

## Covenant Friendship

1Samuel 20:1-42

### Do you know what Jesus said about how people will recognize His followers?

He says in John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Paul says in Romans 13:8, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."

John writes in 1John 4:7, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."

And Peter says in 1Peter 1:22, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart."

Those are just a few examples from the New Testament on the importance, I would say necessity, of Christians loving one another.

### It is the nature of born again people to love other born again people.

To say it another way, it is impossible to love Jesus and be indifferent towards other Christians.

I quoted Peter last there for a reason. He commands believers to "love one another deeply from the heart."

That is saying something much more than we have to tolerate one another because Jesus tells us to.

Love is certainly at times a decision of our will to act against how we feel in a particular moment, but Christ calls us to something much higher as believers.

We are to strive for much more than right actions divorced from any kind of tender hearted affection.

We are to think of love is a different way from the world.

The world's idea of love is like shifting sand focusing primarily upon feelings which often lead us into evil.

I believe the best way to define Biblical love is a  
**"Tender hearted affection for the highest good of the people to whom that affection is directed."**

There is no other way to obey Christ's command than to "love one another deeply from the heart."

### That being the case, deep and genuine friendship should be a common attribute in the life of the church.

Of course since we are all finite beings it is impossible to maintain that level of friendship with everyone we meet, but we should all desire deep and abiding Christ honouring

friendships with as many other believers as possible and desire to have the good fruit of those friendships be a blessing to the church as a whole.

This is literally the spiritual passport of being a Christian.

Given that reality we have to ask the question, “What does that look like?”

[That is the subject of our text this morning in 1 Samuel 20. In this chapter of God’s word the focus is on the friendship between a man named Jonathan and another man named David. The friendship of these two men is based on a covenant that they had made with one another in the name of the LORD. A covenant is more than a legal contract or agreement, it is a promise made in which the promise makers invest their very being into the promise. God’s people are a covenant people. We are in a covenant with God and that puts us into a covenant with one another. So the qualities that we see in the covenant friendship of David and Jonathan are directly applicable to us as we think about the importance of friendship in the Christian life. We can learn at least for important lessons from the friendship of these two men. Number one is this...]

**Point #1 – Truth is essential to covenant friendship. (Verses 1-9)**

People who are bound to one another in Christ are willing listen to one another for the sake of understanding what is real rather than ignore problems for the sake of convenience.

David had fled to Samuel for protection, but that could only be a short term solution and so he seeks out the help of his covenant friend at the beginning of chapter 20.

Jonathan had previously convinced his father of David’s loyalty and worth which resulted in Saul swearing an oath that David would not be harmed and his being restored to service in the kingdom.

David is likely hoping for a similar outcome here so he goes to Jonathan asking why the king is seeking to have him killed.

Jonathan responds in **verse 2**.

Things are not adding up for Jonathan at first. He knows his dad has some issues but he also knows he has sworn an oath before God that no harm would come to David.

He wouldn’t break that would he? He wouldn’t keep something so important from his trusted son would he?

David goes on in **verse 3**.

David gives Jonathan a good reason why Saul might have hidden his evil intentions and he himself invokes God’s name as a testimony to the truth of his words.

That is a tough spot for Jonathan. Both his father and his best friend have done a most serious thing by appealing to the LORD, but only one can be faithful to his word and the other a liar.

Jonathan could have just dismissed David, unwilling to accept the true state of things with his dad, but instead we read this in **verse 4**.

He is willing to face the truth and he is willing to do whatever is necessary discover the reality of the situation.

In verses 5-8 we learn of David’s plan.

His plan is for Jonathan to tell Saul that David is missing from the ‘New Moon Festival’ because Jonathan gave his permission for David to celebrate with his family in Bethlehem.

If Saul is cool with that all is well, but if as they used to say ‘the wheels come of the wagon’ then Saul does indeed have murderous intentions.

It is sort of like David wants to send Jonathan in as an undercover police officer and Jonathan agrees.

It is an easy thing to ignore issues using our love for someone as an excuse, but that is not love and it is not friendship.

You can’t have genuine love and friendship without the truth.

[One of the great and often repeated mistakes in the church is ignoring inconvenient or difficult truths. Many times we have witnessed pastors and leaders absolutely self-destruct on account of ungodly character or hidden sins. Do you know what usually happens after the big blow up takes place? Everyone starts to recognize that the warning signs were there. We usually find that some people even raised concerns but those signs and concerns were ignored by said pastor/leader and the people closest to them were working to cover their tracks.]

That’s not Christian friendship or love.

That is a train wreck waiting to happen and it always does.

Listen, just because we might be unwilling to hear truth in our lives does not mean the truth will remain hidden.

It will always find you out, it is just a matter of time.

So why not avoid all that and embrace truth rather than turn away from it.

Christians should have no fear of the truth. That is what the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ does for you.

It robs evil of its power through repentance and faith.

[If we are to love one another in covenant friendship—and that is what we are called to as believers—then we must be willing to live together under the truth of God’s word. Being satisfied with false appearances only makes our lives into fine looking coffins. We look ok on the outside but we are dead on the inside. Christ calls us to life brothers and sisters. Life in the the truth. Here is another lesson about covenant friendship...]

**Point #2 – Enduring faithfulness is the mark of covenant friendship. (Verses 10-23)**

God’s people, being increasing conformed to His image, should be people of patient endurance in relationship with one another.

Having come up with the plan, David wonders in verse ten how he will find out what the outcome of the plan will be.

Jonathan promises with an oath to find the answers and to inform David in verses 11-13 and then he says this in **verses 14-16**.

Several times in this chapter we are told about the ‘covenant’ between David and Jonathan and several times God’s name is used in reference to the kind of covenant that they have with one another.

Verse 14 is one of those examples. Jonathan says to David, “show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD.”

The Hebrew word translated ‘unfailing kindness’ is the word ‘hesed’.

God often uses that word to describe His own covenant faithfulness to His people.

We need to ask, “How long does God remain faithful to His covenant promises?”

Answer, forever!

That is the kind of faithfulness that Jonathan and David are basing their friendship on.

Jonathan then explains his plan for letting David know what the outcome of testing his father will be.

In verses 17-22 he says that he will come to the field where David is hiding with a young boy.

He will shoot a series of arrows. If he tells the boy that the arrows are beside him everything is cool, but if he tells the boy that the arrows are beyond him then David needs to run for his life.

And then he adds this in **verse 23**.

In the Hebrew it simply reads “The LORD is between you and me forever.”

What is his point in saying that? He is appealing to God’s nature to describe the covenant that is between them.

How long does God remain for? Forever.

The LORD depends on nothing outside of Himself to exist and within Himself He never changes; therefore, He is eternal.

Since God will always be ‘between David and Jonathan’ the expectation is for both men to remain committed to what they have promised to one another.

[Does anyone here this morning have an appreciation for old homes? For those of you that put up your hands what kind of picture comes to your mind when you think about an old home. Is it a picture of a well-kept functioning home or an old dilapidated home with a big hole in the roof, broken windows, a front door that is falling off, and a family of racoons inhabiting the main floor? I guessing it’s likely the well-kept home you have in mind. Do you know the difference between the two? Maintenance. Someone took care of the nice house and the other house was abandoned.]

That is good picture of enduring covenant friendship. You have to remain committed to it and if you don't it won't be long before it falls apart.

That is so important for Christians because that is how God deals with us.

The LORD brothers and sisters is not wishy washy, He is not driving all over the map, He is not committed one day and walking away the next.

He is a covenant keeping God. That is exactly what Jesus says at the last supper is it not.

When speaking about the cup He says, "The cup is the new covenant in my blood."

He died for His people, how then can He abandon them?

He can't. He will be faithful to all His promises forever!

It is that kind of commitment to friendship that He desires in the church brothers and sisters.

[We need to ask ourselves? Are we too easily offended? Do we too easily walk away from relationships with other believers? That is not the Christian way. I've got news for you, if you are in Christ then you will be spending eternity with everyone else in Christ so we might as well get started today! We should be known for enduring friendship. Thirdly...]

### **Point #3 – Covenant friendship seeks what is right despite the cost. (Verses 24-34)**

Believers must at times be willing to take risks for the sake of those they love in Christ.

*After their plans are set David remains hiding in the field and Jonathan proceeds to go to the New Moon Festival.*

It is very strange to me that Saul expects David to show up.

Saul knows that his daughter has informed David that his life is in danger.

Quick show of hands, how many people would show up to supper at the house of someone trying to kill you?

Could be that Saul was just that disconnected from reality, or it could be that he thought David's love for the Lord would compel him to come to be at the feast despite the risk.

That seems especially possible because of what Saul is thinking the first day. In verse 26 we are told that Saul thinks David is missing because he has become unclean and therefore unable to participate.

Very possible as there is a long list of things in the Old Testament that could make a person temporary unable to be a part of religious festivals.

By day two, however, he asks Jonathan where David is.

In verse 28 Jonathan gives his father the agreed upon test saying he gave David

permission to worship in Bethlehem with his family.

Saul responds in **verses 30-31**.

*Not very nice things to say about your son or your wife.*

To the insults he adds fake concern for his son's future and declares the need for David to die.

Now Jonathan has some experience with his father's foolishness and temper.

The easy thing to do here would be to say, "Yes father!"

But instead he stands up for his friend asking for justice (**Verse 32**).

It is completely against God's law to put someone to death for no reason.

Even the king must justify himself for wanting David dead.

With that Saul picks up his spear and throws it as his son to "kill him" it says in verse 33.

Either he just misses or Jonathan dodges it and then we read this in **verse 34**.

I believe Jonathan being a great warrior could have hurled that thing right back in his anger, but instead he shows self-control honouring both his father (who did not deserve it) and the LORD.

Instead he forfeits his own place at the king's table for the sake of what is right.

Friendship in the LORD at times is costly.

[It was this kind of friendship that sustained William Carey and his great missionary efforts among the people of India in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Some thought he was wrong to want to go and many criticized. In the face of that he had dear friends like Andrew Fuller who were willing to stand with him to fund raise on his behalf and continually answer critics even at person cost. The result has been two and a half centuries of foreign missions and who knows how many people saved through the preaching of the gospel to the nations.]

That is what covenant friendship does. It is willing to sacrifice for sake of what is right for the good of others.

Too often in our time we concern ourselves primarily with what we can get out of relationships and often what we want in not right.

This is why so many friendships are so very fragile and easily broken.

Because if we are in a relationship to satisfy sinful desires and we don't get it what will we do? We will walk away.

The church ought to be different.

The church ought to be full of covenant friendship where we have a high concern for what is right.

Sometimes that is costly, but the cost is short term and the benefit eternal.

[Imagine what the church could look like if the vast majority of Christians sought what was right according to the word of God! Imagine if we did that out of a sincere love for God which translated into a sincere love for other believers! It would look a lot like glorious covenant friendship. That brings us to one more lesson closely related to this one. It is that...]

**Point #4 – Honouring the LORD is the basis of covenant friendship. (Verses 35-42)**

How we conduct ourselves in our relationships with fellow believers is a reflection of what we say we believe about God.

Having firmly discovered the truth concerning his father's sinful attitude toward David, Jonathan puts into action his plan to inform his friend of the news.

It is not the signal he wants to send, but the one he must send.

He shoots the arrows calling out the signal to the boy which told David he had to run for his life.

After the young lad retrieves the arrows, Jonathan gives him the equipment and sends him back to town which affords the two men the opportunity to say goodbye. **(Verse 41)**

David's bowing down here is a way of acknowledging that his life was and is in Jonathan's hands and he is emphatically honouring his friend for what he has done.

They kiss one another (a common greeting in the ancient world) and weep.

They know this means parting ways for a long period of time.

In fact, the bible tells us of only one more meeting between the two for the rest of their lives.

Just before they part ways we are told this in verse 42.

They have sworn friendship "in the name of the LORD."

There is much more to the name of the LORD than a means by which he is identified.

His name is a reflection of Who He is, it is connected to His honour and glory.

Jonathan and David's commitment to one another is based on a desire to honour God with their friendship.

No matter how long they live, no matter where each man might find himself, the LORD will be standing between them.

There is a clear understanding that how they act towards one another is bigger than either one of them.

It is about bringing glory to the LORD.

It is that fact that makes every other good aspect of covenant friendship possible.

Because truth is essential to this kind of friendship we need to know that truth exists and we need to have some idea of what it is.

The only reason there is such a thing as objective truth is because the LORD has created all things and established all things according to His goodness.

It is the unchanging enduring nature of God that gives us reason to continue on in covenant friendship.

If not for the conviction that the LORD will be pleased with us doing what is right, we would have no real reason to risk any personal cost for the sake of others.

The only reason any of this makes sense and is worth doing is to honour the LORD.

I would go so far as to say that if you fail to see that friendship is about someone bigger than yourself, namely the LORD, then you have no idea what true friendship really is.

*We should know better as believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

We have a God who is so relentless in His covenant commitments that He gave His One Only Son to die on behalf of His people so that everyone who believes upon the name of Jesus Christ is forgiven for their sins, declared righteous in God's sight, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, being made new day by day in the certain hope of being raised to eternal life according to the power of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Since God's love has been poured out in us, we must love one another.

Covenant friendship is much more than nice thought it is to be our very identity as Christians.

It is impossible to honour Christ without this. If we have indifference or hatred in our hearts towards other believers then we have indifference and hatred in our hearts towards Jesus.

If we love Jesus then we must love, truly love, His people and that ought to be on display in deep and abiding friendships to bring honour to the LORD.

May God graciously make such friendships common in our church so that everyone might look at us and know we belong to Jesus.

Let's pray towards that end.