

1 Samuel 20:1-42

Introduction

‘If I write N-E-W,’ asked the teacher, ‘what does it spell?’

‘New,’ replied a boy at the front.

‘And if I write a K in front of it? What does it spell then?’

‘Canoe!’ shouted the smiling boy.

Most of us here are, thankfully, well beyond the years of spelling tests at school. But here’s a spelling test for you, to get your brains working.

First word: ‘accommodation’. How do you spell it? Does it have one C or two? One M or two Ms?

Here’s the answer.

Answer: accommodation

Two Cs. Two Ms.

Ok, we all know the saying: ‘I before E except after C’. So, how do you spell our second word: ‘leisure’?

Here’s the answer.

Answer: leisure

That saying isn’t always true.

Next word. How do you spell ‘buoyant’.

Here’s the answer.

Answer: buoyant

One more. How do you spell ‘disciple’?

You might be thinking you spell it like *this*.

Answer: disciple

That’s certainly one of spelling it.

But when it comes to Bible-spelling, there are lots of ways you could spell ‘disciple’.

You could spell it like this.

Answer: loved

Or this.

Answer: secure

Or this.

Answer: friend

The Bible has *lots* of ways of spelling 'disciple'. And we're going to see *some* of them in our passage this morning, as we read this story of Jonathan and David.

It's a great story. And firstly, it's a model of friendship.

That's our first heading: a model of friendship.

A model of friendship

Last week we read of Saul's numerous attempts on David's life. David's on the run. And our passage begins this week by telling us that **...David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went up to Jonathan...**

And he asks a perfectly reasonable question: 'Jonathan, why's your dad trying to kill me? What have I done wrong?'

To which, Jonathan's reply seems astonishing. 'I don't think you've got that right, David,' he says. 'My dad tells me everything. If he was trying to kill you, I'd know about it.'

Talk about naïve! It's the equivalent of a grown man saying he still believes in Father Christmas.

So, David points out the obvious. 'Look, Jonathan, your dad knows we're friends. If he were trying to kill me, of course, he wouldn't tell you. But I can assure you that he wants me dead.'

So, David comes up with a test to expose Saul's real intentions.

The next day is the start of the New Moon feast. There would be a big banquet. And David would be expected to be there. But he's going to skip it. He's going to send his apologies. And Saul's response will reveal his true intentions. If he's happy with that, then all is well. But if he gets angry, and loses his temper, it's because he's determined to do David harm.

And David says to Jonathan, 'If that's the case, then please remember the covenant we made, our bond of allegiance, and warn me. Even if your dad intends to kill me, please would *you* show kindness to me, your servant. Unless, of course, you think I really have done something wrong. In which case just kill me now.'

Well, Jonathan doesn't kill him. David is asking Jonathan to do the unexpected. It would be surprising for a crown prince to show loyalty to one of his father's subjects rather than to his father, the king. As crown prince, he has obligations to his father. Yet, there is a covenant of friendship between Jonathan and David. They are kindred spirits with a sworn allegiance to each other. And Jonathan readily agrees to do what David asked.

So, then they go out into a field and arrange a way for Jonathan to signal the outcome to David, who'll be hiding behind a rock. Jonathan will shoot three arrows. And the instruction he gives to the boy who's with him will reveal whether David is safe or not.

All is set.

But we mustn't skip over the conversation they have while they're in the field, because that is vitally important.

Let's read again from verse 12.

Then Jonathan said to David, 'I swear by the LORD, the God of Israel, that I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favourably disposed towards you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father intends to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unfailing kindness like the LORD's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family – not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth.'

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, 'May the LORD call David's enemies to account.' And Jonathan made David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.'

Do you see what Jonathan has come to understand?

He understands that David will one day be king. He isn't king yet. But one day he *will* be king. And he will triumph over his enemies. Of course, Jonathan also knows that, in the coming days, his own father may reveal himself to be one of those enemies. And *that*, technically, would make Jonathan his enemy too.

That's why he asks for David's unfailing kindness to him and to his descendants.

He may be Saul's son. But his allegiance isn't with Saul, it's with David. He loves David as a friend. More importantly, he loves David as his future king. And he's asking, here, for David's protection as king.

According to the prevailing wisdom at that time, it's a crazy request. In those days, when a new king came to power, the accepted wisdom was to have a clear out. The new king

needed to secure his throne. And the conventional way to do that was to get rid of the previous monarchy. Not only the king but his whole family, his children, and grandchildren. They would all be killed along with any other rivals. That's just what people did. Everybody knew it. And everybody practiced it.

Well, nearly everybody.

Not David.

He makes a *promise* to Jonathan, in the form of a covenant, to preserve him and his family. And 2 Samuel tells us that's exactly what he does.

It's an act of unconventional, counter-cultural love. David is promising his unfailing kindness to Jonathan. Like the Lord's unfailing kindness to his covenant people. It's covenant love.

And on that note, they part.

The next day, Jonathan heads back to the banquet.

As expected, David's absence is noted. Initially, Saul ignores it. But then, on the second day... fireworks!

Saul asks Jonathan why David isn't there. And Jonathan gives the answer they'd agreed.

And then Saul flips his lid.

Verse 30.

Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?'

Saul's outraged. His language is insulting. He's saying, effectively, 'Jonathan, you're no son of mine. You must be illegitimate.'

And Saul can't even bring himself to speak David's name. Twice he calls him the son of Jesse. Jonathan is the son of Saul. The king. But David is the son of Jesse. By which he means, the son of a nobody.

And Saul yells at Jonathan to come to his senses and get his loyalties right.

Verse 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!'

And those words reveal his heart.

Saul's great concern is to hang on to his kingdom at any cost. The Lord has already taken that kingdom from him. But he isn't going to give it up easily. And that means David must die.

Saul clearly knows that God has given the kingdom to David. But he's fighting God's will. And he expects Jonathan to do the same.

So now, Jonathan must choose. It's decision time.

Where does his loyalty lie?

Of course, it's with David.

Verse 32.

'Why should he be put to death? What has he done?' Jonathan asked his father. But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the feast he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

It's extraordinary. Saul tries to kill his own son. With a spear. Just as he had tried to kill David.

The message is clear.

If Jonathan has chosen to side with David, then he will be treated *like* David.

So, the next morning, Jonathan goes out to the field and relays the message to David. There is peace between the two of them. But it has come at great cost. At the cost of hostility between Jonathan and his father.

Jonathan has been a good friend to David. Once again, he has tried to mediate with his father on David's behalf. But this time it has failed. And they part without knowing whether they'll see each other again.

Verse 41.

After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. They kissed each other and wept together – but David wept the most.

In contrast to our British reserve, people in the Middle East aren't afraid to weep and embrace and kiss each other. It's simply a sign of affection.

And then we're told: **Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, "The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants for ever."' Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.**

It's a lovely model of friendship: of love and loyalty.

But more than that, it's a model of discipleship. Which is what I've called our second heading: a model of discipleship.

A model of discipleship

We've seen repeatedly in 1 Samuel that David points us to his descendant, Jesus. Jesus is *the* King, whom God has appointed to rule over us all. And this story shows us what it's like to have friendship with *him*. It's showing us what discipleship looks like.

So here, then, are four things we can learn about Christian discipleship.

First, a disciple of Jesus enjoys his peace and unfailing kindness.

Of course, our relationship with Jesus isn't the same as Jonathan's relationship with David in all its detail. But its character is the same. It's characterised by peace and kindness. That isn't the same as saying that Christians should expect a peaceful life. Jonathan and David didn't have peaceful lives. Far from it. They both lived with great turmoil. But amid that turmoil, they had a relationship of peace and kindness they could rely on. That relationship held fast no matter how chaotic life was. And that's the same for the follower of Jesus. Jesus said, '**...in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble.**' (John 16:33). Being a Christian doesn't mean having a peaceful life. But knowing Jesus means having a relationship we can depend on. In which we find peace and unfailing kindness. It's a relationship that gives us strength and comfort.

Second, a disciple of Jesus entrusts themselves to Jesus as their king. Jonathan willingly gave up any claim he might have to the throne. His attitude wasn't that of his father's. He wasn't concerned about 'me and my kingdom'. He bound himself to God's chosen king and aligned himself with *his* kingdom rather than his own. And that's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It means giving up our rights to sit on the throne of our own lives and binding ourselves to Jesus as our king. It means giving up the right to live as I please... doing as I wish... seeking my own pleasure and comfort. And aligning myself wholeheartedly with Jesus and his kingdom. John the Baptist said of Jesus: '**He must become greater; I must become less.**' (John 3:30) Those are the words of a genuine disciple. The question we *must* ask ourselves is this. Am I like Saul? Trying to cling on to power? Determined to be in control of my life? Resisting all interference? Or am I like Jonathan? Content to acknowledge the rule of another? Am I willing to submit every area of my life to Jesus as my friend and king?

Third, a disciple of Jesus puts Jesus first, even before family. Jonathan was conflicted. He was a dutiful son. But he was also loyal to David. And he ended up having to choose between peace with David and peace with his father. That conflict of loyalties can be one of the most painful difficulties we face in the Christian life. But Jesus calls us to supreme devotion to him. He said, **'Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.'** (Matthew 10:37) It's a decision we must all make. Where do our loyalties lie? We have to choose between peace with Christ and peace with our families, peace with our friends, peace with our culture. Who comes first? For many people around the world, following Jesus means being disowned by their families. For many it means being marginalised and persecuted by society. For us, the choice might not be quite so stark. Some of us have Christian families. But, nonetheless, it's a choice we must all make. Where do our loyalties lie?

Fourth, a disciple of Jesus lives under his protection.

Jonathan recognised that David was God's anointed king, his Christ, who would one day be victorious over his enemies. And the Christian recognises the same thing about Jesus. He is *the* Christ. The one God has chosen to be ruler of all. And one day he will return. On that day he will cut off all his enemies and establish his throne for ever. By nature, we all live as his enemies. We refuse to recognise his kingship and resist his rule. But when we come to Jesus in repentance and faith, he no longer counts us as enemies but loves as friends.

The covenant between Jonathan and David was a covenant of love and protection. Jonathan entrusted his future to David. And he gained the protection of David. And it's the same for us. When we entrust our future to Jesus and bind ourselves to him as our king, we gain a future under his love and protection. The apostle Paul could testify to the Lord's protection. He wrote: **We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.** (2 Corinthians 4:8-9) Jesus doesn't promise to protect us from all the troubles of life. But he does promise to bring us through them and deliver us safely home to heaven.

Conclusion

These are all great truths. We'll celebrate them, in a moment, when we share bread and wine. We'll remember the new covenant that Jesus made with his friends, through his blood, shed on the cross.

It's a covenant of peace and unfailing kindness. Of love and protection.

As we share bread and wine, we remember that we have nothing to fear on the day Jesus returns because our sins are forgiven.

We give thanks for his safe keeping of us through the trials and temptations we experience today.

We entrust ourselves wholly to him. Giving him first place in our loyalties and our affections. Knowing that he will never let us down.

And we praise God for such a faithful and loving friend.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for the peace, the protection, the security we have through faith in Jesus. Thank you for your love and unfailing kindness to us in him. Please help us to give him first place in our loyalties and our affections, as our King and our friend. And please help us to walk closely with him all the days of our lives. We ask it in his name. Amen.