

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (10-10-1976 Standtown Baptist Church)

Jonathon

1 Samuel 14:4-16; 18:1-4; 19:1-7; 20:30-42

Introduction

The figure of Jonathon flits across the stage at various times when we look at the life of David. He is always overshadowed by David, but he deserves to be looked at in his own right, for he is a remarkable and outstanding character. As we are all influenced by the kind of friends we have, Jonathon was a great influence on the young David, and helped him become the person he later became.

Jonathon was a courageous soldier and a devoted friend. He was fine, generous, brave, chivalrous, gentle and beautiful in character. He has been described as “a true knight of God”, “ he combined the heroism of a Hebrew patriot with the spirit if Christian virtue” and “the most chivalrous figure in the Old Testament, the flower and crown of Hebrew history, the knight without reproach”. So far as the record goes, there is not a single crooked line or dark spot in his conduct. He was the pride of the army and the darling of the common people. He was fleet of foot and had great physical strength, a noted archer. We are going to consider what we learn from Jonathon the worshipper, the friend and the son.

Jonathan as a worshipper

When we think of the background of his father Saul’s character, and contrast it with Jonathon’s, we can see that Jonathon’s character is from some far higher source. He was a real man of God.

During the incessant warfare with the Philistines, Jonathon, accompanied only by an armour bearer, surprised the Philistine outpost among the rocky crags at Gibeah. The two of them slew 20 men, and it led to the complete rout of the rest of the Philistine army. Jonathon and his servant were greatly outnumbered, but that was not a worry to Jonathon. **It may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few** (1 Samuel 14:6). Here is a man plainly familiar with the ways of God. Numbers are not important to God. He was a man with faith in the power of God. His faith led to courage and strength, and therefore he did exploits.

This truth should strengthen the weak and encourage the timid, especially when we feel few and feeble. This has put nerve and power into the arm of God’s feeble saints down the ages. It has been shown to be true in the experience of countless Christians.

As Jonathon contemplated David’s victory over Goliath, he discerned the hand of God in the action. **The Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel** (1 Samuel 19:5). When David and Jonathon were about to be torn from each other with little hope of meeting again, Jonathon finds comfort in the fact that the Lord would be between them (1 Samuel 20:42). Although divided, they would be connected through the Lord.

This is also true for us. When we are divided from fellow Christians, there is a sense in which we are also united with them. However far apart we are in miles from those we love, we are intimately near in God whose presence infills and enwraps us both.

Finally in the last interview Jonathon and David ever had, they met by some secret arrangement in the wood. **Jonathon went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God** (1 Samuel 23:16). David's faith was failing, but Jonathon put fresh heart into him. He must have been strong in God himself to be able to strengthen another.

Jonathon was a real man of God, devoted to God, strong in Him, and very much living in His presence. The secret of Jonathon's life was his deep relationship with God. This gave strength and courage to his life, confidence about the future, consolation when parted from others, and enabled him to help others. This is a fundamental principle. Keep your relationship with God in good repair. The duties of Christian life will lose significance once contact with the power supply is interfered with. This is why so many Christian lives are only an empty shell. They have lost vital contact with God. "Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing had yet been done" (C.S.Lewis)

Jonathon as a friend

This is the most well known aspect of Jonathon's character. David and Jonathon were not equal partners. The friendship began with Jonathon, and was maintained by Jonathon to a large extent. He was the royal prince who welcomed with open arms the shepherd boy from the little town of Bethlehem. **The soul of Jonathon knit with the soul of David, and Jonathon loved him as his own soul** (1 Samuel 18:1).

What a friend Jonathon was – warm, selfless, practical and constant. It was in David's interest to befriend Jonathon. It was not in Jonathon's interest to befriend David. If Jonathon had an eye on the throne, it would have been better to get rid of David, as Saul had wanted to do. David was a rival to Jonathon's throne, and Jonathon had every reason to hate him and want rid of him. But instead, he loved him. He recognised David's superior ability and was quite willing for him to take the throne. He gave David his robe, and later his sword and bow. He acknowledged David as prince while he himself was now clothed as an ordinary man (1 Samuel 18:4). He made covenants with David, pledging mutual loyalty and help.

Jonathon pleaded with his father not to kill David, and pleaded his friend's cause. He showed Saul David's loyalty, innocence, service and valour. He took considerable risks to warn David of the danger he was in. He did all within his power to save David from the wrath and murderous plans of his father. He longed for reconciliation between his father and his best friend. Well did David sing in his elegy, **Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of woman** (2 Samuel 1:26). There was something in Jonathon's love which David had never met within any of the woman whose love had been given. It was deeper, richer and more intense than even the love of a woman.

Friendship is so common and such an every day thing that we think little of it, in its place in the Christian life. Yet remarkable stress is laid on the importance and value of

human friendship in both Testaments. It is one of those areas of life where Christians are to adorn the doctrine. We are given clear warning against wrong friends, because they can adversely affect the quality of Christian lives. There is also much teaching on the right behaviour when we have found the right friends.

What sort of friends are we? Do we rejoice in other's gifts? Are we happy for them to take pre-eminence if their gifts and God's appointment clearly point to their superiority over us? When we are asked about another at work or church, do we instinctively list their many virtues, or is it easier to point out all their failures and mistakes?

The familiarity and literary beauty of 1 Corinthians 13 often blinds us to the important truth. Love is.. **never glad when others go wrong..., always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient** (Moffat's rendering). Again, the true friend will be like Jonathon, and speak up for friend and character when unpopular or even dangerous to do so. How difficult for Jonathon to speak up for David before his father – he risked more than just unpopularity in doing so.

Jonathon as a son

Jonathon was loyal to David, even at the risk of the displeasure of his father. Yet on the other side, he remained a loyal and dutiful son. How often Jonathon was torn between love to a friend and also love to a father.

What a tragedy Saul was. He began his reign with such promise but became a dark, strange character, melancholy to madness, prey of evil spirits. Although he could be susceptible to music, and was able to recognise patriotism and goodness, yet somehow he could become so insanely jealous that he could hurl his javelin with murderous intent. It was a sorry tale at the end – the Lord departed from him, his power waned, the Philistines invaded the land, and Saul's successor was already chosen. His course was constantly downward.

Yet Jonathon still clung to his father, stood by his father and did not fail him. It must have been all the more difficult to support his father when Saul tried, without any cause but jealousy, to murder the friend he loved. Jonathon felt the uncontrollable temper for himself, and had the javelin hurled at him (1 Samuel 20:33). Seeing what a hopeless situation his father was in, there must have been a strong temptation to desert the doomed and wicked man, and throw in his lot with God's appointed successor. But Jonathon, as son and subject, remained loyal to Saul, despite all the abuse he had to put up with from his father for befriending David.

At the very end, even though the cause was doomed from the start, Jonathon fought shoulder to shoulder with his father on Mount Gilboa, and gave his life for his father's cause and kingdom. This is one of the finest accounts in all history of triumph of principle over passion, duty over inclination. Above all, despite the unworthiness and wretchedness of his father, Jonathon honoured him. When all was said and done, he was his father. None can tell what Jonathon endured in those last sad dark years, yet he held on to his father to the very last. C.f. Mary Slessor's loyalty to her parents, despite the misery of her home life in Dundee because of the character of her drunken father.

There are conflicts for us all. God appoints us to one thing, but the choice of our hearts is another. The wind blows from one quarter, and the tide flows from the opposite one. How very much we need God's grace to follow a straight course, true to the loftiest dictates of conscience, as Jonathon did.