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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *Best Supporting Actor: Jonathan*

### *1 Samuel 18:1-4*

We've been going hot and heavy, pedal to the metal for these last six weeks in our "Beyond These Walls" campaign in which we as a congregation pledged 5,462,347 to eliminate the debt over the next three years at Chapel Hill! Way to go my fellow Chapel Hillians!

Summer is here and it's time to catch our breath a bit and do a fun, inspirational series maybe a little more whimsical! We're calling this series "Best Supporting Actor: Disciples That Make History Who You May Not Know As Well." People like Jonathan, John Mark, Elisha, Timothy, Deborah, and Jochebed (who?) we'll let you figure that out.

The first Best Supporting Actor up to bat is Jonathan, the eldest son of King Saul and ardent advocate of King David. If you like Old Testament drama, there is no more savory story in the Bible than the love/hate triangle of Saul, David, and Jonathan. It may not be an exaggeration to say that without Jonathan's friendship and protection, David may never have become king of Israel.

Let's start by reading a well-known text from 1 Samuel 18 that summarizes this very close relationship between David and Jonathan.

*"When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt." 1 Sam 18:1-4*

Jonathan is one of the noblest men in Scripture. 1 Samuel says that Jonathan loved David "as his own soul." Jonathan placed his friendship with David above his loyalty to his father, King Saul, as well as his own claim to the throne. As a Best Supporting Actor, he chose to give up the lead role to David so that he could be king.

How did David and Jonathan become such close friends?

Some background:

Saul was Israel's first king anointed by the prophet Samuel. Saul was the "people's choice" to be king. He fit their image of what a king should be: he was head and shoulders taller than everyone else and he was handsome. The problem was Saul was incurably insecure and when the pressure of leadership mounted, Saul was disobedient to the Lord's command.

In 1 Samuel 15, God ordered Saul to completely annihilate the Amalekites. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau. They were a nomadic tribe and they were Israel's primary enemies when they

entered the Promised Land. They waged barbaric guerilla war against Israel. It was said that the Amalekites took great pleasure in killing. Because of the Amalekites' many atrocities and pagan practices, God commanded Saul to completely exterminate all the Amalekites including all their livestock. When King Saul failed to kill the Amalekite King and the choicest animals in their herd, God regretted that he had made Saul king, and the Spirit of God departed from Saul.

After a period of time, the Lord sent Samuel to anoint David to be king. The Lord chose David because he had a different spirit than Saul. Many of you know these famous words the Lord said to Samuel:

*"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Sam 16:7*

David was anointed king by Samuel, but he did not become king until many years later. In the meantime Saul continued to lead Israel. He had many military victories over the Philistines, but the Spirit of God departed from Saul and God sent a harmful spirit to torment the king. Saul's servants recommended that Saul find a man who was a skillful musician who would play calming music when the spirit was tormenting the king. Saul's household servants recommended David to come and minister. This must have been when David and Jonathan met. Jonathan and the family were very appreciative of the shepherd boys' skills that helped the nerves of their erratic father.

But David was not only a gifted musician. He was also a fierce warrior. In 1 Samuel 17, David proved his courage and bravery by killing the Philistine giant Goliath. David was an instant celebrity adored by all of Israel. Jonathan was so impressed that he loved David "as his own soul." He made a covenant with David and was his champion for the rest of their days. Jonathan turned over his robe and armor to David, demonstrating his willingness to surrender his right to be king.

King Saul initially loved having David in his household too. It made him look more successful as king! Every time Saul sent David out to battle he returned victoriously. David was so successful that when he returned from battle the women in the cities of Israel would come out as the troops returned singing and dancing saying: "*Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.*" This made Saul insanely jealous. He thought to himself, "They ascribe to David ten thousands and to me thousands. What more can he have but the kingdom." So from that point on 1 Samuel says that "Saul kept his eye on David."

On six different occasions Saul tried to assassinate David. Three times in the palace Saul hurled a javelin at David while he was playing music trying to calm the king! Everyone in Saul's family and household were delighted with David except Saul! Jonathan remained David's champion and advocate despite the irrational behavior of his father. On one occasion Saul spoke to Jonathan and all his servants that they should kill David. Jonathan tried to reason with his father.

*"Why would you want to kill David? He struck down Goliath and worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then would you want to spill David's blood?"*

And Saul listened to Jonathan and he brought David back into his home. But the grace of the king toward David was always short-lived. As soon as David returned victoriously from battle Saul's jealous spirit would flare up again and he would try to end David's life. Eventually Jonathan realized that it was a losing cause trying to convince his father that David was completely honorable and righteous and worthy to be trusted.

Q: What do we learn from Jonathan as one of the Bible's Best Supporting Actors and a history making disciple?

One thing we learn from Jonathan is that history making disciples...

### **Build Close Friendships With Other Disciples.**

Proverbs 18:24 says. *"....there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."*

If you were here last week you saw the video of Curtis Greenfield. He met Ellis while standing in line at a Starbucks here in Gig Harbor. Curtis' reflection on his life are worth noting. He said that his life was going very well in his medical practice. He had a beautiful new home; he had a lovely wife and healthy children. He had everything anyone could want. But he was lonely. He had a feeling of emptiness. He felt like he didn't have any friends. This is very common in our world today. Loneliness is rampant. People feel cut off and live in isolation.

### **What is needed are authentic, life-giving friendships.**

This past week, the pastors were in Sacramento for General Assembly. On Tuesday night I headed down to Danville California to visit my oldest friend Tom. Tom and I met in high school. We have been great friends ever since. Tom was raised in the church and knew Christ from an early age. He was my main peer friend who walked with me when I was a new Christian at 16. While I was at dinner with Tom and his wife Lisa, I also spent time with Tom's youngest son Brett and his fiancé Peggy. I'm performing their wedding this October. My friend Tom has 5 kids. I've done his oldest child's wedding and now I'm going to do his youngest child's wedding. Tom was the best man in my wedding. We have been each other's friend through a lot of "ups and downs."

Close friendships are critical to our growth in the Christian faith. Eugene Peterson says that, "Friendship is a much underestimated aspect of spirituality. It's every bit as significant as prayer and fasting."

Quite a statement from one of America's premiere writers on spiritual formation.

Jennifer and I know it to be true that Christian friendships have helped sustain us in life and ministry for over 25 years. We've lived in a number of different areas doing ministry, but we've always established a few close friendships that have helped to strengthen us during challenging times in life.

I recently had conversation with two pastors from Real Life Ministries in Post Falls, ID. This is the church we model our Life Group Ministry after. One of the pastors said that the reason they try and get people in Life Groups as soon as possible is because they've discovered that one of the primary reasons people get in trouble in life is because of isolation. So we try to help them get in community to live life together with other Christians.

Here at Chapel Hill we hope everyone will get in a life group so that you are not alone. We need each other. We are better together! Being in a life group allows us to share life together, which makes life richer for everyone!

Another insight we see from Jonathan's relationship with David is that history making disciples **help other disciples stay on god's path.**

After Jonathan and David realized there was no changing Saul's mind about killing David, David high tails it into the wilderness. He forms a small army of 400 loyal soldiers and eludes Saul over the next number of years.

At one point, Jonathan looked for David and found him in a forest at great risk to himself. He said to David, *"Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows this!"* 1 Sam 23:17

You could imagine David running from Saul in the wilderness and getting very discouraged. David was at risk of either abandoning his call to be king or returning to the simple life of tending sheep or developing a murderous spirit of retaliation to get even with Saul. David didn't do either thanks to the encouragement of his friend Jonathan.

Jonathan knew in his heart it was only a matter of time before David would be king. Jonathan's words encouraged David and kept him on God's path. David accepted Jonathan's friendship and counsel and stayed on the path God had for him. He was patient. He did not take matters into his own hands and kill Saul, though he could have. Instead, he waited on the Lord and became king when the timing was right.

History Making Disciples help one another stay on God's path.

**Know that just as Jonathan unconditionally committed himself to David, so Jesus unconditionally commits himself to us.**

Jesus said to his disciples, *"And lo, I will never leave you or forsake you."* Matt 28:20

There are times in life when you will feel lonely, but you are not alone. Jesus promises to never leave or forsake his disciples.

At General Assembly this week we heard from church planters and missionaries and God's laborers scattered all over the globe serving Jesus. Many do so in very isolated places. Some serve in very dangerous places.

Mike Kuhn, an EPC professor at a theological seminary in Beirut, talked about the painful experience of living alongside Syrian Arab Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ, who have been driven from Syria and live as refugees on the streets in Beirut. Most have no hope of going back to their homes in Syria because of the devastation of war. Imagine the loneliness and hopelessness many of them must feel! The EPC has recently sent out missionaries to befriend Muslim refugees in different parts of Europe in order to be the pleasing aroma of Christ to people who feel cast out and alone.

We all need friendship. We all need help and support from time to time. Maybe there is someone in your life right now who needs a friend. If God showed you a person who needed a close friend, would you be willing to give up some of your time in order to be a friend?

For those of us who know Jesus, we know that he will "never leave us or forsake us." For those who do not know Jesus, they do not share that same hope. How much more difficult to feel alone in this world and not know the love of the Savior!

**Would you be willing to be a friend to someone who needs a friend?**