

Prayers

Opening prayer

In those moments when life feels numb, and love is distant from my heart, Lord Jesus, come and bless me I pray. Come gently with a word, with a sound, with a sense of Your presence, and place within my heart Your seeds of renewal. Then, with every day that passes, may those seeds grow, so that Your love may be found within my soul, and I am able to lift my heart in praise, once again. Come Lord Jesus, and bless my soul, I pray. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: SCHOOLS

1. For yourself

Give thanks for the education you have received not just at school but throughout your life. Praise God for those who have taught you about the faith and been an example to you of godliness

2. For your friends and family

Praise God for the way that everyone in a family can learn from each other. Think about this carefully, and offer your thoughts to the Lord

3. For the church and its work

Pray for those who work hard to teach the Gospel. Pray that their work will be recognised and their teaching listened to.

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray in earnest for those who will never get an education, who live in countries where this cannot be provided for anyone except the rich. Pray against the evils that keep children in poverty and ignorant. Let the Holy Spirit guide your thoughts and feelings

Meditation

All praise to You, Lord Jesus:

You alone have challenged me to live for You;

You alone have walked with me and know my heart;

You alone have known me since the beginning of time;

You alone have cared about all that has happened to me;

You alone have touched my heart and given me love eternal;

You alone have heard the spiritual tones within my voice;

You alone have inspired me to be a truly better person;

You alone have given me the path to perfect peace;

You alone have answers to my deepest needs

All praise to You, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Samuel 18:1-9

¹ When he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ² From that day onwards, Saul engaged David at court and would not let him return to his father's house. ³ Now Jonathan made a covenant

with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ He took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, and also his armour, and even his sword, bow and belt.

⁵ David continued to be successful wherever Saul sent him. As a result, Saul set him over the army, and all the people, even Saul's servants, approved. ⁶ When the army returned after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul, singing and dancing with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. ⁷ The women sang to one another as they made merry,

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

⁸ Saul was furious, because what they said upset him. He said,

'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?'

⁹ So from that day on Saul kept his eye on David.

Review

Behind the story of David and Goliath is the story of how David will one day claim the throne of all Israel. King's Saul's rightful heir was of course his son Jonathan, but as this passage describe, Jonathan was very close to David. The plot thickens!

We left the story of David yesterday with the young champion standing before the King of Israel. In human terms, his defeat of Goliath gave him almost limitless power and authority in Israel, and he could have used this to further his own ends, but instead, he deferred to King Saul with courtesy (17:58). Until the tragic death of Saul many years later at the hands of the Philistines (1 Samuel 31) David insisted upon calling him 'the Lord's anointed'. He had to live with the irony of being the anointed King of Israel but having to honour the man who already occupied the throne, even though God had rejected him, but David was growing stronger daily by doing the Lord's will, whereas Saul was repeatedly failing, and bearing the penalties of his sin.

At the beginning of our story today, we are introduced to another main theme of 1 Samuel, which is the close friendship between David and Saul's son Jonathan. Scripture uses strong words to describe this relationship, which has become the subject of much debate over the years. When the Bible says '*Jonathan loved him as his own soul*' (18:1,3) and describes how he took off his clothes and gave them to David (18:4), some reckon that this takes the relationship to the very edge of heterosexual friendship. However, to follow this thought further and suggest that their relationship was homosexual would be to miss the point and allow ourselves to be unnecessarily side-tracked. There is nothing wrong with deeply close relationships between men, which have no bearing on issues of sexuality, and the friendship of Jonathan and David can be an inspiration to both men and women. Under God, such friendships are quite different from the precious relationship of marriage, and are a valuable part of the panoply of human relationships open to each individual.

If we want to understand what Scripture is saying about Jonathan and his role in the story of David, then we need to recall some of the texts where he appears in 1 Samuel before chapter 18. Jonathan was Saul's son and heir by right to the throne of all Israel and Judah. He, as well as David, had proved himself in battle at the expense of his father (see 1 Samuel 14), except that Saul had rashly made an oath before a battle, and unwittingly, Jonathan had contravened Saul's oath, resulting in a fierce argument between the two. After this, Saul cursed his son and heir, Jonathan, and threatened him with death; he was only saved by the intervention of the people (1 Sam 14:45)! This was not just a bad episode in a relationship between father and son; the curse was Saul's way of stopping his son from claiming his rightful heritage as the next King of Israel!

With this in mind, our passage today makes more sense, because the friendship of David and Jonathan resolves the issue of the accession to the throne in David's favour. By giving David his royal robes and armour, he was accepting that he would never sit on the throne of Israel, but his loved friend David would, hence the talk of a friendship sealed by a 'covenant' (18:3). From an earthly point of view, David did not have to kill Saul to gain the throne of Israel (see yesterday's study), he acquired the right to succeed through his son Jonathan, who gave it to him! The stories of Jonathan's love of David found in 1 Samuel were probably used in Israel in later times, to heal the rift between David's tribe (Judah) and the tribe of Saul and Jonathan (Benjamin). This becomes abundantly clear if you read the first five torrid chapters of 2 Samuel, which describe David's efforts to unite Israel at length.

From verse 5 onwards, the story line continues by illustrating the public support David enjoyed, and it is made very clear that King Saul was not amused at David's prowess. The people's praises were an affront to

him not just because of one-upmanship in valour and war, but because public support for David was as good as a threat to his throne. In Israel, kings were anointed by prophets and blessed by God, but they were also required to gather public support. In those days, the one who could protect the people from their enemies had the greatest claim to sovereignty. Saul gives this much when he says of David, in exasperation, 'what more can he have than the kingdom' (18:8)!

Just as we saw yesterday, David was a man of God who knew that the 'ways of the world' were not God's ways, but God granted him success in all he did. Scripture does not comment on David's reaction to the praises heaped on him for defeating the Philistines, so we must assume he neither accepted it nor rejected it. Perhaps the best spiritual lesson we can learn from this passage is that any success we have and any praise we may receive in this world may possibly reflect God's will for us, but in general, these things are a poor guide to the ways of the Lord and no good for our spiritual health! Our hearts should, with David, find their sustenance in God's long term will, and not in the ups and downs of the present, however attractive they may sometimes seem.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Have you come across the view that this passage describes homosexuality in the Bible? What do you think of this?
2. Do you think I am right to assume that David is silent at the praises he receives? How do you respond to praise?
3. How do you respond when you find passages of the Old Testament which speak of people being killed in this way?

Discipleship challenges

- *What success have you had in your life? What failures have you had in your life? Write them down, prayerfully hand them over to God and be at peace about them.*
 - *Read through some of the story of Saul from chapter 13, to familiarise yourself with the story.*
 - *Miss a meal in order to pray, or spend a day in fasting for the senior leaders of God's people in the world today*
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Final Prayer

Great, awesome God of compassion, strength, righteousness and mercy; deal with me each day according to your plan for my life. Save me from being side-tracked by issues that do not help me, and give me peace, I pray, that I am following in the right pathway. In Jesus' name; AMEN
