

## Greater Love Hath No Man

I remember in Grade One or Two being told the story of Wolraad Woltemade. On 1 June 1773, the sailing ship De Jonge Thomas, carrying 191 passengers, was driven ashore in a gale onto a sand bar at the mouth of the Salt River in Table Bay. The ship wasn't too far from land, but the water was cold, and the current from the Salt River too great.

Except for the very strongest swimmers, those who headed for the shore were carried out to sea. A crowd of spectators stood on the beach. Some were watching, some wanted to help, some were hoping to loot the cargo that was being washed ashore. A detachment of soldiers was there to keep order among the spectators and prevent the looting. One of the soldiers was Corporal Christian Ludwig Woltemade, the son of Wolraad Woltemade. Wolraad was around 66. He came to the beach to bring his son provisions. When he saw the pitiable state of those still clinging to the hull of the ship, he urged his horse, named Vonk, into the water. When he got to the ship, he urged some to grab onto the horse's tail, and then urged it back to land. He did this seven times, rescuing fourteen men. On his last trip out, six desperate sailors, grabbed onto the horse, causing the exhausted animal to drown, and Wolraad with him. For some years, the highest award for Citizenry bravery in South Africa was called the Woltemade Cross for Bravery.

Accounts like that in history grip us, because they illustrate the great principle of love: Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (Jn. 15:13)

One of the greatest examples of this kind of sacrificial love is the character of Jonathan. This is the last chapter of Scripture where we see Jonathan's character in detail. Jonathan does see David one more time after this when David is on the run in chapter 23, and the next time we read of him, he is dead on the battlefield with Saul, his father. It is in this chapter that we see what made Jonathan such a godly man, and such a friend to David, and why these two godly men were knit together in heart.

Jonathan is a man who gives himself up to save his friend. Jonathan is an amazing portrait of Christlike love. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (Jn. 15:13)

He was speaking of Himself.

**Joh 10:11** "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

**Joh 10:15** "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

At the heart of this kind of love is a willingness to give up your own comforts and rights and privileges, for the good of another. Paul lamented For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. (Phil. 2:21)

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (Phil. 2:4). And then His example was the Lord Jesus Himself: 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

This is the kind of love we all wish to experience. We want to be loved selflessly. But it is also the kind of love we should wish to have and show for others. In Christ, this is true and possible. He loves us like this, and then calls on us to love in this way.

This kind of Christlike, protective, sacrificial love is seen in Jonathan's protection of David. Here we will meet a man who was protective and sacrificial in his heart, his plans, his actions, and his sacrifice. 1 Samuel 20 is a picture of gospel-love: protective, and sacrificial.

## I. Jonathan's Protective Heart

**1 Samuel 20:1** Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and went and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What *is* my iniquity, and what *is* my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?"

2 So Jonathan said to him, "By no means! You shall not die! Indeed, my father will do nothing either great or small without first telling me. And why should my father hide this thing from me? It *is* not so!"

3 Then David took an oath again, and said, "Your father certainly knows that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.' But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, *there is* but a step between me and death."

4 So Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you yourself desire, I will do *it* for you." 5 And David said to Jonathan, "Indeed tomorrow *is* the New Moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field until the third *day* at evening.

6 "If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked *permission* of me that he might run over to Bethlehem, his city, for *there is* a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.' 7 "If he says thus: '*It is well,*' your servant will be safe. But if he is very angry, *then* be sure that evil is determined by him.

8 "Therefore you shall deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. Nevertheless, if there is iniquity in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?"

9 But Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! For if I knew certainly that evil was determined by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you?"

10 Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me, or what *if* your father answers you roughly?"

David leaves Samuel in Ramah, and makes his way back to the capital city, Gibeah, and secretly finds Jonathan. With great respect, knowing how it will hurt Jonathan, David tells Jonathan that Saul is still trying to kill him.

You can see in Jonathan here his protective heart. He always wants to believe the best about others, and assume their innocence. Here he assumes that his father's anger with David had been solved by his intercession in the last chapter, and cannot believe that Saul has gone behind his back and is still after David. Jonathan mistakenly thought that his own relationship to his father was closer than it really was. He thought his father would tell him everything. But he was wrong.

But he is also willing to be persuaded, if David can show him that he is actually in danger.

It's a great sign of a protective heart, that they will believe the best about others until persuaded otherwise. Suspicious people, cynical people are usually only self-protective. They care only about their own interests, which is why they always posture as the persecuted victim. With them, everyone else is guilty until proven innocent. Those people will smile at you today and tear you to shreds when your back is turned. A friend like Jonathan attempts to believe the best about others, even his father, until shown by evidence that he is wrong.

Jonathan loves his friend, and loves his father. Who should he believe?

So David suggests a test. The test is simple. To mark the beginning of every month, a special feast would be held, and all the king's close advisors were supposed to be there. David plans to hide for three days. It isn't exactly clear if David is lying and wants Jonathan to lie for him. He will lie to the priests in the next chapter and deceive the Philistines. But it was actually possible for David to go to Bethlehem and be back in three days. He did hide in the field, but the text isn't clear if that's all he did- three days is a long time to hide in a field.

David knows that his absence will provoke a reaction in Saul. If Saul accepts the excuse that David had a family engagement in Bethlehem, then Saul isn't bothered or threatened by David, and David is safe. If Saul gets angry, then obviously he is threatened by David, and mistrusts his every move, and David is in real danger.

David even asks Jonathan to execute him, if he is guilty of some capital sin, rather than letting Saul capture him. But Jonathan promises to protect David if he knows Saul is unfairly persecuting him. Jonathan has a protective heart. He is protecting his father's reputation as far as he can, and protecting David's life as far as he can.

How Christ wishes to protect His loved ones. He said of His love for Jerusalem: 34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings, but you were not willing! (Lk. 13:34)

It is in God's heart to protect His people.

There is one problem in David's plan. If Saul really is hunting David down, how can Jonathan let him know, without coming out of hiding and being exposed to real danger? That brings us to

## II. Jonathan's Protective Plan

11 And Jonathan said to David, "Come, and let us go out into the field." So both of them went out into the field. 12 Then Jonathan said to David: "The LORD God of Israel *is witness!* When I have sounded out my father sometime tomorrow, *or* the third *day*, and indeed *there is* good toward David, and I do not send to you and tell you, 13 "may the LORD do so and much more to Jonathan. But if it pleases my father *to do* you evil, then I will report it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And the LORD be with you as He has been with my father. 14 "And you shall not only show me the kindness of the LORD while I still live, that I may not die; 15 "but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the LORD has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."

16 So Jonathan made *a covenant* with the house of David, *saying*, "Let the LORD require *it* at the hand of David's enemies."

17 Now Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

18 Then Jonathan said to David, "Tomorrow *is* the New Moon; and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. 19 "And *when* you have stayed three days, go down quickly and come to the place where you hid on the day of the deed; and remain by the stone Ezel. 20 "Then I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target; 21 "and there I will send a lad, *saying*, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I expressly say to him, 'Look, the arrows *are* on this side of you; get them and come'-- then, as the LORD lives, *there is* safety for you and no harm. 22 "But if I say thus to the young man, 'Look, the arrows *are* beyond you'-- go your way, for the LORD has sent you away. 23 "And as for the matter which you and I have spoken of, indeed the LORD *be* between you and me forever."

Jonathan has a simple way to indicate to David that he is in danger. Whether David is hiding or whether he actually makes a quick trip to Bethlehem, after three days Jonathan will come to that field and pretend to do archery practice with a boy assistant. He will shoot and the boy will collect the arrows. If he says, "the arrows have landed before where you're standing", then David is safe and can come back. If he says, "the arrows are beyond where you are standing", then David is in danger. Apparently, the lad was supposed to just stand in the middle of the target range and hope that Jonathan shot too short or too far!

This was a protective plan that allowed David to be warned without being exposed. If Saul's spies were watching Jonathan, they would not have understood what was happening.

But all of this is rooted in a deeper protective plan, which is the covenant that David and Jonathan had made back in chapter 18. In verses 14-17, they renew that covenant: when David becomes king, Jonathan will serve him, and David will be kind to Jonathan's children and descendants, just as Jonathan will be kind to David and his descendants.

This is what covenants do: they bind the parties to be good and kind to the other. Amazingly, in the Bible, God makes covenants with His people, binding Himself to save them, protect them and preserve them. In the Abrahamic covenant, God promised land, seed, and blessing to His people, a covenant which is for the Jewish people, but now includes all those who accept the Seed of Abraham – Jesus. In the Davidic covenant, God promised a kingdom and a throne to the descendant of David, the Messiah, a kingdom that God's people get to be a part of. And in the new covenant, God promises a new heart, forgiveness and cleansing to all those who receive Messiah.

Jonathan's protective heart and protective plan now becomes a protective action.

### III. Jonathan's Protective Action

24 Then David hid in the field. And when the New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat the feast.

25 Now the king sat on his seat, as at other times, on a seat by the wall. And Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty. 26 Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him; he *is* unclean, surely he *is* unclean."

27 And it happened the next day, the second *day* of the month, that David's place was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to eat, either yesterday or today?" 28 So Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked *permission* of me *to go* to Bethlehem. 29 "And he said, 'Please let me go, for our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me *to be there*. And now, if I have found favor in your eyes, please let me get away and see my brothers.' Therefore he has not come to the king's table."

30 Then Saul's anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious *woman*! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? 31 "For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die."

32 And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be killed? What has he done?"

33 Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David.

34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully.

On day one of the feast, Saul is sitting with his back to the wall, probably fearing assassination attempts. Saul does not want to give away the fact that he is eyeing David, so he hopes it is just a ritual purity matter. These feasts were primarily feasts of meat from the new moon fellowship offerings. Anyone ceremonially unclean was prohibited from participating (Lev. 7:20–21). That could come through a variety of ways, including touching something unclean. If unclean, a person had to separate himself from other people for that day, bathe his body, and change clothes, and he could come back into society the next day.

So when David doesn't come on the second day, Saul asks Jonathan. Jonathan gives the story about David being called away by his brothers to Bethlehem. He is protecting David with this excuse.

But Saul sees through it. Whether or not he believes that David is in Bethlehem, he senses that David has told Jonathan what his father has done, and he senses that Jonathan has chosen David over his own throne. He recognises that their friendship has become more important to Jonathan than protecting the family throne.

When Saul says, "'You son of a perverse, rebellious *woman*! " he is actually disparaging Jonathan in the worst way. He is implying that Jonathan's treachery in befriending David proved that he was not Saul's son at all. He was actually the son of some other man, for a son of Saul would never betray his father. Saul was saying that Jonathan's action was shaming his mother and revealing that she was a common prostitute, someone who practised perversion. Warren Wiersbe: "Because Jonathan helped David and didn't protect his father's throne, he had shamed his mother as much as

if he had exposed her nakedness. She bore him to be the successor to his father, and now Jonathan had refused the crown in favor of the son of Jesse. The king was shouting, "You are no son of mine! You must be illegitimate!"

And now, no longer hiding his motives from Jonathan, Saul now demands that Jonathan join him in defending the throne and bringing David to be executed.

Jonathan, the protector not only of David but of justice itself, asks, "Why should he be killed? What law has he broken?" In other words, if this is capital punishment, what is the crime? But this is not capital punishment. This is just political assassination, orchestrated murder. Now Jonathan is protecting David against Saul's vile attacks.

F.B. Meyer: "Never be ashamed to own a friend. Do not count him your friend whose name you are ashamed to mention, and with whose lot you blush to be identified; but when you have entered into an alliance with another soul, whom you love as Jonathan loved David, dare to stand up for him at all cost to your comfort and relations, with those who do not know your friend as you know him."

And when Jonathan calls his father on this, Saul's rage turns on his own son, and casts a spear at Jonathan himself. Jonathan has now dodged a spear for David, and knows that his covenant with David is putting his own life on the line. He is furious at his father for his sinful treatment of David, and for his shameful treatment of him.

Meyer says "But there is something still nobler, when one dares in any company to avow his loyalty to the Lord Jesus. Like David, He is now in obscurity and disrepute; his name is not popular; his gospel is misrepresented; his followers are subjected to rebuke and scorn. These are days when to stand up for anything more than mere conventional religion must cost something; and for this very reason, let us never flinch, but as we trust that He will confess our name before his Father and the angels, let us not be ashamed of his. Jonathan's arrows showed that he did not hesitate to stand alone for David; let our words assure Him, who is just now hidden, that we will bear scorn, ..., and death, for his dear name."

Christ was not ashamed of us, when He protected us on the Cross, bearing our shame. The hymn says

Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea  
A great High Priest, whose name is Love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me  
My name is graven on His hands  
My name is written on His heart  
I know that while in heaven He stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart

If like Jonathan with David, Jesus is not ashamed of us, to own us and protect us, why would we be ashamed of Him?

Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend  
on whom my hopes of heaven depend!  
No; when I blush, be this my shame,  
that I no more revere his Name.

Ashamed of Jesus! empty pride!  
I'll boast a Savior crucified,  
and O may this my portion be,  
my Savior not ashamed of me!

Jonathan protected his friend in his heart, in his plans, in his actions. But finally, to protect David, Jonathan had to give things up.

#### **IV. Jonathan's Protective Sacrifice**

35 And so it was, in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad was with him. 36 Then he said to his lad, "Now run, find the arrows which I shoot." As the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. 37 When the lad had come to the place where the arrow was which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried out after the lad and said, "Is not the arrow beyond you?"

38 And Jonathan cried out after the lad, "Make haste, hurry, do not delay!" So Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows and came back to his master.

39 But the lad did not know anything. Only Jonathan and David knew of the matter. 40 Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad, and said to him, "Go, carry *them* to the city." 41 As soon as the lad had gone, David arose from a place toward the south, fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times. And they kissed one another; and they wept together, but David more so. 42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the LORD, saying, 'May the LORD be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.'" So he arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city. (1 Sam. 20:1-42)

Jonathan carries out his plan, shooting arrows beyond the boy, signaling to David that he is in danger. But then, unable to send David off without a final goodbye, Jonathan dismisses the boy, and then knows he has a few dangerous moments to say goodbye to his friend.

This is a broken-hearted goodbye. Why? Because they both know that the only way they will ever be friends again in each other's presence would be if Saul's death or some civil war has brought David to the throne. And the chances are, Jonathan will die in that war, or David will. They know that the pain of being divided by opposing loyalties now means their friendship is at an end.

And this friendship will likely cost Jonathan his life. He will fight alongside his father against Israel's enemies, but he will not fight David.

He has given up his throne symbolically in his covenant with David.

He has given up preserving his father's dynasty, and knows it may further split his home. He lives up to his family responsibilities, but has chosen to place his loyalty in David, rather than in his own natural family.

He does this out of sacrificial love, and through much grief.

Jonathan gave up his throne, his title, his own safety for the good of his friend.

What did our Lord give up to protect us?

6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:6-8)

Of course, we don't protect the Lord Jesus, but if we are in a covenant with Him, then our loyalty to

Him means we also give up what we must.

35 "For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law"; 36 "and a man's enemies *will be* those of his *own* household.' 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (Matt. 10:35-37)

Jonathan is a living example of this kind of love, ultimately seen perfectly in the Lord Jesus. Protective, self-sacrificial. 13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (Jn. 15:13)

And then Jesus tells us “ 34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (Jn. 13:34)