

We saw last time that there is a common theme running throughout chapters 18-20:  
and that is the theme of Saul’s family (and everybody else) following David.

18:1-5	Jonathan loved David and made a covenant with him
18:6-16	All Israel and Judah loved David
18:17-30	Michal loved David
19:1-10	Jonathan delighted in David
19:11-17	Michal protected David
19:18-24	Samuel protected David
20:1-42	Jonathan protected David and made a covenant with him

There is even a chiasmic structure to this—  
with Jonathan at the beginning, end, and middle of this love-fest for David!

And the completeness of this particular passage is seen  
in the fact that Jonathan and Michal then vanish from the narrative.

We will not hear about Jonathan again until his death in chapter 31  
(except briefly in chapter 23),  
while Michal only reappears in 2 Samuel 3.

We heard last time that David is the general who goes up against Saul’s enemies—the LORD’s enemies.  
After Goliath we heard about David’s victories in 18:5, 18:14-16, 18:27, 18:30, and 19:8.

And Saul is not blind to who David is.

By the end of chapter 20, Saul understands full well that David is the Lord’s anointed (20:31).  
But Saul is jealous and wants to see his own line follow him as king.

We saw at the end of chapter 19, that the Holy Spirit came upon Saul once more —  
but only for brief time.

This passage clearly demonstrates that the Holy Spirit may come upon a person temporarily.

Our confession speaks of this as the “common operations of the Spirit”--  
by which the Spirit uses the wicked temporarily in his service.

The key distinction between these “common operations” and “saving operations”  
is that the common operations are not permanent.

There may be a temporary change of attitude and action,  
but in time the old man reasserts itself—  
because the old man isn’t dead!

What is interesting is that Saul’s family (and all Israel)  
sees more clearly than Saul.

They see that the LORD is with David, and that is enough for them.

Do you see that?

Do you see that since King Jesus *is* the Lord’s anointed one (meshiach)--  
then we need to see that loving David, protecting David, and making a covenant with David

is all about loving Jesus, delighting in Jesus, and protecting Jesus –  
and by “protecting” I mean defending and maintaining *his kingdom* –  
rather than seeking our own kingdoms!

This is what Jonathan does.

Jonathan doesn't care about *his* kingdom!

Jonathan wants to see the kingdom of God – and so he loves David, and wants David to be king!

If David signifies our Lord Jesus Christ –  
then we should see that as we are made partakers in Christ –  
we also are called to imitate him.

We are called out into the wilderness –  
Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.

But we are also promised the same protection –  
“I will be with you always – even to the end of the age.”

You may have complete confidence that the Lord will protect and guard you from all evil.  
Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.  
Not even death.

So what if Saul's spear pins you to the wall! (like it almost did with Jonathan!)  
You belong to Jesus!  
And the one who loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it!

When we fear man – we do not fear God.  
But when we fear God – we do not fear man!

Last time we saw that chapter 18 is all about loving David.  
Verse 1–“Jonathan loved him as his own soul”  
verse 16–“all Israel and Judah loved David”  
verse 20–“Now Saul's daughter, Michal, loved David” (echoed in v29)  
Likewise, chapter 19 begins with Jonathan delighting in David.

And then the end of chapter 19 and chapter 20 focus on many people *protecting* David.

Last time we asked the question, *why did God permit Saul to persecute David?*

And we saw that the LORD's anointed must be brought through suffering to glory.  
The only way for a son of Adam to become the son of God  
is the way of the cross.  
And even as Israel was tested in the wilderness, in order to learn to trust in the LORD,  
so also David must be tested in the wilderness.

And that won't happen as long as David is getting comfy as the great warrior,  
the king's son-in-law.

And so God sends the evil spirit to Saul in order to drive David into the wilderness.

### 1. The Friendship of Jonathan and David (v1-23)

#### a. "Whatever You Say, I Will Do for You" – the *Hesed* of Jonathan (v1-11)

*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?"* <sup>2</sup> *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."* <sup>3</sup> *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."* <sup>4</sup> *Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."* <sup>5</sup> *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."* <sup>6</sup> *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.'* <sup>7</sup> *If he says, 'Good!' it will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him."* <sup>8</sup> *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?"* <sup>9</sup> *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?"* <sup>10</sup> *Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?"* <sup>11</sup> *And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field.*

Chapter 20 begins with David's uncertainty with what is going on!

After all, he just saw the Spirit of God come upon Saul.  
Is it possible that Saul is a changed man?  
Or will Saul continue to try to kill him?

So he comes to Jonathan with a plan.

The new moon feast was being celebrated the next day,  
and so David wanted to ascertain the king's attitude.  
As the king's son-in-law and general,  
David should be at the feast,  
but if Saul was okay with David's absence,  
that would mean that Saul was happy with David.  
*But if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him. (20:7)*

The other thing is that it appears that Jonathan does not really understand his father.

Jonathan is so used to Saul's confidence and trust,  
that he assumes that his father has been honest with him.  
He does not realize that his father's fear and suspicion has destroyed their relationship.

Jonathan insists that his father is not trying to kill David!  
I'd know it if he was plotting something.

But David sees more clearly than Jonathan:

“Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes.”

“But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.”

Verse 8 is especially interesting.

David says:

*Therefore deal kindly with your servant,  
for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you.*

How do we make sense of Jonathan’s covenant-making?

After all, Jonathan makes two covenants with David—

one at the beginning of their relationship (18:3) and one at the end (20:16).

And for that matter, what exactly is a covenant?

We are used to talking about God’s covenant with his people.

When God establishes a covenant—it is unilaterally established.

God says I will do it – and he does it!

But throughout the Bible we also hear of other covenants

made between tribal leaders (Abraham and Abimelech in Gen 21:32)

or between nations (Israel and Gibeon in Joshua 9).

We might call them “treaties” nowadays – but the Hebrew word is “covenant.”

So what is Jonathan doing?

Jonathan is a prince.

He is the son of the LORD’s anointed.

So he has the authority to make such a covenant (or treaty).

But his covenant-making has the effect of pledging his loyalty to David.

David refers to this as a “covenant of the LORD” between them.

This is not merely about friendship between buddies.

This is about who will serve whom in the kingdom of God.

This is not entirely clear in David’s statement in verse 8.

David refers to himself as Jonathan’s servant,

and plainly sees himself as the subordinate in the relationship.

But this is only an example of our Lord’s teaching about the greatest being the servant of all.

David is not grasping for power.

David has humbled himself and is serving the very man who has yielded all to him!

#### **b. The Self-Maledictory Oath – the *Hesed* of David (v12-17)**

<sup>12</sup> *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? <sup>13</sup> 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.*

There is a lot of oath-taking going on in this chapter.

In verse 3 “David vowed again” (probably suggesting that we should also read verse 1 as a vow),  
“as the LORD lives and as your soul lives” –

In other words, I swear before God that I am telling the truth.  
Likewise, Jonathan’s “far be it from me” in verse 9 – and now in verse 13,  
Jonathan takes a self-maledictory oath:

“The LORD do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it to you...”

Since the question is whether Saul is trying to kill David,  
the implied meaning of “do so...and more also” is  
“may God do to me, what my father is trying to do to you – and worse!”

This is why we call it a “self-maledictory oath” –  
I am swearing before God – asking God to destroy me if I fail to do what I say.

This is not something that you should do very often!  
You might go your whole life without ever swearing such an oath!  
But if you ever do – make sure that you swear it in the fear of God!  
The third commandment warns us not to take the name of the LORD your God in vain,  
because God will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain!

And Jonathan adds at the end of verse 13,  
*May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father.*

That may sound a little strange, since the LORD was no longer with Saul!  
But Jonathan’s point is that his father is the king!  
To say *may the LORD be with you as he has been with my father*,  
is to say, may you be king!

Jonathan sees that his self-maledictory oath – his entire renunciation of the crown –  
does not depend solely on himself.  
He depends on the steadfast of the LORD –  
the *hesed* of the LORD – and the *hesed* of David.

*<sup>14</sup> If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die; <sup>15</sup> 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.”*

In other words, when you become king, if I am still alive]  
*show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die;*  
[after all, the children of the old king usually get killed when the new king takes power!]  
*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.*

You cannot be any clearer than this.

You, David, will be king,  
and when you are king—please don't kill me or my family.  
We will serve you.

And so for a second time:

*<sup>16</sup> And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD take vengeance on David's enemies." <sup>17</sup> And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.*

This is what baptism is all about.

Our baptism is our pledge to be the Lord's.

(And if you wonder, how come we baptize our children,  
remember that Jonathan pledges that his house will follow David.)

There are two sides to the covenant in baptism.

One is what God says and does:

he claims us as his own.

He promises the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who respond in faith.

But the other side is our pledge and vow:

"Our engagement to be the Lord's."

In baptism we are pledged to him,

just as Jonathan pledged himself and his family to David.

That is why the Reformed have so often spoken of the importance of "owning the covenant."

If you fast-forward to the death of Saul.

David honors Jonathan's covenant,

and spares the son of Jonathan (though not all the house of Saul!).

And Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, owns the covenant.

If he had rebelled against David, then David could have justly killed him,

but to the end Mephibosheth remains faithful,

and so David cares for him all his days.

### **c. "The LORD Is Between You and Me Forever" (v18-23)**

*<sup>18</sup> Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. <sup>21</sup> And behold, I will send the boy, saying, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to the boy, '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. <sup>22</sup> But if I say to the youth, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then go, for the LORD has sent you away.*

And so Jonathan comes up with a plan –

a signal that will alert David to whether it is safe to come to the king's house.

And Jonathan swears in the name of the LORD that he will be faithful.

*<sup>23</sup> And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken,  
behold, the LORD is between you and me forever."*

What is it that binds David and Jonathan together?  
Why did Jonathan love David as his own soul?!

“Because the LORD is between you and me forever.”

It might seem at first as though this language pushes us apart and puts something in between us.

But this language is often used in other covenants.

The rainbow is the sign of the covenant between “you and me” God says to Noah.  
Circumcision is the sign of the covenant between you and me God says to Abraham.  
It is used in several other covenants and treaties in the OT.

And the point of the thing that is “between” us  
is that this is the thing that *connects us*.

Think about the problem that Jonathan and David are facing.

Jonathan’s father may want to kill David.

But Jonathan loves David.

How can Jonathan love God with all his heart –  
and also honor his father?

If God says Follow David, and your father says, Kill David.  
What are you supposed to do?

Jonathan is saying,

“The LORD be between us.”

If only the LORD is in between me and you –  
then we are connected in the most intimate manner possible!  
*Nothing else* besides Yahweh himself separates us!

This!!

THIS!!

THIS is *friendship indeed!!*

What have you covenanted to do?

If you are baptized, then you have covenanted to follow Jesus.

If you are married, then you have covenanted to love your spouse.

If you are ordained, then you have covenanted to care for the flock.

## 2. Jonathan and Saul (v24-34)

### a. Jonathan Honors His Father (v24-29)

<sup>24</sup> So David hid himself in the field. And when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. <sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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.”<sup>27</sup> 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?”<sup>28</sup> Jonathan answered Saul, “David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem.<sup>29</sup> 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 get away and see my brothers.’ For this reason he has not come to the king's table.”

And so Jonathan goes to the feast.

And the first day, Saul says nothing – “maybe he is unclean...”

(if he was unclean

then he would have to wash and refrain from social contact until the next day).

But on the second day, Saul asks,

and Jonathan tells his father that David asked permission to go to Bethlehem for a sacrifice.

What do we make of this?

Was Jonathan lying?

Verse 24 tells us that David was hiding in the field.

But Jonathan says that David is not present

because he asked permission to go to Bethlehem for a feast.

Now, it is true that David had asked Jonathan to say this –

but it is nonetheless deceptive –

because *in fact* David had no intention of going to Bethlehem.

I do not think that this is a sin.

The classic example in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was

“If the Nazi’s ask if you have any Jews in your house, what should you say?”

Well, Saul is trying to kill David,

so no honest Israelite should tell Saul where David is.

And so Jonathan tests his father.

Indeed, I would suggest that Jonathan *honors* his father.

It would not honor his father to assist in the murder of David.

(The moral of the story is that if your father is trying to kill someone,

you are not required to tell him where that person is!

Otherwise, you should the truth to your father!)

#### **b. Saul Dishonors His Wife (v30-31)**

<sup>30</sup> 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? <sup>31</sup> 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.”

And the result is that Saul loses all sense of decency and honor:



*You son of a perverse, rebellious woman  
(Okay, now Saul is insulting his own wife)  
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. (20:30-31)*

Saul wants to see “my kingdom come, my will be done, on earth – and who cares about heaven!”

### **c. Saul Tries to Murder His Son (v32-34)**

*<sup>32</sup> Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” <sup>33</sup> But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. <sup>34</sup> And Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had disgraced him.*

Saul’s fear and jealousy have reached the nadir of self-destructiveness:

and when Jonathan asks “why?”

Saul hurled his spear at *Jonathan!*

Talk about a good way to make sure that your son never becomes king!

Try killing him!

But this is all that Jonathan needed to know that his father was determined to kill David.

But notice that Jonathan was *grieved for David, because his father had disgraced him.*

Jonathan cares *nothing* for his kingdom – and for that matter, nothing for his own disgrace.

His thought is only for his friend.

His thought is only for his Messiah.

## **3. The Oath of Jonathan and David (v35-42)**

### **a. The Sign Performed (v35-39)**

*<sup>35</sup> In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him a little boy. <sup>36</sup> And he said to his boy, “Run and find the arrows that I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. <sup>37</sup> 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?” <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> But the boy knew nothing. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter.*

But then Jonathan and David met in the field one last time.

As far as we know there was only one more time that they ever saw each other (23:15-18).

Jonathan starts with the sign that he had promised to perform.

Jonathan is a man of his word.

He said that he would do it – and so he does it.

### **b. The Oath Confirmed: Go in Peace (v40-42)**

*<sup>40</sup> And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, “Go and carry them to the city.” <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> 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.*

Some have wondered why they needed the sign if they could meet in the field?  
But there was no guarantee that Jonathan would get that far unwatched.  
Only when it was clear that the boy was gone – and no one else was around –  
only then did David rise from beside the stone heap...

David bowed three times to Jonathan.  
Before he has heard a word from his friend, he knows what this means.  
Jonathan now knows that his father is implacably opposed to David.

David knows that Jonathan has surrendered *everything* in order to follow him.

But now they must part.  
And they wept at that parting.  
And we are told that David wept most.  
And they kissed each other –  
it is still common for men to kiss each other in much of the world.

The “holy kiss” in scripture – the kiss of peace – should not lightly be set aside.  
If the holy handshake is all you can do – that is okay –  
but make it your goal to kiss on the cheek.

Yes, Judas kissed Jesus.  
But the fact that it has been used in betrayal should not deter us!  
If the misuse of a thing forbids its use – then we should use nothing!  
For all things have been misused!

*Then Jonathan said to David,  
Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of Yahweh, saying  
Yahweh 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. (20:42)*

It is perhaps no accident that it was a Benjaminite named Saul  
who took the gospel of Jesus, the son of David,  
to the Gentiles.

We do not know whether Saul of Tarsus was a descendent of Jonathan.  
We do know that the house of Kish (Saul’s father)  
lasted at least until the days of Mordecai and Esther.  
But Jonathan’s tribe remained faithful to David,  
as Benjamin became united to Judah.  
And it was a Benjaminite who followed the last prince of his tribe,  
and yielded all to the son of David,

proclaiming that the Son of David had come through suffering to glory,  
and had delivered his people from sin and death.

And remembering how his namesake fell short,  
Paul declares

*Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,  
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

*I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*  
(Phil 3:13-14, 12)

Saul of Tarsus was a true son of Jonathan.  
He wanted no kingdom for himself,  
but only to exalt the kingdom of Jesus.

We often focus on "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" –  
and rightly so, since he loved us while we were his enemies!

But what does it mean for *us* to be *his friends*?

Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:12-15)

What does it mean for *us* to be friends of Jesus?

It means that we do what he commands us.  
Jesus has called us and made us his friends.  
He has told us what he is doing: he is making all things new!  
He is beginning the New Creation in his own resurrection –  
and he calls us to make disciples of the nations.

And what is his commandment? "That you love one another as I have loved you."  
How has Jesus loved us? By laying down his life for us.

John goes on to reflect on this in 1 John 4:7-11 –

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God,  
and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.  
Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." (4:7-8)

And pay attention to what it means that "God is love":

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us,  
that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." (4:9)  
The incarnation demonstrates the love of God -- because in the incarnation,  
Love himself came in our flesh!

"In this is love, not that we have loved God

but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (4:10)  
The atoning sacrifice of Christ demonstrates the love of God!

Now here's the kicker!

You might think that the incarnation and the atonement  
are the two absolutely unique things that Christ did -- and you would be right!!

But listen to John:

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (4:11)

What is our love supposed to look like?

The incarnation and the atonement.

How on earth are we supposed to do that?!

How can we who are sinners ever possibly imitate the inimitable?!

Keep listening to John:

"No one has ever seen God;

if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us,

because he has given us of his Spirit." (4:12-13)

This is the same point that Dr. Sunshine made in his excellent sermons last Sunday.

We can only imitate the incarnation and atonement

because *through the incarnation and atonement*

we have first been made partakers of the divine nature! (2 Peter 1)

Or, to use John's language,

"we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

The Spirit of God unites us to Christ in a real, true, mystical union –

so that we can say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ,

it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:20)

How much of this did Jonathan understand a thousand years before Christ?

Enough for him to surrender the throne of Israel forever to his friend.

Enough for him that he understood that "The LORD shall be between me and you,  
and between my offspring and your offspring, forever." (1 Samuel 20:42)

If we are friends to Jesus only half as much as Jonathan was a friend to David, we will do well.