

God's keeping power

Jonathan and David's keeping friendship

Fuelling Saul's jealousy of David was the fact that Saul's own son, Jonathan, loved David more than anyone else. Jonathan was David's keeper from the day he killed Goliath. 1 Samuel 18:1, 3-4 says:

Now when 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 . . . Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.

Do we love our friends as much as, or even more than, we love ourselves? With all of our heart, we should want the answer to be yes. Our friends must be as important to us as we are. Jonathan and David had their souls knit together. In other words, to unravel their friendship, one would have had to unravel his own soul. Keeping relationships can only be dissolved at severe damage to oneself. To back away from a dear friend is to cause ourselves harm.

Jonathan gave David the most precious gifts he had: his robe, his armor, his sword, and his belt. These gifts were both symbolic and functional. They symbolized

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Jonathan's status as the heir to the Israelite throne.

They spoke of his strength, his power, his might, his position. Jonathan knew that David was anointed by God to rule Israel; by giving the sheep keeper his armor, he indicated that he accepted God's choice. Saul wanted to build a royal line around Jonathan, but the prince wanted God's man, his best friend, to rule.

Jonathan's love for David didn't exclude Saul; it was the king who chose to step out of that pact. David was Saul's keeper, and Jonathan was David's. Father and son also shared a strong bond. Yet Saul's bitterness and pride kept fracturing what could have been an anointed, focused, powerful trio.

The prince did everything he could do to find reconciliation between Saul and David. In 1 Samuel 19:1-7, we read of one such effort:

Now Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David; but Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted greatly in David. So Jonathan told David, saying, "My father Saul seeks to kill you. Therefore please be on your guard until morning, and stay in a secret place and hide. And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you. Then what I observe, I will tell you."

*"The difficulty is not that great to die for a friend, the hard part is finding a friend worth dying for."
Henry Home*

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Thus Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant, against David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been very good toward you. For he took his life in his hands and killed the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great deliverance for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood, to kill David without a cause?"

So Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be killed." Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these things. So Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as in times past.

Jonathan loved both those men, and longed for them to be restored. In private, the son reminded the king of the good David had done. *"Why then will you sin against innocent blood, to kill David without a cause?"* he asked. Jonathan's words pricked Saul's heart, and the king swore he would spare David. The two reconciled, and things returned to normal for a period of time. Saul's rage, however, ran deeper than anyone could have imagined, and soon David was in danger again. As his anger increased, however, so did the covenant between David and Jonathan. In 1 Samuel 20, we read of how deep their bond had grown:

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and went and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity, and what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?"

So Jonathan said to him, "By no means! You shall not die! Indeed, my father will do nothing either great or small without first telling me. And why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!"

Then David took an oath again, and said, "Your father certainly knows that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said, '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."

So Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you."

And David said to Jonathan, "Indeed tomorrow is the New Moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field until the third day at evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked permission of me that he might run over to Bethlehem, his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.' If he says thus: 'It is well, your servant will be safe. But if he is very angry, be sure that evil is determined by him. Therefore you shall deal kindly with your servant, for you have