

1 Samuel 20:1-42 // B.F.F. (Best Friends Forever) or The Costliness of Friendship with God's Anointed

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[0:00] We continue the reading of 1 Samuel chapter 20 at verse 27, which is at page 293 of your Bible. The next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again.

Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal either yesterday or today? Jonathan answered, David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem.

He said, Let me go because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town, and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me go to see my brothers.

That is why he has not come to the king's table. Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan, and he said to him, You son of a perverse and rebellious woman!

Then, don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established.

[1:11] Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die. 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.

In the morning, Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, and he said to the boy, Run and find the arrows I shoot.

As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, Isn't the arrow beyond you?

Then he shouted, Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop! The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. The boy knew nothing about all this. Only Jonathan and David knew.

[2:13] Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, Go, carry them back to town. 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.

Then they kissed each other and wept together, but David wept the most. 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 forever. Then David left, and Jonathan went back to town. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Matt, so much for reading.

Let me add my welcome to you all. It's great to see you all. What a joy to have these baptisms today. Well, it's been a while now since we were in Samuel.

We were in that series last year. So let's pray and ask for God's help before we crack on with it. Father, we pray that you would nourish us.

[3:24] We pray that you'd nourish us by your word to us from this book of 1 Samuel. Would your spirit be powerfully at work among us?

Would you open our ears so that we can hear your voice? Would you open our minds so that we can understand your truth?

Would you open our hearts that we may respond to your grace? Would you change us and transform us into more of Christ's likeness?

For it's in his precious name that we pray. Amen. Well, the bromance. The close non-romantic friendship between two male friends.

Brothers from another mother. The bromance. The classic example of this, Paul Newman and Robert Redford. The original Hollywood bromance.

[4 : 32] And their friendship struck up in 1963 in the set of the film Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kids. They'd go on together to star in one more film together.

The Sting, another buddy movie. Great for Sunday afternoon, by the way. But their offset, their bromance, would endure for decades.

And it wasn't an act. Paul's children referred to Redfords as Uncle Bobby. And they even bought matching silver Porsches, which is kind of sweet.

In our own time, Hollywood actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenny went one step further. Their busy bromance led them to making the absolutely extraordinary, some would say irrational decision, to buy a rubbish football team in Wales.

And the Welcome to Wrexham documentary became a global hit. Not because of the ups and downs of our football team that was transitioning from Ugly Duckling to Cinderella, but because of the blossoming bromance between this pair.

[5 : 46] And watch out, St. Silas. Keep your eyes peeled, and you might just spot one or two burgeoning bromances closer to home. Well, it might be bordering on the facetious and mischievous to be describing the friendship between David and Jonathan as the original bromance.

But theirs was certainly the deepest of close male friendships. And there's a lot to be said, obviously, for cultivating deep and enduring friendships in the Christian life.

Maybe you're here and you're part of a prayer triplet, or you value doing a one-to-one with a close friend. I myself have got a couple of really good friends from previous churches.

I don't see each other so often now, but I know that I can rely on them for support when they're needed. I want to suggest that this chapter, 1 Samuel 20, is less about Christian friendships and more about how God's people relate to God's king.

So it's not that it's illegitimate to learn things from David and Jonathan about Christian friendships. The passage has got a lot to say about that. But the passage is really more about how we relate to Christ.

[7 : 15] Let me explain. When it comes to a passage like this, any passage in the Bible, a good question to be asking always is, who am I?

Who am I? And we shouldn't have to think too hard about it, I don't suppose, before we realize that none of us here this morning is God's anointed king.

David, however, represents and points forward to another king. He pictures for us and prefigures Christ Jesus, the friend of sinners that we sang about earlier.

Jonathan, on the other hand, is one of the most Christ-like characters you'll find. And just for the sake of clarity, obviously I'm not talking about myself, I have no false pretensions about that.

I mean, Jonathan, in this passage, is one of the most Christ-like characters in the whole of the Bible. In his self-effacing devotion to God's king, Jonathan models for us how we are to respond to God's anointed king, the Lord Jesus.

[8 : 31] So first point, devotion to God's king demands loyal love. So we've jumped back into the middle of Samuel, a series we began last year, as I say.

And at this point in the story, Saul's still king for now, but the Lord's favor has been removed from him. And he's just a bit of a bad dude, really.

David's been secretly anointed as God's chosen king and has defeated Goliath, the enemy of God's people.

That makes him super popular with God's people and makes him super unpopular with Saul, who's really jealous of him. It doesn't help that there's a chart-topping, distracting the rounds.

Saul has slain his thousands, David his tens of thousands. And in the last couple of chapters, Saul, not once, not twice, but three times, has hurled his spear at David, trying to assassinate him.

[9 : 39] So David's on the run. And he meets Jonathan secretly in verse 1 and says, What have I done? How have I wronged your dad that he's trying to kill me?

So they come up with this plan and basically David warns Jonathan to go into the king's court and be with Saul and figure out what Saul's state of mind is, figure out what Saul's thinking, whether Saul's still trying to kill him.

Meanwhile, David's going to hide among the boulders and stay away from the royal dinner table for a few days. And Jonathan, well, he's supposed to give this excuse in verse 6 that David's gone

back to his family.

And then he'll see by that what Saul's reaction is to David not being there. And so depending on Saul's reaction, Jonathan is to shoot arrows in a particular direction, one way or the other, signaling to David whether or not it's safe for him to return.

So that's the plan. Simple enough, but not without its dangers, of course. So at this point in the story, David's life is in real jeopardy.

[10:50] And Jonathan's actions could have life or death implications for him. So David reminds Jonathan of the covenant that they'd originally made back a few chapters back.

So look with me at verse 8. David says, As for you, show kindness. That is, show chesed to your servant.

Show kindness to your servant for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the Lord. So a couple of Bible words there. And it is worth our while just wrapping our heads around what they mean because not only do they get to the heart of the relationship between David and Jonathan, but also because David and Jonathan's relationship is a picture for us for what it means to be in a personal covenant relationship with Jesus.

These words get right to the heart of our relationship with Jesus too. So chesed first. You have to do the sound. It's a Hebrew word often translated as loving kindness or steadfast love.

And it's all through the Old Testament. It's most usually found in the Old Testament describing God's faithful love for his people. His unfailing love.

[12:15] A loyal love that will not let you go. because it's based as Ruth prayed earlier on the faithfulness of God's character.

That's chesed. The covenant on the other hand is a loyal commitment and it's the public expression of that loyal love.

That chesed love. A relationship entered into by mutual agreement and in this case between David and Jonathan. Jonathan. And Jonathan's all in.

We've seen that in verse 4. Whatever you want me to do I'll do it for you. Sounds like a song by Brian Adams. But willing to risk his all for his friends.

And so then in his response to David's urgent request Jonathan reaffirms his loyal covenant commitment to him in verse 12.

[13:15] Jonathan said to David I swear by the Lord the God of Israel that I will surely sound out my father. So as far as the present situation is concerned Jonathan will do exactly as David has asked him.

Let me say Jonathan has more on his mind than the present circumstances. And what he says next is astonishing. So verse 13 end of verse 13 May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father.

In other words for Jonathan to ask that the Lord be with David as he had been with Saul was to ask that David and not Jonathan should become king.

So do you see what he's saying here? See what that means? He's stepping aside for God's chosen king surrendering his own rights to that role.

It goes on verse 14 but you show me show me what chesed steadfast love like the Lord's steadfast love as long as I live so that I may not be killed and do not ever cut off your steadfast love from my family not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth.

[14:57] 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 of love for him because he loved him as he loved himself.

So Jonathan is clearly aligning himself to God's chosen king. He's calling on the Lord to cut off all David's enemies setting him against even his own father.

He recognizes also that if God's purposes are to be filled and David does become a king then ordinarily that would put him in grave danger.

See when there's a change of administration there's often a purge. We're seeing that played out of course on the other side of the Atlantic at the moment.

But in those days it was standard practice for all legitimate heirs to the throne or rivals like that to be slaughtered by a usurper king.

[16:10] So when Jonathan says do not cut off your steadfast love it's a desperate plea for mercy from the one Jonathan recognizes as God's chosen king.

And what we're seeing in Jonathan what we're being presented with is a model for how it is that we're meant to respond to God's chosen king.

So think about it Jonathan has everything to lose he's got everything to lose aligning himself with God's king means he's giving up his own father he's giving up his own kingdom the riches and the prestige and status that that entails he's giving all that up it's costly it flies in the face of worldly ambitions it doesn't make any political sense whatsoever and in his wholehearted loyal love Jonathan shows us how we are to respond each of us here how we are to align ourselves to God's chosen king a room for sitting on the fence wholehearted loyal commitment to God's chosen king we need to align ourselves to him like that so Jesus invites you into personal covenant loving friendship with him to put him first above all else to make him lord over your life okay so just before we head onto the second section a little sidebar

I want us to notice that there's something interesting going on here something pretty cool that's playing out in this passage so most of the action takes place in a field so verse five let me go and hide in the field verse 11 and there'll be a more literal translation up on the screen there for us helps us see the repetition come Jonathan said let's go out into the field so they went to the field together it's also there in verse 24 why all these mentions of the field why twice in verse 11 isn't that a waste of ink it seems unnecessary why all these mentions back in Genesis chapter 4 God removes his favor from the older brother Cain and in almost identical language to

Jonathan Cain says to Abel let's go out into the field then here's the difference Cain proceeds to murder his brother in the fields same idea in Genesis 37 Joseph is about to be attacked by his brothers it's a replay of Cain and Abel and right before he meets his brothers Joseph is in you guessed it a field so what we've got going on here in 1 Samuel 20 is a reversal where Jonathan recognizes and accepts that God's favor belongs to another and he gladly submits and devotes himself to God's true king so secondly devotion to God's king provokes the rage of the world now believe it or not the

[20 : 09] Mona Lisa was not always as famous as it is today it was always well known but it's not always been as famous as it is today and on the morning of the 21st of August 2011 a chap named Vincenzo Perugia slipped out of one of the side entrances of the Louvre and soon vanished into the crowds on the Rue de Rivoli he decided to liberate da Vinci's painting with the intention of repatriating it to his native Italy news spread like wildfire and crowds gathered at the Louvre to gaze at the empty space for the painting once hung and it turns out that many of the crowd had never even been to the Louvre before let alone seen the painting sometimes things are more noticeable by their absence and in 1 Samuel 20 there's a void isn't there in the royal court a noticeable absence you can picture the table setting in verse 24

Saul's in his usual seat by the wall Jonathan's opposite him Abner he's the commander of the army is on one side of Saul but on the other side an empty space an empty place with David's name on it his absence is just noted on the first day but when David is absent the second day that's when the fireworks begin it all gets just a little bit Jerry Springer the dinner party from hell and you can really sense the change of atmosphere Saul is consumed with contempt for David in verse 27 so Saul said to his son Jonathan why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal either yesterday or today he can't even bear to put David's name on his lips so Jonathan gives him the story that they rehearsed he embellishes it just a little bit and

Saul goes absolutely mental he blows his lid and he flips his nut verse 30 Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan he said to him you son of a perverse and rebellious woman which is charming son of a perverse and rebellious man more like it's a pretty good self description of Saul he's one messed up individual the reason for his rage don't I know that you sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother who bore you as long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth neither you nor your kingdom will be established you see Saul just can't get his head around it can't wrap his head around Jonathan's choice can't get his head around his self denying devotion to David can't get his head around it at all why would you do that Jonathan why would you do that why would you give up your kingdom why would you give up your inheritance you're pouring your life down the drain behind all this seething anger behind all that he simply can't understand the life choice his son has made doesn't make any sense to him whatsoever brothers and sisters the world will never understand can never understand men and women who choose to abandon all their worldly ambitions plans and dreams for the sake of following God's chosen king his loyalty and devotion to king Jesus takes priority over everything else the world can never understand they're

baffled you are an enigma to them and it's worth us just asking this question what does my life say about me what does my life say about what

I'm living for my goals my hopes my dreams are you a puzzlement to the people around you the people scratch their heads wondering why you are what you are Jonathan was gladly willing to suffer the loss of all things compared to the surpassing joy of knowing God's chosen king and he's not ashamed of God's king and he's not ashamed and he's not ashamed to defend his cause verse 32 why should he be put to death he says to Saul what has he done but Saul hurls his spear at his own son to kill him the guy is a total nutter it's irrational and we're getting an insight here into just Saul's kind of messed up psyche here one minute he's raging because the son of

[25 : 40] Jesse would rob Jonathan's kingdom the next minute he's lost the plot entirely and he himself tries to kill his own son tries to end his own son's life and wipe out the dynasty like that well just to point out here again Jonathan is a model for how we're supposed to respond and submit ourselves to God's true king what happens to the king happens to the people and the New Testament is clear about this picture Christ suffered and was crucified as Christ lived so do his people so we too must take up our cross and follow him Christian life friends is cruciform Jonathan the follower of David is now being attacked by Saul in exactly the same way that David was three times in the previous two chapters

Saul hurled his spear at David must have been a pretty bad javelin throw but now Saul is hurling his spear at Jonathan what happens to the king happens to the people and some of you will have experienced this of course first hand the seething rage and vitriol of a world opposed to Jesus and some of you come from places where Christians are persecuted and despised for some of you this may be all too close to home Jesus is unapologetic he says to us if the world hates you remember it hated me first they persecuted me they will persecute you also anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me whoever finds their life will lose it and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it so we shouldn't be surprised should we devotion to

God's king demands my own devotion to God's king provokes the anger of the world the third point devotion to God's king provides peace amidst turmoil and according to one published list of things I most dread in no particular order are these sitting an exam going on a blind date pistachios that don't open people who ask questions during movies 3% battery life 1% one ply toilet paper and saying goodbye saying goodbye represents the end of something and in 1 Samuel 20 this is a sad departure it must be one of history's most moving farewell scenes two great friends bound together by that great brotherly love and not knowing when or indeed if ever they will see each other again it's always sad to say goodbye to someone you love especially if you know that it's going to be the last time that you see them

I remember saying goodbye to Alice's grandfather and I remember him getting up from his sofa and coming with his walking stick to give me a shake of her hand and in that moment I just knew that that would be the last time that I would say goodbye and so it proved saying goodbye isn't easy and it takes place verse 35 in the morning when David when Jonathan rather goes to the field to meet David so if we count the days on the first day David's absence is noted on the second day Saul loses it and on the third day on the morning of the third day all this takes place in this last part of the passage naturally the third day is mentioned multiple times in our passage we see it in verse 5 in verse 12 and verse 19 and the translation that we have in the church bibles is a brilliant translation but sometimes it helps to just have something a little bit more literal we've got that up on the screen to help us to see the multiple references to the third day always happening on that third day and we've not time now of course but you'll find numerous examples in the

Old Testament in Genesis and Exodus Joshua Jonah God's deliverance God's salvation happens on the third day so again this is big picture stuff Christ David in our passage hidden for three days among the rocks foreshadowing Christ Jesus hidden for three days in the rocky tomb and so when Paul the apostle Paul says that Christ was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures I believe he had passages like this one in mind so verses 35 to 39 we've got this Robin Hood bit with Jonathan and the bow and arrows signaling to David giving David the signal that they've both been dreaded dreading and all the implications that that has for their friendship and that should be that mission accomplished their plan has come off

[32 : 00] Jonathan has been able to tell David secretly without having to meet him that it's not safe for David to return to the royal court that should be it except it's not and such is their deep love for one another that they simply cannot bear to not say goodbye one last time so they go off script and

it's described in such poignant words isn't it in verse 41 Jonathan sends the boy back with his weapons and verse 41 David got up literally David rose from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan and they kissed each other and wept but David wept the most well the kiss must be understood in its

Old Testament context and the kiss expressed not only the friendship between them but it was also a sign of veneration Samuel we're told had kissed Saul when he anointed him as king as an act of submission we see here displayed too don't we the genuine heartfelt brotherly love and affection between these two brothers as it were you see the heartache matters completely outwith their control mean that in all likelihood they'll never see each other again actually they do see each other one more time as far as they're concerned they don't know that and so we have these extraordinary words from Jonathan in verse 42 go in peace and in some ways this has you scratching your heads and thinking it's going to be anything but peace anything but peace certainly for David a fugitive on the run you think for Jonathan also too the danger the uncertainty the worlds are crumbling around them but these are not mere idle words of parting from Jonathan it's a peace that transcends the turmoil of life a peace that will endure it's a peace between

David and Jonathan that's grounded in their steadfast love for one another a covenant of loyal love but this in turn points to something higher still go then 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 forever so they share this together not a fast cars not a Welsh football team but a vital relationship with the Lord their steadfast love for one another is underpinned by God's steadfast love a love that is steadfast and loyal a love that will not let us go well it was the the hymn writer

George Matheson who penned those words oh love that will not let me go he was a student here at Glasgow university training for ministry and he had a fiancée as a young man but then he was struck blind and his fiancée said I don't want to be married to a blind man and so then he was a single man and he remained single all his days his sister cared for him and when Matheson turned 40 his sister was caring for him was to be married and then the night before she was to be married he sat there and he was confronted by all the affections and longings of his heart just sort of crumbling underneath them like that not only had his fiancée left him but now his sister too was to be married and taken away from him like that and amidst the uncertainty and the confusion and the distress where did he go to the steadfast love of the Lord oh God oh love that will not let me go I yield my life to you so with David and Jonathan it gives us another picture doesn't it Jonathan models the way we're to devote ourselves above all others to God's king whatever the cost whatever the world thinks and David well he anticipates the sheer delight that Christ has for you that Christ has for those who are in him and so though we've not seen him we can love him Christ David in our passage has departed for now but soon enough he'll be back in Jerusalem on the throne and Christ Jesus he too has departed for now our risen ascended reigning king but soon enough he'll be in the new

[37 : 58] Jerusalem and we'll be in his courts in the new Jerusalem in the meantime as we wait for Christ's return just as Jonathan at the very end of our passage had to go back to the town we too are called to live out our days in a hostile land in a land that is hostile to the message of the Lord Jesus Christ so whatever trials and temptations we face whatever it is that we may dread in the days ahead whatever troubles lie ahead we go in peace that flows from heaven because we have such a faithful friend in Jesus whose loyal love and steadfast and sure love means that he will never let us go so while there might be the world's disdain to face there's no longer enmity between us and

God's king we are his forevermore let me pray Jonathan may David reaffirm his oath out of love for him because he loved him as he loved himself we love you Lord Jesus thank you for being our loyal and faithful friend a friend whose love for us knows no bounds a friend who died for us on the cross taking away our sin and guilt help us by your holy spirit to be unashamed of our love and devotion to you even when it provokes the world's puzzlement and anger but instead help us to be willing to defend your cause we reaffirm our devotion to you grant us peace that surpasses understanding for we ask it in your name amen