

## 1 Samuel 20: I Pledge Allegiance to the King of Kings

If you remember back in chapter 19 Saul had conspired to kill David. He told Jonathan and his household servants to put David to death. Initially, Jonathan was able to convince Saul not to do that. But as David had more success Saul's jealousy increased and he attempted to put David to death again. Twice he sent people to David's house to kill him, then sent 3 waves of soldiers to seize him at Naioth (a housing complex for prophets) in Ramah, and then he himself went to kill David. That's 6 counts of attempted murder in one day.

What's the connection between chapter 19 and 20? The connection here is that Jonathan - Saul's son and David's best friend - had no idea what was going on. The last he knew Saul was fine with David and had sworn that he wouldn't put David to death. So he's sitting there one day and here comes David out of nowhere telling him that he is but a step away from death because his father Saul is trying to kill him.

Who is Jonathan going to believe? Saul never does anything big or small without telling Jonathan and Jonathan hasn't heard of any plans to kill David. And what if Jonathan does find out Saul is again trying to kill David? Who is Jonathan going to side with? If he sides with David his own father might kill him because of treason. If he sides with Saul, he has betrayed the covenant he made with David. **And** if David becomes king David will likely kill him because of that betrayal. What's he going to do?

And what do we do with this whole section? Maybe we could tease out that we, as the people of God, are bound together through the New Covenant we have with Christ. As brothers and sisters in the faith we are bonded together closer than family. That's true.

**Mark 12:48-50:** When Jesus' family was looking for him...Jesus said: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

We live in that reality, too. Because of our common union with Christ, the spiritual brothers and sisters we have are closer to us than even our own family. For some of you your physical family and your spiritual family overlap. For others, the reality that your bond in Christ with others really is the strongest bond is an obvious daily reality. And we are called to love our spiritual family in a unique way.

**Gal. 6:10:** So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

There is a priority we are to have in doing good to the household of faith - to other believers. Those are all true, and true for Jonathan and David. Certainly they were friends who followed the Lord and were united by faith.

But I think there's a bigger issue here and that is that Jonathan is pledging allegiance to David, not just as a friend, but as the true and rightful king of Israel. This is covenant friendship, but it is covenant loyalty to the king. And here's the amazing part: it is covenant loyalty to the king despite the fact that **Jonathan** would naturally be the next king of Israel. He was first in the line of succession to Saul's throne and by any natural rights would be a rival of David.

But Jonathan's life and heart is not bound up in his own family or even his own safety, but in the covenant that he has made with the rightful king of Israel, David the son of Jesse. In the face of overwhelming pressure and opposition and even confusion, Jonathan's loyalty to David remains steadfast no matter what comes.

And I think that his loyalty to David, the true king of Israel, serves as a model for our loyalty to the true King of kings, Jesus Christ. When we are called into the Kingdom of God, when we are saved by grace through faith, we are called to supreme allegiance to Christ. He is, by covenant (the New Covenant), the first and foremost and sovereign in our lives. Whatever worldly position we might have or think we have he is Lord over it and that Lordship is the supreme factor that drives every aspect of our lives.

And we have to settle ourselves with the reality that we may lose a lot of earthy things because we follow Jesus.

**2 Tim. 3:12:** All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be what? Persecuted. That's just a promise.

**Acts 14:22:** We need to encourage each other like Paul encouraged the churches he planted to "continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Just like Jonathan's devotion to the true king cost him, so too our devotion to Jesus will cost us. But the promise is that through many tribulations we actually do enter into the Kingdom of God! But in the mean time what can we expect?

1) When you follow the true King you can be expected to be cut off. Really this first section is where Jonathan understands for the first time that Saul still wants to kill David. He's been kept in the dark the whole time. **Read 1-3**

We last left Saul naked and prophesying before the Lord in Ramah, which was probably just a few miles from where Jonathan lived. It seems as though David escapes while Saul and all his troops are still naked singing praises to God. Our Bibles have a break at chapter 20, but the story didn't stop. This is the same day and David's not sticking around to see what happens when they come to their senses.

Both David and Jonathan are completely surprised at this whole situation. David is surprised that Saul is trying to kill him **and** surprised that Jonathan doesn't know. That's why the first questions out of his mouth are "What have I done? And what is my guilt?" He's asking Jonathan: "Tell me why your dad wants to kill me!"

But Jonathan is surprised too: "He doesn't want to kill you; why are you saying that he does?" Again, we need to keep in mind that this whole thing has happened over just the course of a day or so. This is all very fast and surprising, and both of them are confused as to what is even happening.

And it seems like it's not until **Vs. 3** David figures out that Jonathan has been cut off. Saul's crazy, but he's not ignorant. He knows Jonathan loves David, he's seen their friendship. And after the failed attempts in chapter 19, Saul isn't going to take the chance of Jonathan warning David. So Saul cuts him out of the loop. Whereas he's told Jonathan in the past his plans, that's all over because Jonathan loves David, the true king.

I don't know if you've experienced this, but when you follow Jesus, you can be cut off of a lot of things. You can be cut off of friendships. People don't want to hang out with Jesus Freaks. We judge them, make them feel uncomfortable. You're not invited to social events, neighborhood events.

People will cut us out of family. I know several of you whose families have just black-balled you because you follow Jesus. You must be ignorant or caught up in some cult anti-science thing or whatever. Maybe you get cut out of the will or inheritance; college money evaporates. You're not invited to the family gatherings: "We didn't think you'd want to come."

Know that following Jesus comes with a cost. By the way, when we are talking to people about the gospel, about following Jesus, we need to be clear with them what they might potentially face. Jesus says we have to count the cost to follow him. You can't pressure someone into counting the cost. You can't make that cost-counting go faster by playing another round of Just As I Am.

Let me be clear: The New Covenant of redemption and eternal life we have in Christ are worth it. But there is a cost of following King Jesus and we need to be honest about that cost.

2) When you follow the true King you can expect to be put in situations that test your loyalties. **Read 4-11**

So David comes up with this plan that will hopefully show Jonathan that Saul really is after him. He's not just making this stuff up. We're going to look at the details of this plan in a little bit as it unfolds. But the real issue here is whether or not Jonathan will be loyal to David or loyal to Saul.

Jonathan has gone to bat for David before and saved his life, but now Saul's craziness is on a whole new level. He's secretly trying to kill David and the question is will Jonathan confront Saul with this deception? Where does his loyalty lie? Is it with Saul and his family line or with David the true king?

And this is the issue for us too. We're going to be put into complicated situations in our lives where we might have the option to compromise and our loyalty to Jesus will be tested.

Remember in book of Galatians? The main problem that Paul was writing about was that these people who had professed faith in Christ alone for salvation were being deceived by Jewish people called Judaizers. The Judaizers basically taught that salvation was by faith in Jesus plus circumcision. And the Galatians were confused so they were getting circumcised **just in case** God really did require circumcision to be saved. Paul said you have no loyalty to Christ if that's the case and the only thing your circumcision has done is cut you off from Christ. Who's side are you on? Where is your loyalty?

Martin Luther in the 1500s complained that those who had converted from the Catholic faith of basically buying salvation to Christianity - trusting in Christ alone for salvation - he complained that those people would often sneak over to the Catholic church after their conversation and pay a little money for indulgences. And he'd ask them "Why are you doing that?" And basically their response was "just to be safe." And his response was that there is no safety for you if you're not 100% devoted to Jesus Christ to pay for your sin!

Whereas David was simply testing loyalty, King Jesus demands loyalty.

**Matt. 10:32-33:** So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

We will be put in difficult situations. Where is our loyalty?

3) When you follow the true king you can know that one day all of his enemies will be destroyed. Read 12-17  
As I mentioned earlier, one of the themes that runs throughout this whole chapter is that of covenant devotion, covenant friendship. And we see that very clearly here.

**Vs. 12** - the God of Israel is a witness, that's covenant language.

**Vs. 13** - "the Lord do so to Jonathan and more also" - is also covenant language. You can look up cross references to that phrase throughout the OT and it's in relation to making oaths and covenants. The person is basically calling on God to judge them severely if they don't carry out their side of the covenant.

**Vs. 14** - the steadfast love of the Lord is mentioned. The word for "steadfast love" is our old Hebrew friend "chesed" - meaning steadfast-covenant-keeping-lovingkindness. We don't really have an english equivalent. But that word usually refers to God's steadfast love toward us. If you remember **Psalms 118** and **136** the end of each line in the Psalm is "the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever." That's chesed; the love you and I bank on for our salvation.

**Vs. 17** - their covenant with each other is renewed.

At this point, Jonathan believes David and doesn't know if he will ever see David again. He doesn't know what's about to go down with his father, but what he does want is to renew the covenant he had made with David back in **18:3** when they first met. Why is that? Why is there any need to revamp the covenant? Has it been violated?

The answer is no. I think what is going on here is not more promises on top of what has already been made - like when little kids pinky swear or promise on your mama's grave. I think what's going on here is what is often referred to as covenant renewal. Covenant renewal is a reminding and refreshing both parties of covenants we've already made. It's sort of like celebrating an anniversary or when a couple renews their vows after 25 or 50 years. It's not like the old ones are broken, it's a way to be reminded of, and rejoice in, the first covenant.

That's sort of what we do every week with the Lord's Supper. We're not re-upping the covenant, but we are being reminded week in and week out of the preciousness of the covenant we have with God through Christ.

So this whole section is revolves around their covenant. Why is that so important? Because Jonathan knows David has the Lord's favor. Jonathan knows one day David will reign. And when he does - given the success God has given him over his enemies as simply a commander - David will absolutely devour his enemies. **Read 14-16**

Jonathan knows the day of reckoning is coming. It's just a matter of time. And the only thing that will protect him is the covenant he has with the king.

What we need to realize is that that is identical to the gospel message that we preach. The gospel message is that God has offered the forgiveness of sins and imputation of righteousness for all who believe in Jesus. That salvation is by grace alone through faith alone not of any works. But the way the gospel is framed throughout the book of Acts is that Jesus is coming back to judge the planet in righteousness. And that the only way to avoid his wrath is through believing in him.

**Acts 17:30-31:** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

The Christian gospel - and therefore the Christian hope - is that Jesus is coming back to judge. He will set all things right. The wicked will be condemned - hallelujah! Those who are in covenant with Christ, who trust in Christ, will be rewarded.

**2 Thess. 1:5-9:** He will grant relief to us and destroy all of his enemies.

Unless you are in covenant with Jesus through faith in his death and resurrection and ascension, his coming to reign in fullness is going to be a rough day.

4) Following the true king calls for great wisdom with how to conduct ourselves. **Read 18-23**

So they come up with this plan that keeps David safe. The idea is that whatever goes down between Jonathan and Saul might be so bad that David and Jonathan might not be able to talk face to face. Jonathan might have spies with him all the time so that he would have to secretly send David a message.

Now we know later on in the chapter he does talk to David, so it seems like things didn't get as bad as they absolutely could have. Jonathan was able to talk to David even if for just a couple of minutes. But they devised this plan not knowing what might go down.

So the signal is that once Jonathan knows the state of things, he'll take a a young man out to do some archery target practice. He'll shoot a few arrows. If all is safe, Jonathan will call out to the young man "the arrow are over here closer to me" but if David is in danger he'll call out "the arrows are past you, keep going" then David needs to get going. **Read 24-25**

The whole testing of Saul section takes place during a new moon festival. What is that? Buckle up because you are about to know more about a biblical theology of the moon than you ever thought was possible. But hopefully you'll understand that this was actually a genius idea to test Saul.

So, in **Numbers 10:10, 28:11** Israel was commanded to hold a feast at the beginning of each month as marked out by the new moon. For Israel, the new moon was when the moon just has it's first slim crescent. We call this the first waxing crescent. That very first little sliver of the moon. That was the new moon for Israel. For many ancient cultures, months were based on a lunar calendar rather than a calendar like what we have. God told Israel that their calendar was based on the lunar cycle and here there is no exception.

Interestingly, except for simply mentioning the new moon feast, this passage is the only place in the whole Bible we have any detail about what exactly the people did to celebrate a new moon. It's worth looking for just

a moment at exactly what happened. **Turn to Num 28:11.** Here we see that this was a sacred festival. Not just a party, but there was worshipful significance to the feast. **Read 11-15**

Now, to be clear, this is what the priests would have been offering at the Tabernacle and later the Temple on the new moon. But most people didn't travel to the Tabernacle to celebrate this feast, they just stayed home and feasted together.

That's what's happening back in **1 Sam. 20.** Saul is holding his family's new moon feast and expects his family - and David is now his family - to join him.

Here's the interesting part: they would actually celebrate the feast over 2 days. The first part of the feast would happen in the evening, go through the next day and evening. They were only commanded to celebrate the one day, but the feasts were 2 days. Why is that?

Well, here's the thing about the new moon - most of you know this. The moon does not rotate around earth precisely in 28 days. It's actually 27.32 days. So unless you know precisely where we are in the lunar calendar as it relates to our solar calendar you're not sure which night will be the first night you see the first crescent moon.

This is probably more thought about the moon than you've given in a while. But stay with me. When we experience a new moon what happens is that the moon is in the sky all throughout the day - you can barely see it - and at evening, just as the sun is setting the moon starts setting too. And on a new moon the smallest little crescent appears just as the moon sets.

But here's the problem: you know how sometimes you look in the sky and you think "Is it a full moon tonight or tomorrow night?" It looks like a full moon, but it might not be technically a full moon? Well, the same is true for a new moon. Because the moon's rotation is not precisely 28 days, sometimes you think there's going to be a sliver of a crescent in the sky but there's not. The moon sets before there's a crescent and you just disobeyed God's command to celebrate the new moon because you missed it by a day. What's an Israelite to do so they don't disobey God's command? They celebrate for 2 days just to be safe. If you missed the crescent the first night, you'll be sure to see it the next night.

All that to say, this one day new moon feast was held for 2 days. And this is the test David comes up with to see if Saul will be angry at him. He comes up with a plan to say that his brother called him to their family's feast. Apparently Jesse is dead now and Eliab or Abinadab or someone else is the patriarch and he says tell Saul they called me home for a special family feast.

Now watch how this goes down. **Read 26-27**

So, to be fair to Saul, the first night he actually gives David the benefit of the doubt. He doesn't ask Jonathan where David is, he just assumes he's unclean. If you were unclean because you touched a dead body or had an open sore or had intimacy with your wife you were unclean until the evening and couldn't join an official celebration to God. So Saul thinks, it's okay. He's just unclean. **Read 28-34**

The test that David had devised worked exactly as planned. What David knew through experience Jonathan now knows by experience. All of Saul's logic and reasonability is gone. Saul's intention to murder David overflows in an outburst of anger that just about kills Jonathan.

Jonathan is doing what Jesus tells us to do in **Matt 10:16.** We are to be wise as servants but gentle as what? Doves.

While we are to be fearless as we follow Jesus and have boldness to proclaim his name, we are also to be skillful and wise in situations that are difficult. Situations that could bring disrepute on the name of Christ call for humility and grace and wisdom.

5) Here's the aftermath, then I want to end over in Luke's gospel. **Read 35-42**

Except for a brief meeting between David and Jonathan in **23:16** this is the last time they see each other. Saul's murderous intentions will keep them apart for the rest of Jonathan's life. And we also see that Jonathan remains faithful to the covenant he made. He realizes what that might mean for him and his own life, but his loyalty to David never waivers.

**Turn to Luke 14:25-33.** As I mentioned at the beginning: the summary of the chapter is Jonathan's pledge of allegiance to the king, king David. But we need to be reminded that Jesus calls us to the same high devotion. He uses hyperbole here - exaggeration for effect. But I think we get the point. **Read 25-32**

This is our king's demand on us. To be completely devoted followers - with no close seconds. Jesus doesn't really want us to hate anyone - he commands us to love. But our love for him should be so great that all other loves by comparison might be in some sense called hatred.

To attempt to follow Jesus without a 100% devotion to him is like trying to build a house without all the money or going to war without thinking about the potential consequences. Jesus - the true and better David, our Savior and our King - demands all. **Pray**