

Good morning everyone. It is always great to be here. It is good to remind ourselves that great things are happening, that God is active. God is at work in our lives and in our community. It is good to keep our focus on God.

Today we will be continuing our new series on David. Today's story comes from 1 Samuel and the things that are recorded in chapters 18 through to 20.

Prayer

I will pray.

Last week in the story about David, he was a young teenager, looking after sheep. David was called, chosen by God to be king. Now that had been a real surprise. David came from a small rural town, he had a family tree that should have excluded him. He was the youngest of eight sons. That does not sound like someone who is royal material. But David was chosen by God, David was the king that God wanted.

Samuel had anointed him as king, after that, David had gone back out to look after the sheep. Time passed, David grew older, he was still young, maybe in the last of his teenage years, but David was not yet king. God was still training him.

And as the years passed, opportunities came, opportunities that God put there for David. There was David, playing his lyre for King Saul. No recorded music in those days, no radio or ipods. You needed to listen live. Saul suffered from black moods, dark times and he had found good music helped to calm him. And David, well he was a good, skilled musician so he was chosen to play for Saul, and he did that really well. But that came and that went, with nothing changing very much at all for David.

The event that really lifted him into the spotlight, was when he confronted Goliath. David, with God's help and just a sling and a few stones fighting a huge enemy warrior in one on one combat. Goliath the giant being slain.

After that Saul ask David "Whose son are you, young man?" And David replied, "I am the son of your servant Jesse from Bethlehem" David, probably not yet twenty years old, was on the rise. he was a promising young man.

Now Saul was still king of Israel, Saul had children, they were the natural successors. We know that unless something unexpected happens the British crown will pass from Queen Elizabeth the Second to Charles and then to William. We know that, that is what we expect, and that is what the expectation was like in Israel as well. That the next inline after Saul was his eldest son Jonathan. Jonathan was the one who we would have expected to become king.

Jonathan was a warrior and a fighter and he was an all-round good guy. Jonathan was a few years older than David and he saw in David something that he really admired, he saw God at work in him and Jonathan encouraged David. Jonathan became David's closest friend his mentor.

These were the days of the early iron age. Metal was hard to get and extremely expensive. Swords and armour were very precious, and not the sort of thing that a young shepherd could ever dream of being able to afford. But Jonathan fitted out David with some of his own armour, a sword and a bow. Jonathan looked out for David and they become really good, close friends.

So there was Jonathan the royal prince, David the rising star and King Saul, aging, having dark moods and clinging to his throne.

Saul - jealousy, fear, hostility schemes...., God protecting...

Now in the days after Goliath, David started being sent out on missions by Saul.

David went wherever he was asked to go, and he did whatever he was asked to do. David showed wisdom and maturity that was astounding. He was put in charge over some men in the army, and even the hardened veterans were impressed by him. And that is not something that happens very often, even today. Things were going well for David, they were getting better and better. He was on the way up to the very top. Until one fateful day. David was returning at the head of his group of warriors, and some women came out to meet them, there was David there, the warriors and king Saul as well. And as the women danced, they made up a song that they started to sing.

"Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

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When Saul heard the words, something triggered in his heart. Jealousy, fear, anger, resentment towards David and towards God. It did not bother Jonathan, that he wasn't even mentioned in the song even though he was a great warrior, but Saul being less than David really got to Saul.

Even though David had done nothing wrong, even though David always had done his very best, Saul seethed in anger towards him. Maybe God was going to use David to be the next king instead of his son Jonathan. And so Saul started plotting and scheming against David.

The next day when David was playing his lyre, Saul lifted up his spear, and threw it at him with all his might, trying to pin him to the wall with it, but David ducked and the spear missed. Saul picked up a second spear and threw that as well, David

leapt to the side, the spear missed and David fled through the door. Safe for the moment.

So Saul came up with a plan. Maybe the Philistines would do the evil deed and kill David for him. So Saul made David captain over a regiment of 1000 soldiers and he said to him, look I will let you marry my older daughter Merab, just go and fight the Philistines for me, Saul hoped that the young, bold David would be killed. So David went off into the thick of the battles, fighting the Philistines enemy and God looked after him through those times and he remained alive. When David returned he found out there was a problem, Saul had tricked him and married Merab off. That was not fair, but Saul had another plan.

He had looked and seen his daughter Michal had a crush on David, they were in love. So he told David, "look if you bring proof that you have killed 100 enemy Philistine males, that will be the bride price, I will let you marry Michal." 100 Philistine males, killed in battle. To do that David would need to be in the very centre of the action, surely he would be killed. But God was with David, Saul's evil plan did not succeed. David returned and he had been successful. So he married Michal. The two of them very much in love.

Now David was becoming famous throughout all of Israel. He was a real star. Jonathan his friend and mentor, had seen his father scheme against him, so spoke to his father on David's behalf and said to him. "Look don't do evil to David - he has served you really well. he has been a wonderful commander for your army, God is with him. stop trying to kill him." And Saul listened to his son, and said ok, "as the Lord lives I will not try to kill David."

But the peace, was very short, only lasting for a few months. Once again there was a war with the Philistines, David lead the fighting, and once more he was successful.

Once more Saul tried to kill David, throwing a spear at him while he was playing his lyre. David ducking, the spear hitting the wall, David fleeing into the night, going back to his home.

And this time Saul sent a hit squad out to David's house, surrounding it, keeping an eye out for him with a plan to kill him when he left in the morning. David's wife Mikael found out about it, and she came up with a plan of her own. She helped David escape through the window and put a dummy in his bed, complete with a goats hair wig to make it look like David was still lying there. Just like you see in the movies today, only this was three thousand years ago. In the morning she told those men from Saul, "David is sick and can't come to the door". When Saul heard the story, he yelled out "Bring David here in his bed, so that I can kill him, sick or not." Then, when he found out he had been deceived, and it was just a dummy in the bed Saul flew into a terrible rage. David had avoided death once again.

Now David still had his close friend, his mentor, Saul's eldest son Jonathan and they had a secret place where they could meet. David said to Jonathan, look what have I done wrong. Why is your father trying to kill me?

And Jonathan said, "You are my friend. I will look out for you. I will find out for sure if my father is trying to kill you and I will let you know."

And Jonathan, recognising that God was with David, Jonathan, seeing that God was preparing David, that David was going to become king, rather than himself, Jonathan knowing that what he was going to do was very risky, said to David,

"May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father. If I am still alive, show me the faithful love of the LORD; but if I die, never cut off your faithful love from my descendents."

Jonathan made a plan with David. A plan where David would be kept safe away from Saul while Jonathan found out if his father was still planning to kill him. It was a plan with a secret place to meet, and a way for Jonathan to let David know if the coast was clear or not.

When Saul asked Jonathan why David wasn't around, Jonathan told him that he had said to David that it was Okay for him not to be there and Saul exploded in anger towards his son Jonathan: *"You son of a slut! Don't you think I know that you're in cahoots with the son of Jesse, disgracing both you and your mother? For as long as the son of Jesse is walking around free on this earth, your future as a king is at risk. Now go get him. Bring him here. Make sure he is dead!"* Jonathan stood up to his father. *"Why dead? What's he done?"* but Saul became mad at Jonathan and threw his spear at him trying to kill him. It missed, Jonathan escaped, but he knew without a shadow of a doubt that his father was obsessed with killing David.

The next day Jonathan met with David at their secret rendezvous and he told David that being near Saul was no longer safe for him. The two friends wept, and they grieved together.

Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, we have said, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" And David and Jonathan separated, David heading for the countryside and Jonathan going back into the city.

When I think of this story, and the characters in it, the evil nature of Saul really stands out, but there is another really strong thread as well - the friendship and character of Jonathan.

Jonathan remained friends with David. Jonathan, was the one who would have been king, who should have been king. But he put his friendship with David and his understanding of what God was doing before his own interests. Jonathan could see that God was with David and so he stood by him, even when it meant defying his own father, Jonathan stood by David even when it meant risking his own life. He stood by him even when he realised that David was going to become king rather than himself. Jonathan was someone who shows what it means to be a true, godly friend. What it means to put God first.

Yes David did his part as well, he refused to fight Saul, he refused to seize the kingdom through violence. He could have killed Saul, claimed self defence and proclaimed himself as King. But that was not the path that God wanted David to follow. Yes, David made sure that he avoided the threats on his own life, he moved to a safe place. But he did not return evil with evil. David trusted in God. This was David at his finest. I think that the choices that he made in this story required more courage than deciding to face Goliath.

And I am also sure that one of the main reasons that David was at his finest, that he was able to rise above what was happening around him, was because of the friendship he had with Jonathan. It was Jonathan who helped David remain on an even keel. It was Jonathan who was the example for him. Jonathan who did not cling to power, who did not fight for the throne, Jonathan let it go. Jonathan was someone who saw what God was doing and was okay with it, even if it meant that someone else, rather than him was going to get the glory. It was Jonathan who

confronted his father on David's behalf, not once but twice. And David was at his finest, not confronting evil with evil, because of Jonathan.

Looking and seeing a job that we can do, that God is calling us to do and then doing that is great.

But looking and seeing a job, something that we would love to do, something that might make us famous, and realising that God is calling someone else not us, to do it, and then encouraging that person, mentoring them, providing the space for them to do it, that is really special. Doing that requires great courage, faith, and trust in God. That is what Jonathan did, that is what Jonathan was like.

We need people like David, God uses people like David to change the world. But people like David need friends, mentors like Jonathan, God uses people like Jonathan as well.

Now there may be times and situations in our life when we are like David, when God is calling us to things that might move us into the spotlight. There may be times like that and when there are, we need to find people like Jonathan to give us stability.

But there will be times and situations in our lives when God does call us to be like Jonathan.

To be someone who is a godly friend, to be a mentor, to be an encourager. To provide the space for someone, so that they can grow into what God is calling them to do and to be. God does call us to be like Jonathan. We might not become famous, but remember, David rose to fame, David was at his finest because of Jonathan.

let us pray.