the Old Testament. In day-to-day life, in the ordinary lives of people, when they made a covenant, a covenant to which the Lord was witness, a covenant with obligations and stipulations, that in times of trouble, in times of difficulty, they invoked this covenant, they remembered this covenant. It's what we do in part at the Lord's Supper. When we meet together as the people of God we remember — "Do this in remembrance of Me because this is the cup of the new covenant in My blood." — He has dealt with us in loving kindness. He has dealt with us in mercy and we are remembering the covenants. David is invoking the covenant. He is invoking

this bond that has bound them together as a band of brothers with mutual obligation. That's the first thing.

## **II. Covenant commitment.**

The second thing that we see here is the commitment of the covenant. The commitment of the covenant — and it's all about Jonathan here. It's extraordinary. It's breathtaking what Jonathan does in this chapter. If Jonathan begins this chapter somewhat naïve about his father's intentions, there's absolutely no doubt about Jonathan's heart and Jonathan's willingness to meet every demand that is made upon him in this friendship. He hands over the kingdom to David. Jonathan is the heir apparent. He's Saul's son, but he knows that he is not God's choice.

Try and put yourself in Jonathan's shoes for a minute. God has passed you by for some big promotion and He's given it to someone else and there's no bitterness in Jonathan. There's no remonstrance in Jonathan. There's an astonishing purity of heart. There's an absolute commitment and willingness to meet the demands of the covenant into which he has entered. He hands the kingdom over to David. He agrees to this rouse.

David isn't going to be at the little *soiree* at Saul's house. Saul will be there, Jonathan will be there, Uncle Abner will be there, but David's place will be empty. Now don't get all uptight about the fact that David and Jonathan agreed to deceive Saul by saying that David has gone to Bethlehem because the older brother demands him there and Saul thinks the reason he's not in Saul's place is because there's some demand from home which isn't true. Let's pass that by. We can be armchair critics about the rights and wrongs about these ethical scenarios and we're good at doing it, but David's life is at stake here. This is an act of warfare and soldiers in warfare engage in deception all the time.

It's on the second day that Saul's fuse is lit, and boy, don't you love it when families disagree. You know, I was trying to think, what is the feast day, the new moon feast day? It's like having Thanksgiving every month. Now for some of you Thanksgiving is wonderful. You just can't wait to be with your families. And for some of you it is not because there are tensions. Father doesn't get on with son. Mother gets on with no one. And it's every month. Saul's fuse is lit and you have one of these embarrassing moments that we can all talk about I'm sure but not in southern polite company. He calls Jonathan, his own son, “a son of a perverse woman.” That's probably polite translation of what Saul actually said. It's colorful language and he uses all of the language of shame which would get all of your counselors all bent out of shape for using this shaming language on Jonathan. It's about the succession issue. Saul understands, more than Jonathan understood, the consequences of Jonathan's friendship with David. The succession is going to end with Saul. It's going to be handed over to David.

You know, they say blood is thicker than water, but covenant loyalty wins out every time, even over blood. Do you remember what Jesus said? You can't sit down and be an armchair critic of what Jesus said here, "that if you're not prepared to give up wife and husband and father and mother and son and daughter and all of those blood relationships, if you're not willing to give those up for Jesus you're not worthy of Him." Well, that's what Jonathan is being asked to do right here. That's what he is being asked to do. Are you going to stand by your family? Are you going to stand by this megalomaniac Saul and defend him or are you going to be true to your promise and your covenant and to the Lord? Ralph Davis in Hattiesburg says, "Life" — listen to this — "Life does not consist in achievements but in keeping promises." You know, that hurts. When I read that it took my breath away. "Life doesn't consist in achievements." You know Jonathan was going to be the next king, but it doesn't consist in achievements. It consists in keeping promises.

Are you a promise keeper? Are you a promise keeper? Will you put your promise to a covenant above everything else? You see what that is asking don't you? What promises to a covenant that the majority of people in this room have made — to a marriage covenant — "till death us do part." Are you a promise keeper till death us do part?

### **III. Covenant peace.**

There's a third thing here. It comes right at the end in the section from verse 35 down to verse 42. Jonathan does his little rouse with the arrows, with the three arrows, sends the boy, gives the password, the coded message that says to David, "Things are not well. David you were right. My father is out to kill you. You need to run and you need to go quickly." And from now on David is going to be a fugitive. And he sends the little boy with the arrows and stuff, and he sends them back and there's a meeting between David and Jonathan and then he says in verse 42, "Go in peace. Go in peace." How can he go in peace when he's a fugitive? How can he go in peace when Saul is out to kill him? And you understand that Jonathan is saying? It's the peace of the covenant. As far as Jonathan is concerned, David need never worry. He will keep his word even if it costs him his life. There's a moment in this passage when Jonathan actually says that — "If I'm still alive," he says. There's a peace between them. It's a peace of the covenant. It's a peace of a promise that is made and a promise that will be kept. Covenants provide stability and assurance and peace.

There's another covenant of which this is but a copy — a covenant between God and His people that costs the blood of the Lord Jesus. You remember how Toplady put it?

"A debtor to mercy alone, of covenant mercy I sing. Nor fear with your

righteousness on my present, my offering, to bring. The terrors of law and of God with me shall have nothing to do. My Savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.”

What you see here in this story between David and Jonathan is but a little glimpse, a little illustration, of how God makes a covenant with us and it's a covenant unto death. It's a covenant that says “I will never leave you. I will never ever forsake you.” You can't break God's promises by leaning on them. You can't break God's promises by leaning on them. David here is leaning on the promise of a covenant. Let's pray.

*Father, we thank You for the covenant, the new covenant, and the blood of Jesus Christ shed for many for the remission of sins. We thank You that in Christ we too have peace. Being justified by faith we have peace with God. We ask tonight that You would grant us that assurance of Gospel peace and take us home rejoicing in it for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction and then afterwards we're going to sing the doxology. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

*This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.*

*Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

### **Subscribe to RPM**

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).