

Jonathan's Gift

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[0 : 00] I'm going to look at the verses 18 in particular at the beginning of chapter 18. If you're ever wondering what to buy, if it's not past that stage, if you're ever wondering what to buy for someone as a gift for Christmas, or it could be engagement or a wedding present or for a birthday, or simply when you're going to visit someone, spare a thought for the heads of state.

An inappropriate gift could cause an international incident. The heads of state may have researchers, advisors and buyers to help, but nonetheless the choice of gift is important.

When the Obamas made a state visit in 2011, they gifted the Queen with a collection of rare memorabilia and photographs and a handmade leather-bound album of her parents' visit to the US in 1939.

That would have been just before the war. It was very much a personal and well-thought-out gift. So clearly, in choosing a gift, culture and context matter.

In Scotland, if you're invited to someone's home for dinner, or you might bring along some home bakes, a cake or a box of chocolates or even a bottle of wine.

[1 : 40] I noted recently that if you're invited to dinner in France, and I'm led to believe this is the case, it could be disrespectful to present a bottle of wine.

It's as if you are saying that the host could not provide for his or her guests, and that their wine is not good enough. So clearly, culture and context matter.

So on the subject of gifts, I was drawn to this passage in 1 Samuel chapter 18, which intrigued me. I started looking at this passage, then I decided, no, I'll look at something else instead.

But then I was drawn back to it because the particular passage intrigued me. And it relates specifically to the gifts.

The gifts in chapter, in verse 4 of chapter 18, where Jonathan, the son of Saul, and heir to the throne, the gifts that Jonathan gave to David.

[2 : 45] These gifts were his robe, his tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt. So this is something I want to explore with you this morning.

But first we need to look at the context. David had been a somewhat obscure lad. The shepherd boy, age 17, 18, or thereabouts.

And he was jettisoned into the limelight in a military standoff, where there were two armies, one on each side, two armies facing one another.

Israel versus the Philistines. Sworn enemies. This was no football or rugby match with the two teams lined up against one another.

These were arch enemies looking into the abyss of death. There were no drones operating from the comfort of some remote American military base.

[3 : 55] But the reality and expectation of hand-to-hand combat, bloodshed and unspeakable carnage were in the offing. I mean, sitting here in the safety and the comfort of Bonacord, we have little concept of what that was like.

The fear in the faces of the men facing one another would have been palpable. And for 40 days, the Philistines had been ratcheting up the pressure, increasing the tension, morning and evening taunting the Israelites.

Come on then, bring out your best. Bring out your best fighting warrior. Where is he? So why on earth did King Saul allow this young lad David to consider too young to go into battle with his brothers?

Why on earth would he allow him to take on this Philistine, this battle-hardened champion warrior? It doesn't say much for the Israelite army, does it?

And it certainly doesn't say much for the military judgment or tactics of the king. But of course, it was the Lord who was ordering things.

[5 : 15] Salvation will come from the house of David. Salvation will come from the house of David. So here we find the context of these gifts given.

It was following the standoff and defeat of Goliath and the Philistines. In sport, we quite happily use battle language, speaking of victories and defeats.

But the imagery here is not of that ilk. The imagery here is more akin to World War I standoff with battle-weary soldiers in opposite trenches with their bayonets fixed in their guns.

And David doesn't come running across the field with his football shirt thrown over his head. Instead, he carries the head of the vanquished Goliath.

It's all pretty gruesome. So what gifts do you give to a returning hero? Not a box of chocolates and not a bottle of wine.

[6 : 26] What this soldier prince Jonathan gave to David weren't the gifts associated with a love gift, but a recognition of the victory against the Philistine and indeed the salvation of God's people.

Goliath had, as it were, been sacrificed for the salvation of God's people. But this was only a skirmish and a completely insufficient sacrifice.

We look for a better sacrifice. Coming to this interaction between David and Jonathan, what about any previous encounter?

Was there a previous encounter? Was it on the battlefield that David first came to the attention of the king? And was this the first meeting of David and Jonathan that we find in these few verses of chapter 18?

Because as the, if you look at the passage, as the two armies were facing one another, David was brought to Saul, as we read in chapter 17.

[7 : 45] What David said, this was when David had been talking about, to his brothers and others about, oh, I'll take on this fellow Goliath. In verse 31 and 32 of chapter 17, what David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

David said to Saul, let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine. Your servant, meaning himself, your servant will go and fight him. And we later read as, in verses 55 and 56, as Saul watched David going out to meet the Philistine, he said to Abner, commander of the army, Abner, whose son is that young man?

Abner replied, surely as you live, your majesty, I don't know. The king said, find out whose son this young man is. And then later on in the chapter 17, David carrying the head of Goliath in his hand.

He came, he was brought to Saul. Whose son are you, young man? Saul asked him. And David said, I am the son of your servant, Jesse of Bethlehem.

Now that discourse between discussion, that talk between David and Saul, is somewhat confusing, if not a little surprising. Because if you look back in chapter 16 and verse 21, David had entered into the service of Saul.

[9 : 28] In verse 21, we read of that chapter, David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor bearers. Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him.

So David had been Saul's personal musician. He'd also become one of his armor bearers. So was this before or after the defeat of Goliath?

Because the identity of David had already been revealed to Saul in chapter 16. Because we read, So Saul said to his attendants, Find someone who plays well and bring him to me.

One of the servants answered, I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem, who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. Why then does Saul ask about the one going out to fight Goliath, not knowing who he was?

Was it perhaps the case that the lyre, L-Y-R-E, the lyre playing musician, was here found in a different context?

[10 : 44] In the royal house, he would most likely have been dressed differently. And perhaps there was a separation between the great king and this young shepherd boy who could play an instrument.

Perhaps, even though he said that he liked David, perhaps there was this separation. So, then he didn't necessarily recognize them on the battlefield. People are sometimes not recognized when they're in a different context.

And this may have been the case here. If we're outside our usual environment, you meet someone, you know, that person looks familiar, but I can't place them.

Because the significance is that if that is the case, Jonathan may well have known David before this battle against the Philistines, before the Goliath encounter.

But some have suggested that chapters 16 and 17 are not in strict chronological order. But notwithstanding these questions, what is clear is that the gifts were given after the victory over Goliath.

[12 : 01] But it is not clear if the gifts were given there on the battlefield. But it does seem likely in the circumstances. So, here we have the Prince of Israel honoring the conqueror, David.

I want to turn now to this relationship between David and Jonathan. I'm describing it as a loving relationship. There was clearly a deep connection between them.

It says that Jonathan became one in spirit and he loved him as himself. It would be a bit of an anachronism out of context to interpret these verses at the beginning of chapter 18, to interpret these in terms of 21st century Western culture.

It would be more appropriate to interpret these verses in the words of Jesus. Of all the commandments, which is the most important? The most important one, answered Jesus, is this.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

[13 : 24] The second is this. Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these. Do we love our neighbor as ourself as Jesus has instructed?

Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself. Jesus says to us, love your neighbor as yourself. Both Jonathan and David, they both loved their God.

They both loved the Lord God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob. And they shared in this special relationship of loving God, a relationship that we can understand as Christians, the love we have one for another as sharing in the blessings of the gospel.

in David, Jonathan found a kindred spirit. Until now, his father had been his mentor and his guide.

But he was beginning to see his father's failures and weaknesses. Saul may have been Saul may have been God's anointed one, but he didn't fully command Jonathan's trust.

[14 : 52] His trust was beginning to wane. When Jonathan went in to attack the outpost of 20, we read this in chapter 14, when Jonathan went in to attack the outpost of 20 Philistines, he had secretly slipped away from his father's encampment.

He didn't want his father to know, come, let's go over to the Philistines outpost on the other side. This is what he says. But he did not tell his father. That's in 1 Samuel.

14, 1. So he kept it secret from his father that he was going over to tackle these Philistines in this encampment.

And then later on, he questioned Saul's wisdom in starving his army before a battle. Would you starve your army before they go into battle?

Little wonder that Jonathan questioned his father's wisdom. Jonathan said, my father has made trouble for the country. And in fact, that particular oath that he asked his army to commit to, which was not to eat anything before they went into battle to take this oath, Jonathan had partaken of some honey contrary to the, because he didn't know about the oath having been made.

[16 : 09] And as a consequence, he could have suffered death as a penalty. But thankfully, his loyal army supported him and he was preserved.

His loyal army had intervened. So in contrast to Saul, David, even though it's reckoned he was about 10 years younger than Jonathan.

In contrast, David was one to follow. His trust in his father was waning, but David was seen as this great leader.

He displayed such godly father, says David. David displayed such godly valour with someone who trusted God. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

In all your ways submit to him and he will make your path straight. Obviously, that would have been written after. It would have been in Proverbs, so it's likely under Solomon's time, not under David's.

[17 : 21] But David was so decisive. He was fearless in the face of danger. Who amongst us would stand before Goliath with only a sling and a stone.

But he was also, David was also loyal and trustworthy. But these attributes could also equally apply, and this is where the kindred spirit came in, these attributes could equally apply to Jonathan, because Jonathan commanded a thousand men and attacked and defeated a Philistine outpost, when his father had two thousand men and held back.

And yet, later on, he was happy to take credit for Jonathan's victory. And another exploit, Jonathan and his armour bearer tackled and killed twenty Philistines.

Come, let's go over to the outpost of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. And this is what Jonathan says, nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.

How prophetic is that? Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few. So Jonathan's heart, David's heart, were with the Lord.

[18 : 48] As a person, David would have been someone that people were attracted to. As a young man, he was described as follows. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

But also, he's a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and a fine-looking man. But this was added on to that sentence. And the Lord is with him.

So as you can see, this kindred spirit that would develop between Jonathan and David. And this in spite of Saul's determination to kill David, he had remained loyal.

David remained loyal to Saul. David did not try to steal the crown. In spite of the fact that David had been anointed by Samuel, he did not try to steal the crown prematurely.

He recognized that Saul was God's anointed king. And that his own time had not yet come. He could have quite easily killed Saul on a couple of occasions because there was one occasion when he was in a cave and he instead, when he had basically Saul lying there and he was able just to stick a sword or a knife into him, he instead cut off a corner of his robe.

[20 : 11] We read that in chapter 24. And then a further opportunity arose after this time where he took a spear and a jar of water from next to Saul's head when people were sleeping.

So he had two opportunities where he could have killed the king and taken the crown. But Jonathan too, he also was loyal to his father, whilst at the same time protecting David.

Yes, he stuck his neck out a little bit and helping David. But in the end, in the end, he was loyal to his father. He separated from David in favour of family loyalty to King Saul.

in spite of this vengeful accusation of his father. We read this. 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 the shame of the mother who bore you?

This is his father speaking to him. As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me for he must die.

[21 : 25] He was spitting anger at David, jealousy and hatred. And there are these prophetic words of Saul, even in his anger.

As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. established. Of course, it is David's kingdom that will be established and indeed a son of David will prevail.

In the end, he died, Jonathan, Jonathan died on the same battlefield as his father on Mount Gilboa. which brings me to the rather sad passage in scripture, the death of a loving brother.

On hearing of the news of their death, David went into mourning and he lamented the loss of Saul and Jonathan. And in 2 Samuel chapter 1, you have this desperately, desperately sad lament.

Three times in this lament, it says, how the mighty have fallen. How the mighty have fallen. And the last verse is particularly poignant.

[22 : 45] Jonathan lies slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan. Very pleasant you have been to me. Your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of woman.

The lament describes Jonathan as his brother. He was, of course, his brother-in-law, David having married Michal, Jonathan's sister.

It also speaks of this special relationship and the brotherly love as surpassing the love of woman. In other words, being greater than what a mother would show to their children.

Or greater than a mother or a woman would show to her husband. The kind of bond that two soldiers might experience, having served together in the trenches, having seen and survived action at the war front, as one looked out for the safety of the other.

They may go home to their wives, but the camaraderie of serving soldiers is something altogether, different. So to kind of sum up really, having looked at something of the life of Jonathan, I can't help but think that he would have made a much better king than his father Saul.

[24 : 21] But Saul was the one that the people chose and the one that God had allowed had allowed to become their king. But Jonathan never escaped from under his father's shadow.

And of course, he would have realized that Saul had been the one anointed by God. And probably aware, Jonathan was probably aware, if only by Samuel's absence.

that's because Ab Samuel would have no longer been seen around the royal courts. Jonathan was probably aware that something wasn't quite right in the house of Saul.

For the Lord had rejected Saul. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you from being king. Samuel had said to him, speaking the words of God.

When Jonathan made a vow with David and gave these gifts to him, it was more than likely that he was aware that David was God's anointed, and that he, Jonathan, couldn't presume to be king.

[25 : 40] Perhaps the sentiment of Saul's later words, spoken in anger, had been expressed in the royal courts. I don't know. For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established.

But Jonathan was prepared to submit to God's will. So the passing of these gifts, the passing of the robe, the tunic, the sword, the bow, and the belt, they are all symbolic of Jonathan letting the crown pass from his father Saul to David, bypassing himself, because Jonathan was the heir to the throne.

If it was not symbolic in Jonathan's mind at the time, it was certainly prophetic. Jonathan would have surely known God's covenant with Abraham. I will make you into nations and kings shall come from you and I will establish my covenant between you and your offspring after you through their generations for an everlasting kingdom and kings shall come from you.

But the covenant that God made with David, that was still some time off yet and not spelt out until after Jonathan's death. covenant being and your house and your kingdom, this is to David, and your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.

Your throne shall be established forever. Forever. We look not to David, but to the son of David, to the king of kings and to the lord of lords, to our mentor and saviour, Jesus Christ.

[27 : 38] What gifts do we bring to him? You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it.

You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, oh lord, is a broken spirit and a contrite heart. What gifts do you bring to the lord?

Bethlehem and Calvary represent the great gift that the lord has given to us, the gift that we have received.

This is a love gift. May we receive it with gladness and praise his holy name. Amen.

May God add his blessing to these few thoughts on his word. We'll now turn to praising God in song and we will sing joy to the world and we will stand in praise of the lord.