

David and Jonathan

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so as I was saying before, we're doing these Old Testament stories. Now, I have a confession to make, and the confession is that I changed this week's story. Now, as a hyper-spiritual individual, I would say I was led by the Spirit to do so, and I hope that's the case. I wouldn't make such a great claim.

But I just felt there was a need for a slight change of pace. The stories we've done have been fantastic, but there's been an intensity about them, and I assume this at one level, which is absolutely good because it's the themes that God wants us to have.

But it was supposed to be this week, it was supposed to be David and Absalom. But we'll do that again. We'll do it at some other time. But today, we're going to do David and Jonathan.

A slight change of pace and a slight change of theme. Because I wonder today, if you're in the position where you just crave, you know, you just sometimes crave a friend. You know, someone who understands you, someone who just accepts you, loves you for who you are, faults and all, someone that you can relax with.

Do you ever come to God's house and you're just tired, and you're just tired of bitterness and a bad atmosphere and opposition? I don't mean in church. I mean generally in your life, in your workplace, in your studies, hassles, people nagging at you, finding fault with you, complaining about you.

[1 : 3 3] Isn't it nice just to be in the company of a friend? Friendship's a great thing. And it's a massive theme in the Bible. Huge theme in God's word. And I just want to unpack that a little bit today, generally, and then particularly with David and Jonathan.

The theme of friendship is huge in the Bible. It reflects, it reflects, it reflects the very nature of God, okay? Let's start at that level. It reflects the very nature of God, because in God there is a Trinitarian friendship.

He's not a lonely idol, IDLE. He's not lonely at that level on his own. He is in this great, the purest and best of all friendships.

There is no mistrust and there is no competitiveness or pride or fallouts or jealousy or tensions. And I believe in Christ that we will spend eternity exploring the depths of God whose persons love each other.

And we will be enjoying the image of being God's people in a righteous community of friendship eternally, which will always be growing and developing.

[2 : 5 0] It reflects the very nature of God. It also reflects the fruit of redemption. I think of the first text from the screens is, do we have this screen text here?

Yeah. Okay, from John 15, 13 to 15. Greater love is no one than this. And you know what you all know this verse. It literally lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends. Jesus speaks to his disciples.

If you do what I command you, no longer will I call you servants. A servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends for all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. So at the very core of our redemption, Jesus is trumpeting that we become friends with God.

The language of Scripture is that our sins sets us at enmity with God. We are enemies of God naturally, and that's terrifying, even though he still loves us. The sun still shines and the rain still falls down on the righteous.

Without grace, we are enemies at enmity with God, terrifying if we understand who God is. Terrifying. The righteous opponent.

[3 : 55] Not like the human opposition we sometimes face that we can argue against and say it's unjust and unfair. But this is the righteous God, and only Christ can reconcile us. And he does so, obviously, through the cross.

And as we recognize and acknowledge our guilt and seek forgiveness, it opens up the way to this glorious, completely fresh relationship with God as a friend.

James 2 and verse 23. The Scripture was fulfilled that God sees Abraham, believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness, he was saved by grace. And he was called God's friend.

Or Proverbs 18, verse 24, where we have a man of many companions come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. So we have the theme that interweaves Scripture, that we recognize that in Christ we have a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

And that in Christ we can be called rightly God's friend. That's a great thing. It's a powerful thing. It's the living God who calls us into friendship with Him, His power and His glory and the author of life, the one who sustains the universe, invites us into friendship with Him.

[5 : 15] I think probably we all like the idea of being friends with someone famous. You know, if we could, if we could wangle ourselves into that place where we were friends with someone famous, we would be pleased with that, and friends with someone really famous.

I'm not going to say who it is, because who I think is famous, you might not. But you know, that's an important thing. But I wonder if we think of a relationship with God like that as Christians.

There's no one more famous, more glorious, more worship worthy than the living God. And that is how He, one of the great descriptions of our relationship with Him in Christ, someone that He wants us to spend time with Him too.

He understands us. He loves us. We can be ourselves with Him, or as Corey mentioned, as we confess and recognize who we are before Him. He accepts us. He seeks our best.

His promises are not just sometimes like human promises, even in human friendships, wishful thinking. He makes future provision for us, and I wonder, I wonder as you come to church this morning, if you've considered or think of beyond theoretical concepts, Jesus is your friend.

[6 : 37] Jesus Christ is your friend. Do you see your relationship of faith as a believer today? What do you see? Do you see merely theological, or intellectually theological terms?

Do you see in ritualistic terms, or moralistic terms? Or is it a cold relationship, a ritualistic, distant? Is it a fearful relationship? Is it an authoritarian relationship?

If so, you are missing one of the central themes of the Bible in your relationship with God, which is that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst, in order that we are friends with God, friends with God.

That is His own terminology for us. And of course, not only vertically friends, but also as we understand that concept, it absolutely applies to our horizontal relationships in Christ with one another.

We are friends in Christ as believers. Now, this is very significant. Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude, New Testament writers, they all understood that. 23 times in their letters, they refer to the people of God to whom they are writing as dear friends.

- [8 : 00] It was central to their understanding of the Christian community. We share a common Savior and friend, and it's the heart of our understanding of community and of church.
- We have a common Father and a shared grace, and we have a common enemy of our soul. And it's an enemy who can only be defeated as we do what?
- As we deal with the sin that separates us from one another and stops us from calling each other friends. The judgment, the gossip, the natural antipathy, the mistrust, the envy, the differences that we make judgments on.
- You know what you need to do and what I need to do in the Christian community? We don't need to kind of in a soft theological way or in a sappy understanding of truth, but we have to will to be friends. We will to be friends.
- It's not about natural attractions only. It is willing to be friends because we have a common Savior and we have a common family and we have a common destination and we have a common indwelling of the Spirit.
- [9 : 22] So it's very theologically, crystal-centric, it's very theologically core to our understanding of the gospel in the Bible. Can I look briefly at the story or at least at the friendship of David and Jonathan?
- It's both an inspiration for us and an example for us of friendship as God intends it to be. We read a little bit from chapter 18. We didn't read any of chapter 20.
- If you have time, go home and read chapter 20 because that's a big bulk of the story of David and Jonathan and the way they interacted and how Jonathan found out about his father's hatred of David and warned him in the whole...read the story. It's a great story.
- And then read chapter 20, which is David's lament. Sorry, no, chapter 1 of 2 Samuel, which is David's lament for Saul and for Jonathan.
- How the mighty have fallen. A powerful, moving, emotional account. We'll mention one or two bits of it. This is the kind of godly friendship that we should strive after.
- [10 : 32] Now, before I do that, I'm going to mention an interpretative bias that we need to deal with when we are reading Scripture. Remember today, when we read...every time you read Scripture, we recognize it as God's word, okay?
- And we recognize it as God's word that has been written and inspired by men through the Holy Spirit. They were given God's word, it was breathed out through them into real situations, into real cultures and into specific historical redemptive settings.
- And it was written to original readers or listeners first and also then, obviously, to us all. And so as we read Scripture, we need to read it with our minds as well as our hearts and recognize the culture into which it was written and the people who were the first recipients of that word.
- We need to understand the culture and the times in which the Bible was written. Now, for the ancient Near East, that's not that easy for us. We are 21st century Western Scots and others. And the ancient Near East is very culturally different to us.
- And so sometimes we find that very difficult. It requires work. It requires effort on our part. Sometimes to understand, the danger is that we impose 21st century Western, sometimes Scottish, cultural lenses to what is God's word.
- [12 : 06] We all need to be aware of not doing that. You know, we don't put a kilt on David, for example. Silly example, but you know what I mean? Nobody haggis then in the Old Testament.
- We need to understand the culture and understand the society in which the word was written. Now, many liberal modern interpretations of the story of David and Jonathan will have them in a homosexual relationship.

It's the language of lovers, clearly, obviously. David's lament, which we didn't read in 1 Samuel 1, he speaks of his love for Jonathan as more wonderful than that of women.

Chapter 1 verse 26, I'm going to say more about that later. But that is reading this ancient Near East text of God's word with 21st century lens.

There's nothing in the text to suggest that David and Jonathan were in any sense homosexual lovers. It goes against the clear teaching of the covenant ethics of the Lord that they both adhered to. They were married.

[13 : 18] David himself did battle with heterosexual faithfulness later on, and it's recorded in Scripture, but it's also exposed as sin.

It's simply not either explicit or implicit in the text, nor would it have been understood as such by the original readers. It's absolutely a reflection of an obsession with sexualization of all of society and the gender fluid narrative that is being imposed on all of society, including Scripture.

This is about a good, God-centered and vital same-sex friendship, a vital part of life for us, especially redeemed life, should I say, and something we aim to and look to develop in our churches, and in general terms in society, in the world in which we live, but particularly in our relationships in churches.

So what were the characteristics of this godly friendship? The first is it was a godly friendship.

We're told in verse 1, as soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul, loved him like himself. They were one in spirit, and they were very close at that level, and Jonathan loved David as himself.

[14 : 47] Now that's biblical language when it speaks about loving someone else as himself. In Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 18, right in the middle of the Old Testament, explaining the commandments, you shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

I am the Lord. That's the same kind of language that's been used of David and Jonathan. Jonathan loved him as himself, or of course Jesus outworks that in Mark chapter 12, verse 13, 31.

This is a summary of the commandments. Love the Lord your God. And then the second is this, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. It was an outworking of God's pattern for brotherly friendships.

It was a close knit, deep bond of friendship. Brotherly, could I say, brotherly and law friendship, because they were brothers in law. Because David was, at this point, married to Michael, who was Jonathan's sister. They were brothers in law.

But they also had this oneness in spirit. They were knit. He was knit to the soul. They were real close guys together. They felt as one. Jonathan was inspired by David's victory because Jonathan himself was a soldier.

[16 : 08] They were fighting men and their characters that hit off with one another. Immediately they just got on well together. There's probably only, this is a slight aside, there's probably only over maybe two or three, at most three people that you'll ever be like that within your life.

One in soul. Absolutely. The moment you meet you, there's this closeness. But there's wider character of six of friendship also. So it's a godly friendship.

It was also a covenantal friendship in verse three. We're told that Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul. And then if you could, if you have your Bibles with you, flick forward to chapter 20.

I kind of wish we'd had more time to read this, but we didn't. But please do read it. But David and Jonathan are interacting and in verse eight of this chapter, Jonathan says, No, it's 20. Yeah, verse eight.

Therefore, Jonathan's speaking to David here and he says, 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?

[17 : 22] I was David speaking to Jonathan. And there's this clear covenantal relationship that they had. We're told that they had a covenantal relationship of love with one another.

And it's a tremendously powerful love. In verse 17, Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as his own soul.

And the word is used as the hesed word of the Old Testament, the covenantal word that's used of God's love for his people. And it holds really strong ideas of loyalty and of sacrifice.

And this relationship was more than just a deep friendship. There was something formal about it.

We don't really do that kind of friendship marriage, possibly, is a covenant of love relationship. That's been a man and a woman. But when I was growing up, used to watch cowboy films a long time ago, 40 years ago.

[18 : 36] And cowboy films in these days, it was cowboys and Indians. That's where it was cowboys and Indians. And the Indians were baddies and the cowboys were goodies. It was a kind of very clear and unrealistic picture.

But sometimes there would be a really good Indian who would make friends with a real rebel cowboy. And they became blood brothers. And so they would cut their finger with a knife. Remember that?

They would each cut each other's fingers and they would fuse the blood together. Blood, blood friends for life. And that's a kind of covenant. That's the nearest thing I could think of to relatively modern day.

Those are under 30 here, maybe. We wouldn't find that to be the case. But blood brother, there's a steadfastness about it. It was a promise, a great promise of loyalty in chapter 20 again at verse 42 towards the end.

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 my offspring and your offspring forever.

[19 : 47] So it wasn't just about their friendship. It was about friendship right down the line and how they would treat one another as families. So it was really loyal. And because it was loyal, it was also sacrificial as a covenant friendship.

Verse 42 says it was done in God's name. And it was sacrificial because you know that the bit we read, the bit we read were Jonathan and David in chapter 18. They love each other really closely.

And Jonathan makes a covenant and he disrobes himself in front of David. That was a formal act he was doing. Whether he knew from God or whether he just presumed, but what he saw in David was that David would be the next successor to the throne.

It was Jonathan's rightful place. Jonathan was next in line to Saul. But whether he'd been told by God or whether he knew that David had already been anointed as God's next inch, the way he defeated Goliath made him realize it's not going to be me. It's going to be David.

And so the disrobing was a transfer of his succession rights as the crown prince. That's what he was doing. He was handing over what was rightfully his as the crown prince.

[21 : 05] Really costly friendship. He was saying, you're God's man. I'm not going to be the next king. You are. But I will be loyal to you to the end. Hugely humble.

And at the same time, it was sacrificial for David because David, when Jonathan in chapter 20 asks for David to protect his family after if he dies, David promises to do so. That also was greatly costly. Not in 21st century terms, maybe Scottish terms, but in ancient Near East terms, that was really costly because the general idea was you annihilated anyone who had a rightful place to the throne.

You annihilated them and their family. So Jonathan could have rightly wanted to annihilate David as a threat. And David could have rightly annihilated Jonathan's family after Jonathan died because they could have been a threat.

But Corrie preached one of his best sermons here when he preached about David and Mephidchev. Jonathan's son and how David treated him because they were in a covenant friendship. It wasn't elimination.

It was protection and love and humility and service. So it was a covenant relationship, but it was also a heart relationship. In verse 41 of chapter 20, I know it's hard jumping to verses that we haven't read the story, but when they part from one another because they have to because Saul is trying to kill David, we should...

[22 : 43] We're told that David gave... I'll carry on. So see, this is difficult. Go in peace because... I don't know, that's not the right verse. I'm looking for verse 41. Yeah, sorry, I can't see it for looking.

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. They kissed one another and wept with one another. David weeping the most. They kissed and they wept.

Dodgy? Well, it's very similar to Paul's parting with the Ephesians elder. Ephesians elders in Acts chapter 20, I think we have that for the screen. And there was much weeping on the part of all.

They embraced Paul and kissed him. Do you talk about that as a homosexual relationship between Paul and the elders? No, we don't talk about that because we understand the cultural. It's a cultural kiss, isn't it?

Between brothers. And absolutely, it was this heart friendship. They were sharing life and soul. It was a heart relationship. And as David says in 2 Samuel chapter 1 and verse 26, Do if you have time, read that when you go home. It says, lament when David, when Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle.

[24 : 05] He says, I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan. Very pleasant you have been to me. For your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen and the weapons of war perished.

Better than the love of women. Now, that means that for David, his relationship with Jonathan was unparalleled. It was better for him than sexual love. And that is a significant and important thing.

It was deeper than blood. It was deeper than marriage. In other words, there was no lust attached to this friendship. It wasn't distorted by physical attraction, which many male-female relationships are.

It was a pure level. It wasn't lustful. And nor in David's case, it was an arranged relationship. Up to this point, his marriages and would-be were arranged by others and sometimes for political reasons.

And so it may have been that David hadn't truly experienced a real loving relationship with a woman in a way that would have maybe kept him from saying what he said.

[25 : 31] And maybe Bathsheba was that first genuine love affair he had. We dealt with that in not a good way, of course.

But it was an amazing, deep, heartfelt friendship, and of course one that was broken.

Isn't that the hardest thing in this life? Whether it's a marriage or the closeness of friendships. It's broken. It's one of the bitterness of living in this world, isn't it?

Read David's lament. Take time to read David's lament. It's the pain of being in a broken world. As you sit beside your lover today, your husband, your wife, your best friend, maybe. Same-sex friendship.

Sometimes in your weakest or saddest moments you think about that relationship being broken, sin destroys the best of all relationships, apart from our one with Christ alone. So it's a heartfelt relationship and experience the brokenness of that heartfelt reality.

[26 : 46] And I finish with this in conclusion to make a statement. What a need we have for such friendships as David and Jonathan's in the church.

Now I know we need it generally. I know we need it in our relationships with the world. But I think, and I'm not saying that other friendships don't matter. They're vital. But as we understand the nature of true godly friendship, the characteristics that flow from that will influence all our friendships and all our love for other people who are not Christians themselves, will develop.

What a need we have for these kind of friendships in the church. It's fundamental, I would say, but rare to our humanity as image-bearers.

And I think there's degrees within that friendship. I think within the family of God we are to love one another. And I'll mention briefly these characteristics. There's to be a committed sacrificial love to each other, all of us, to one another.

But there will be within the church one or two, or maybe three, in any Christian community with whom you're one in spirit, like David and Jonathan. You'll not be that with everyone. We can't be that with everyone. It's impossible.

[28 : 01] It's far too emotionally draining for a start. It's just with the one or two. And that's not to cause envy in the church. Don't be envious because other people have that kind of friendship. It may be within a marriage, but I'm saying something different. One same-sex friendship. It's a good thing.

Jesus had it. Jesus had it with the inner group of disciples, among the twelve, and he was perfect. But so within that there's the broad and then there's the focused, and then there's the one.

Okay, remember the one. Friendship with Christ. Develop your friendship with Christ, the concept of your friendship with Christ. Remember that. And develop the characteristics of the friendship that we have between here, reveal between David and Jonathan.

It was deep. It was committed. It was loyal. It was sacrificial. It was costly. Now that is why we have banged on here for years and years and years about the importance of relationships and the importance of community within the church. It's not soft-soaping the gospel. It's not the easy option.

It is not the easy option. Self-righteousness and legalism is much, much easier and being completely isolated, much easier. It's the hardest thing to do, but we bang on about the importance of community being core to our thinking, because we don't believe in ritualism and we don't believe in moralism. We believe we're image-bearers, and as image-bearers we seek to be friends with God and friends, therefore with one another.

[29 : 37] It's the core of our mission, and it means that we eyeball each other and confess our sins. It means we recognize our weakness. It means we work hard at not taking the huff.

It means we don't become embittered, and it means we work desperately hard at being protecting one another against the evil one. Friendship with others, sharing Christ, sharing love.

And remember that is heart friendship, as it was with David and Jonathan. As brothers and sisters in heart relationships, that will mean our relationships are accountable to one another.

They are real and they are vulnerable. Now, I know this quote has been made quite recently from the church, and I take it as mine, although it's C.S. Lewis's. The only reason I take it as mine is because I've included it in my marriage booklet that I do with people who are getting married.

I think, maybe, Corry, or someone mentioned it recently, fairly recently, about love. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, your heart will certainly be run and possibly be broken.

[30 : 50] If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.

But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

See, it's costly to love like Christ loves, and to love one another. There will be tears, and of course, there will be loss. You will lose your best friend. You will lose your husband. You will lose your wife. You will lose your children.

They will lose you. But all of it must drive us to the one who ultimately wipes away every tear, and from whom we will be in this glorious relationship with love eternally.

If you don't know Jesus as your friend, can I ask you to plead with Him to reveal Himself to you as your friend, and to reveal your own heart to yourself to see your need of Him as a friend?

[32 : 10] That's Bowerheads in prayer. Father, God help us to understand who you are and understand the nature of true friendship. May we not be glib and simplistic in either the way we call each other friends or treat each other as friends.

And may we not be selective, only attracting ourselves and expending ourselves on those who we would naturally be attracted to.

May we see the people of God as our family and as our blood and as our brothers and sisters. And may we expend ourselves in loving one another.

And bless the one-spirit friendships in this church. May we not be jealous of others who have them. May we strive after them ourselves.

And may we recognise as we hear Scripture what God is, what light He is shining into our own hearts that may need His convicting power and can transform in grace to change.

[33 : 23] We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.