

1 Samuel 20
October 16, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Imagine what it would be like to be on the run from someone who is willing to kill you. How would you feel and where would you go? What would it be like to always have to look over your shoulder to see if you're safe? [Let people engage.]

Transition: David finds himself in this situation. Saul has already attempted to kill him with a spear after the Lord afflicted Saul with an evil spirit. David was able to dodge it, but it's clear to him that Saul wants him dead. David is flabbergasted about this. He runs to Jonathan to find out how he's wronged Saul to deserve death! In the meantime, he's not keen on being near Saul, so let's read the storyline to see how David and Jonathan work together to keep David safe from Saul. Let's begin.

BOOK:

20 Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?"

² "Never!" Jonathan replied. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It's not so!"

³ But David took an oath and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this, or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."

⁴ Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."

⁵ So David said, "Look, tomorrow is the New Moon festival, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. ⁶ If your father misses me at all, tell him, 'David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.' ⁷ If he says, 'Very well,' then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. ⁸ As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?"

⁹ "Never!" Jonathan said. "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?"

¹⁰ David asked, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?"

¹¹ "Come," Jonathan said, "let's go out into the field." So they went there together.

¹² Then Jonathan said to David: "By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? ¹³ But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. ¹⁴ But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, ¹⁵ and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

¹⁶ So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the LORD call David’s enemies to account.” ¹⁷ And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

¹⁸ Then Jonathan said to David: “Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty. ¹⁹ The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target. ²¹ Then I will send a boy and say, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I say to him, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,’ then come, because, as surely as the LORD lives, you are safe; there is no danger. ²² But if I say to the boy, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you,’ then you must go, because the LORD has sent you away. ²³ And about the matter you and I discussed—remember, the LORD is witness between you and me forever.”

²⁴ So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon festival came, the king sat down to eat. ²⁵ He sat in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David’s place was empty. ²⁶ Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, “Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean—surely he is unclean.” ²⁷ But 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?”

²⁸ Jonathan answered, “David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. ²⁹ 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 get away to see my brothers.’ That is why he has not come to the king’s table.”

³⁰ Saul’s anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, “You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don’t I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? ³¹ As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!”

³² “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” Jonathan asked his father. ³³ But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

³⁴ Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father’s shameful treatment of David.

³⁵ In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, ³⁶ and he said to the boy, “Run and find the arrows I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. ³⁷ When the boy came to the place where Jonathan’s arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, “Isn’t the arrow beyond you?” ³⁸ Then he shouted, “Hurry! Go quickly! Don’t stop!” The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. ³⁹ (The boy knew nothing of all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) ⁴⁰ Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, “Go, carry them back to town.”

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² 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 the town.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

A love relationship with another person under God involves both parties in giving up things to help the other.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sam 20)*. Victor Books.

III. David Trusts Himself (20)

These chapters do not record a very beautiful picture, for in them we see the man of faith faltering and failing in his faith. Instead of waiting to seek the Lord's will, David flees in fear and tries to "scheme" his way out of his problems. Note the lies he tells.

A. He lied to Saul (chap. 20).

David's speech to Jonathan in 20:1 suggests self-centeredness and impatience. How much better it would have been had these two friends prayed together instead of hatching their scheme. Jonathan lied to his father about David's whereabouts (vv. 6, 28), but he had to wait a few days to see how the matter would end. Meanwhile, he and David made a covenant together that David would protect Jonathan's family when he became king, a promise that David fulfilled (2 Sam. 9). Saul did not believe Jonathan's story (vv. 24–33), and his reaction almost cost Jonathan his life! When God abandons a person and the devil takes over, there is no end to the wickedness that results. Jonathan left the table and met David the next morning; they wept together and said farewell.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). *1 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, p. 450)* Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

20:1–23. Having become persuaded of the irremediable nature of Saul's hostility toward him, **David** sought to learn its source and to determine if there might be a means of reconciliation. The test would be Saul's response to David's absence from the **New Moon** feast (v. 5), held on the first day of every month (Num. 28:11–15). If Saul became upset about David's absence, then David would know that there was no hope of patching up their differences. If, however, the king was amenable, then all was not lost (1 Sam. 20:6–8). **Jonathan** would approach his **father** on the matter and communicate the results to **David** by signaling with **arrows** (vv. 18–23).

20:24–42. At first **Saul ... thought** David was absent because he was **ceremonially unclean** (v. 26). But then Saul's response was what David feared. After David's absence on **the second day**, Saul was filled with rage toward **David** and also toward **Jonathan** (vv. 30, 33). **As long as** David lived, Saul said, there was no hope that his own dynasty would continue (v. 31).

With heavy heart **Jonathan** signaled to **David** the next **morning** by his words to a **boy** and with **arrows** (vv. 34–40). **Jonathan** and **David** met **and wept together** (v. 41). It was obvious that friendship with Saul was impossible. But **Jonathan** said that his own bond of loyalty with **David** would never be broken (v. 42). Jonathan was giving up a kingdom for the love of a friend.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 115–117)*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Jonathan's Selfless Love (20:1–42). David met his friend Jonathan and appealed for his help. Jonathan knew that he would never be king of Israel because the Lord had chosen David to

succeed his father. He loved David (18:1; 20:17), and they covenanted together to spare each other's lives. Jonathan agreed to signal David in the field if his father again planned to kill him.

At the Feast of the New Moon, David's absence caused Saul to become enraged, and he charged Jonathan with treachery. He tried to kill his own son, but Jonathan escaped to warn his friend David.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). 1 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 174-175). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

David and Jonathan Part (1 Sam. 20:1–42)

The passage—In light of the many attempts on David's life, one wonders that there was any question as to Saul's intentions. Jonathan, however, had only recently arranged a truce between his father and his friend (19:1–7), and Saul's subsequent actions were subject to varying interpretations. His latest attack on David with a spear was associated with the evil spirit which afflicted him only periodically, and for which he could not be held accountable (19:8–10). Although David was convinced that Saul was trying to kill him during the incidents at his home and at Ramah, no overt attacks had been made. A test case was devised, therefore, by which God could reveal, especially to Jonathan, Saul's true attitudes toward David.

David decided to offer a false alibi for missing the king's ritual feasts associated with the arrival of the new moon (vv. 5–6). If the king accepted his explanation, David would know that he had misjudged Saul's intentions. A violent reaction to his absence from the ceremonies, however, would be taken as a final indication that David would never be safe in Saul's court.

Saul reacted, not only against David for his absence from court, but also against Jonathan for his lack of family solidarity. Saul could see that as long as David lived, Jonathan would never become king (v. 31). For Jonathan, however, the sacrifice of a friendship was too great a price to pay for the opportunity to reign. Now that his father's intentions were clear, he warned David to leave the king's court permanently. After a lengthy and emotional farewell, the two friends parted to pursue their divergent, even conflicting, destinies.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.