



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula  
3 Stanmore Bay Road,  
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.  
[www.ststephenswgp.org.nz](http://www.ststephenswgp.org.nz)

## Sermon

### ***Relationships, Promises and Covenants***

**1 Samuel 17:57 - 18:17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18**

© 2012 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

1<sup>st</sup> July 2012

How important do you think people's promises are? How meaningful is your promise? How reliable are God's promises do you think?

Today's Old Testament and Epistle readings have a common theme of covenants and promises. When we deal with anyone we have to trust them for anything which is to happen in the future. When we deal with God, that dependence on trust is elevated because we are also dealing with an unseen person. That trust is called faith. But faith only grows where there is trustworthiness. And covenants are especially strong commitments designed to help us trust the other person.

Last week, we looked at the fight between David and Goliath. As we pick up the story today it is immediately after the battle. David struck Goliath with a stone stunning him and then killed him. In the rout that followed the Israelites chased the Philistines back to their own land killing many of them. Now Saul and David meet again.

#### **Initial relationship between Saul & David**

David is well regarded by everyone. He is the hero of the hour. Saul retains him at court and we see him acting regularly as a musician to the king as well as being sent on military assignments. In every mission, David is successful.

It all looks good but very soon distrust sets in. At the end of war as they go home to their farms, the women sing the praises Saul and David. But their song exalts David high above Saul. It was on the Israeli hit parade of the day - it is referred to four times in the Bible.

Saul cannot stand more praise going to David than to him and he becomes jealous. All there is now for David is the kingdom itself, he speculates. As jealousy is given free reign and brooded over, it grows into fear and then murderous intent as he throws a spear at David not once but twice. This will be repeated later with David and with Jonathan.

We need to be watchful of the reality of our emotions. David had no designs on Saul kingdom. As we will see in future weeks, he was absolutely loyal to Saul who was God's anointed king. Yet Saul allowed lies to fill his mind and grow into toxic feelings. We have all encountered that sort of behaviour if not as intense as Saul's. People brood over hurts and they become bigger. That is why it is so important to do the work of forgiving. Jesus taught that if we were offended by a brother or sister in the church we should tell them about it so there could be forgiveness and reconciliation.

The relationship between Saul and David is complicated by public opinion and Saul's rapid abrupt mood swings. Saul had publicly offered a reward of his daughter's hand in marriage to the man who killed Goliath. As we heard he does offer David his oldest daughter. However, David refuses saying he is not worthy to marry into the king's family. Saul reckons he can get rid of David through military misadventure so sends him out repeatedly on military raids.

Soon the next daughter gets interested in David and Saul will use her as bait to provoke David into still more heroic missions in the hope that he will be rid of this inconvenient hero.

Through this stage of their relationship, David seems to be surprisingly trusting. Soon the time comes when he learns better. Even then, he retains his loyalty and determination to respect Saul's role. David thus shows integrity of character – his behaviour and standards are maintained because they are right and are not dependent on the behaviour of others. Do we do the same?

### **Reversals in Life:**

Through these events and the wider story, we see God bringing about what he has said would be - his promises always stand solid even when men try to oppose him. As Saul tries to oppose God's plan, we will see God moving through circumstances to bring it about regardless. It is the same principle that was at work when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery to get rid of him – that was the means of getting him to Egypt so he could rise to great political power. When the wife of Potiphar falsely accused Joseph it moved him into the next stage of his journey to the highest rank.

When we face opposition for the gospel, we can have confidence that somehow God is able to work his own will through it. In fact Jesus taught us to rejoice when we face persecution not because we like suffering but because God is more powerful and his will shall be done.

### **David and Jonathan**

Let's consider the relationship between Jonathan & David. Jonathan was himself a very courageous hero. Earlier, in 1 Samuel 14, we read of an exploit where he and his armour bearer together crept up on the Philistine defences, killed 20 men and caused the Philistine army to flee in terror.

After David dealt with Goliath, we hear of a covenant made between Jonathan and David. This was typical warrior covenant of the time. All warfare was hand-to-hand combat and a man needed sworn companions who would defend him and help him. In battle you defend my back and I'll defend yours. I will give my life for you; you give yours for me. If I should fall in battle, look after my family – provide for them, feed them, raise my sons.

When Helen and I were in Israel, we went on a taxi tour to the Golan Heights. The taxi driver had fought in the Six Day War. Part of the tour was a visit to a Druze village. It came out that our hostess for morning coffee was the widow of a soldier beside whom the taxi driver had fought. He had taken on responsibility to care for this man's wife and family.

There are those who wish to interpret this relationship between Jonathan and David as sexual because it speaks of their love for each other. I submit this is the product of our society's preoccupation with sex and the strong agenda held by some to justify and make acceptable the homosexual lifestyle.

The Hebrew word translated "love" here (*ahabah*) is never used of sexual love. Rather it has political and diplomatic connotations.<sup>1</sup> The force of the word relates to the depth of their covenant commitment to each other.

By way of comparison, the greatest literary work from Ancient Babylonia (the "Gilgamesh Epic") similarly refers to the relationship between warriors as love yet scholars are clear that there is no sexual aspect to it.

My father served in the Royal Artillery during the war. I remember his saying to one of his army friends, "They were great days." I could see the other man hesitate, but I knew my father meant the

---

<sup>1</sup> Arnold B.T., 2003, *The NIV Application Commentary 1 & 2 Samuel*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p413

comradeship, not the battle. How many men learnt true friendship and selfless love through the demands of that wartime service.

In 2006, I met a man at New Wine in England who had been the Heavy Weight Boxing Champion in the RN, had served in the SBS (Special Boat Service - the Naval equivalent of the SAS) and had fought behind the lines in the Malaysian campaign on six month long solo missions. I think you could say he was both brave and tough. I asked him how you teach men courage. His reply surprised me. He said, "It's love, in'it." He went on to say he had recently been to speak to SBS men in training at Portsmouth. He asked them what they really wanted in the mate alongside them when they went into battle. After they had talked about skills and strength etc, he said, "What about love?"

"None of that sissy stuff," they said.

"No," he said, "but don't you want someone who will defend you at all costs? Don't you want a mate who will risk his life for you?"

"Oh, sure, you've got to have that!"

"Well that is love," he said. As Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his friends."

Given that The Law of Moses unequivocally condemned homosexual acts, it would be incongruous for the narrator to present a homosexual relationship between these men in a positive light. The Bible does not hesitate to show the faults of God's people and indeed David himself, but here the relationship is presented in a positive, heroic light. I submit that it is obvious that the writer does not even imagine we would think of a homosexual relationship.

There is a wonderful description here of Jonathan giving David his robe, sword, bow and belt. This is part of making covenant. It is different from the offer Saul made of his armour – Saul was head & shoulders above the rest of the Israelites and even had the armour had fitted there was no time to train. Here, Jonathan was expressing an equality and inducting David as a warrior. He would now go on to train in the skills of battle.

As to the strength of this covenant between the warriors – it stood the test of time. David could be seen a threat not only to Saul's reign but also Jonathan's inheritance. But Jonathan selflessly defended David (even against his father) and David who outlived Jonathan made sure he protected and provided for Jonathan's offspring.

There is a parallel here to Jesus embracing us into the covenant. He gives us his robe (righteousness), his armour (belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit). These are his attributes which we neither earn nor desire. We are defended in our spiritual battles as we rely on his defence and his gifts to us. We also are inducted as spiritual warriors to fight spiritual battles in the ways of God.

### **Unequal yoking**

For another take on covenants and commitments let's consider the reading from 2 Corinthians.

Paul is addressing the Corinthians who lived in the midst of a strongly pagan culture. Their city had major temples devoted to the worship of various Greek gods. Paul is concerned that they are separated from pagan worship and spiritual compromise.

He uses the image of uneven yoking – harnessing different animals especially differently sized animals together into a yoke. They are unable to work well together. They will pull against each other, hurt each other, one will inevitably take all the strain.

So he says, do not take on new bonds, commitments, covenants with unbelievers - those of different spiritual allegiances. How might that apply:

Paul does not spell out the applications; he gives us a principle to apply in our circumstances. Most obviously marriage is a covenant and so a yoke. That is a good thing but it is not good for a Christian to marry a non-Christian. They have different spiritual allegiances. There will be pulling apart, and a strain. They will not be able to be in total agreement about important decisions in their life together.

Now I am not saying for a moment that if you are married to a non-Christian you should divorce. In fact, Paul himself specifically says that you should stay together as long as the non-Christian partner will tolerate the faith of the Christian. And who knows, you may lead the other to the Lord.

What Paul says is don't go into an unequal yoking. If you are in that sort of marriage and you are a strong Christian you will have struggles and heartaches over your different allegiances.

It is dangerous when young people say, they will marry and so bring the other to the Lord. This is disobedience to God's instruction and presumptuous. More often the Christian is drawn away.

For that reason, my personal position was that I would not even date a non-Christian girl, because if it developed into anything serious I would have to refuse to marry and it is better not to start a relationship which could not be allowed to mature.

Another area it can apply to is business partnerships. If you have very different allegiances there is likely to be trouble ahead and certainly a lack of unity.

Since we are talking about spiritual holiness, it is obviously essential that we avoid all participation in anything that the Lord says is immoral or of spiritual darkness. These things separate us from fellowship with the Lord.

The call is to purity of devotion to God. Paul uses five comparisons which are intended to show the utter inappropriateness of liaisons in two opposing camps. He says:

- Can righteousness and wickedness have anything in common?
- Is there any fellowship between light and darkness?
- Can there be a harmony of Christ & Belial? (Belial means "worthlessness" and was a euphemism for the Devil).
- Can the believer and unbeliever have anything in common?
- Can there be agreement between the temple of God and idols?

Not all those comparisons apply to any given liaison but some may.

We are called to be the temple of God (God's dwelling place on earth). He calls us to separation for his purposes. Separation is the basic meaning of holiness. God said repeatedly to Israel when the law was given, "You shall be holy unto me, for I, the Lord, am holy."

This separation towards him is because he comes to dwell in our lives by the Holy Spirit. If we are to experience that indwelling we need to provide a temple devoted to him not to other spiritual powers and causes.

Covenants have benefits and responsibilities. We have heard examples of the benefits we are given as well as the responsibilities that are expected of us. Let's make sure we learn from the characters of David and Jonathan rather than Saul. And ensure that we give our loyalty to God alone as we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us and work through us to his glory.