

The King who Divides

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Preacher: Drew Kennedy

[0 : 00] Evening. Good to see you all here tonight. Today, this evening, we'll be reading from 1 Samuel 20. I've entitled this sermon, The King Who Divides, so it's another episode in the life of Saul and David.

So the new year isn't all that old yet. In 2018 saw the close of the commemoration of the centenary of the end of the First World War. Here are the kings on the three major powers that were in the First World War.

So this was obviously a major division that caused massive loss of life and suffering all through Europe. They were really thinking about last year. And the interesting thing about these three men is that they're all cousins.

All these kings that were formed up against each other and took their country to war against each other were related. They were all cousins. King George, Kaiser Bill, or Kaiser Wilhelm, I should say, and Tsar Nicholas of Russia were all cousins related through their grandmother, Queen Victoria, who acquired the nickname, the Mother of Europe, because many of the monarchs of the time in Europe were descended from Queen Victoria.

And the reason I thought of this and this division and this conflict was division is the big theme of this passage tonight. The division we'll see here is not because of an argument in this sense or a sort of family dispute because of something like the First World War.

[1 : 33] It's because one person is God's chosen king, David, and the other, Saul, is rejected. So this division is based on each one's obedience or disobedience to God's will.

Up until this point previously in the life of David and Saul, we've seen the slow demise and decline of Saul. We see how he's completely self-absorbed and only getting worse.

He's so intent on retaining the kingship, he'll ignore God and his will by trying to kill God's anointed king. So this chapter is just another incident that shows how far Saul has come on his journey, how far Saul has left good sense and God's will.

And all through this process of being chased and abused by Saul, how David has obeyed God and the king, the king that's trying to kill him, even though he knows he is the rightful king.

So, a faithful friend from verses 1 to 23. If you'll join me in looking at verse 1 of the passage, we read and see that David has fled from Niath at Ramah, where Saul chased him to.

[2 : 48] He's come to seek out Jonathan, King Saul's son, to ask him a question and seek his help. David asked Jonathan in the second part of this verse that we've read, What have I done? What is my crime?

How have I wronged your father that he is trying to kill me? So David has come before Jonathan and potentially put himself in danger. Jonathan is Saul's son and may show loyalty to his father Saul by betraying David or killing himself.

But Jonathan replies in verse 2, You are not going to die. So Jonathan is not going to betray or harm David. And then in verse 4, reveals to us Jonathan's heart and mind where David is concerned.

He says to David, Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you. Which is remarkable. It's mind-blowing. David has come to Jonathan seeking his help.

David is the inferior and Jonathan the superior. David is an important man in the kingdom, an army commander and the king's son-in-law, but still not as important as Jonathan.

[4 : 02] Jonathan is like Prince Charles here. He's like the Prince of Wales of Israel. So when he says to David his inferior who is running for his life, they will do whatever he can to help him.

Jonathan asks, as I've said, as a faithful friend to David. He puts himself under his inferior, at his command, because he recognises David as God's true king, as his true king.

Even in spite of who he is, and that his father is currently on the throne, during this chapter, Jonathan behaves as a faithful friend to David, the true king.

And then going down to the next verse, verse 5, and if you'll look there, in verse 5, so David said, look, tomorrow is the new moon feast, and I'm supposed to dine with the king, but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow.

So David is devising this plan to sound out Saul's intentions and see what he means to do to him, and also to convince Jonathan that his father is out to get him.

[5 : 13] So David was an important attendant of King Saul by this point. He was expected to be at this new moon feast, to be at this new moon festival. So with his absence, David will be able to tell, along with Jonathan, what Saul intends to do, without a shadow of a doubt, what he wants to do to David.

At the end of the plan, in verse 8, David invokes the covenant they had sworn between them two chapters before in chapter 18. A covenant just being a sworn, holy, sacred agreement between two parties promising faithful, loving kindness.

So a modern day example of a covenant would be marriage. Obviously in marriage, two people promise themselves to forsake all others, all others in front of witnesses.

So David and Jonathan have a sworn covenant much like this, between them, but with God as their witness. And in verse 8, when it says, as for you, show kindness to your servant.

That word kindness, although the NIV, the New International Version, translates that word as kindness, a better translation of that word kindness there would be faithful, loving kindness.

[6 : 34] So kindness is part of it, but it doesn't fully cover the breadth and depth of this word in the original Hebrew. It has to be built in mutual love for each other, to be bound up with loyalty and friendship.

And then from verses 12 to 23, this covenant is renewed and extended beyond David and Jonathan to their descendants as well. And if you look with me at the end of verse 13, it says, may the Lord be with you as he has been with my father.

So Jonathan is in this conversation with David. He's standing before him and by saying that he's saying, the Lord's favour has been withdrawn from my father. And it's been given to you.

Along with the Lord's favour, he has also given David the kingdom. He's also given you the kingdom. So Jonathan is acknowledging here David's rightful place as king and his rightful place as a humble subject of God's king.

And then Jonathan then goes on to say in the next verse, verse 14, if you look there. Do not ever cut off your kindness from my family.

[7 : 50] So he's saying here, you're the king, your line will be established over mine and my line will serve yours. Totally relinquishing his status, importance and position to serve God's king and to do God's will over his own.

And then David goes on to reaffirm his oath to Jonathan and his descendants. This chapter is a hard one to wrap our heads around as we've sort of said and thought about.

It took me ages and I initially sort of got it wrong. However, it has a really valuable lesson for us all and the lesson is learned from how Jonathan conducts himself and what he says in this passage.

Jonathan is faced with God's anointed king, the man that God has said will reign after his father.

The man that will take his place as the next king and it would be understandable from our sinful position and our sinful point of view if Jonathan had acted like Saul, if Jonathan had opposed David and tried to kill him like Saul did.

However, he doesn't. When confronted with the choice between arrogant rebellion and humble obedience, Jonathan chose wisely and took the rightful place as the humble servant of God's anointed king.

[9 : 18] king, we also face that same choice every day. We are faced with making a decision about our king, Jesus, our true king.

Just like David divided Jonathan and Saul, if you look at the screen I've put up a New Testament passage, look chapter 14, 25 to 27 if you turn there in your Bibles, we read about a similar division caused by our king, the Lord Jesus.

I'm just going to read this now for us. Large crowds were travelling with Jesus and turning to them he said, if anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple and whoever does not

carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Don't misunderstand the house for not being Christians and our faith should cause us to argue with people unnecessarily about small issues and small things.

In fact, they should give us more love and concern for our family and our friends, so I'm not saying that, so don't go on the phone to anyone when you get back or send out any rash emails. And if you do, it wasn't me telling you to do that.

[10:47] However, we need to know that the Lord Jesus acknowledged that the Christian's faith in him and love for him is going to cause us to be at odds with society, to be at odds with our culture and to be at odds with people within it.

It will lead us to being drawn into conflict at times with people we know in various different contexts, in our workplaces, in our schools, universities, and our colleges, socially, and where we meet other people or friends.

So we shouldn't look for conflict or argument with our loved ones or anyone else. people. But let's be aware that this division does exist in the Christian's life and in this modern day and it's important that we respond correctly to the Lord Jesus.

Respond in faith and obedience. If we don't respond in faith and obedience, then we will find ourselves rejecting the king, which will look different for the people who do.

It's not going to look like this in this passage. No one here is going to throw any spears at you or anything like that. So it probably won't look like this, but it will end up, like Saul, frustrated and unfulfilled.

[12:10] And worst of all, each person is going to meet our king Jesus. And if we've rejected him in life and been on the wrong side of this division, then he will reject us in time.

So we need to be on the right side of the division. like Jonathan and learn from Saul and his side of division and his reaction to the king. And that leads me on to my next point.

So a spiteful king from verses 24 to 42. And if you look at me, look at me, look at me, but certainly as well look at verses 30 to 31.

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 to the shame of the mother who bore you?

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

[13:15] So we see in these verses the extent of Saul's decline. He has steadily departed from all good sins. Jonathan has just told his father, Saul, that David will not be present at the new moon feast with the king for the celebration and feasting.

David had said to Jonathan, if Saul is calm when you tell him this, then I'm safe and the king doesn't want my life. And if Saul becomes angry that he and David will be absent from the celebration, then Saul does mean David's harm and he does want to kill him.

So this is confirmed here. He does indeed want to kill him. So let's, I'm going to move on and pick some of this apart so we can understand it a bit better and see the extent of Saul's thinking about David and Jonathan and really reveal his heart in all this.

So you son of a perverse and rebellious woman. This insult is directed at Jonathan rather than his mother as it says, meaning that he's a disobedient son and he should be ashamed of how he has endangered his birthright and turned his back and betrayed his father the king.

Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? When he says that don't I know, you can almost hear the contempt and disgust in his voice.

[14:46] Here he's saying he's either been told of the covenant between David and Jonathan or that he's been put together the pieces of the puzzle and worked out and how Jonathan and David treat each other and conduct our friendship.

You have sided with the son of Jesse. Here is Saul drawing a division all of his own making between him and David. There's no need for this but he does it anyway and he's saying to Jonathan you have sided, you've chosen the wrong side, you have to be loyal to me, I'm the king, I'm your father.

When actually Saul should be on the same side as Jonathan supporting David rather than trying to kill him, acknowledging him as king as opposed to chasing him all over the country.

And in this verse when I've underlined the son of Jesse, this is another insult Saul throws at David. Saul hates David so much he will not even call him by name.

Almost trying to take David's accomplishments and fame from him by invalidating his name and refusing to speak it. He calls David this twice as well in verse 31.

[16:02] where he calls for Jonathan to betray David and bring him to Saul so he can kill him. Sighting that Jonathan and his claim to the kingdom will not come to fruition as long as David is alive.

Jonathan realises that's not true. Saul however thinks that he will be able to get rid of David and secure his fame and glory. So let's not be confused.

Although Saul speaks to Jonathan and uses the language of Jonathan inheriting the kingdom from Saul Saul is in fact only concerned with himself.

Saul loved the adulation of the people and the fame it brought and when David received more praise and more honour from the people than Saul did that began to turn Saul against David and now we see Saul for what he really is.

A spiteful king willing to do anything to hang on to power and fame and glory. In verse 33 it goes on to confirm this thinking even further that Saul is only concerned with himself.

[17:12] So in verse 33 if you look there now Saul flies into a seething rage with Jonathan. So verse 33 says but Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

So Saul throws his spear at his own son Jonathan at the start of verse 33 but not just to kill him it's not just that he wants to kill him and murder him he specifically tries to kill him the exact same way he tried to kill David earlier in the story.

He thinks so little of Jonathan this humble servant hearted man that he will try and kill him in the same way he tried to kill his supposedly great enemy David and just the fact that he tries to kill his own son and all this is shocking and then the end of verse 33 is Jonathan's realisation that yes Saul my father the king is indeed trying to kill David.

And you can almost feel and hear the remorse in Jonathan's voice as he comes to that realisation that Saul his father the king is trying to kill his friend and this friend is God's chosen king for God's chosen people.

David's been chosen for a very important and special task to steward God's nation Israel as king. Saul had been chosen for the same job and he'd blown it basically.

[18:53] Rather than being a servant-hearted king like God commanded and God laid out in his law Saul was proud and used the kingship to aggrandise himself with fame and glory and honour at the expense of God often forgetting God and neglecting God's fame and glory over his own.

And in verse 34 Jonathan leaves the king's presence and is ashamed of how Saul has treated David. For two reasons. Because David is Jonathan's friend and because David is God's king and Saul is not just sinning against David but against God as well.

And then continuing in verse 41 David and Jonathan meet each other once again after Jonathan has used the code of the arrows to communicate that Saul does indeed want to kill David.

And this is hard to hear for the two friends. Hard because now they must part. Hard because Saul will seemingly stop at nothing to kill David. And hard because the current king of God's people is very quickly going off the rails.

Just like any time you have to say goodbye to a friend you know you won't see again for a long time because they live abroad or they have such a busy lifestyle it's hard to meet them.

[20:20] It's hard and painful for Saul and David here. And Saul is very quickly descending into madness and violence. Consumed by his own importance, his fame and the legend that he has actually started to believe about himself.

He's forgotten the days when he like David was an ordinary Israelite and that God also picked him for the task. God doesn't work like men and his throne is not to be controlled as Saul is trying to. That just because Saul sits on the throne that his descendants will as well is an assumption that Saul is working on. Even though Samuel has told Saul the opposite of that.

And moving on to the last verse in the passage, verse 42, if you'll look there with me. Jonathan said to David, go in peace for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, the Lord has witnessed between you and me and between your descendants and my descendants forever.

Then David left and Jonathan went back to the town. Jonathan sends David away as he said he would if his father Saul wanted to kill him.

[21 : 41] Citing their sworn friendship with God as our witness, this covenant between them and also between their houses in the future. Jonathan once again pledging his loyalty to David and the loyalty of his descendants after him to David and his descendants for all time.

As we saw in this chapter, David is a king who divides opinion, splitting Saul from Jonathan. he divides father and son.

And Saul unfortunately finds himself on the wrong side of this division. He finds himself not just set against Jonathan and against David, but most importantly set against God, set against God's will, set against God's king.

Saul is hard-hearted and refuses to accept, believe, and act appropriately in the face of a clear and direct word of God.

Instead of bowing to this, Saul continues to rage and tries to help Jonathan in the process. Saul by this point is completely caught up in his own fame and ambition.

[22 : 55] And we face the same division which I had mentioned earlier. the division between our reaction to the king. Not King David like in the chapter, but our far greater king, King Jesus.

And in those verses we looked at from the New Testament, from Luke chapter 14, 25 to 27, Jesus says that he will divide families, relatives and friends.

One side of that division is with Jesus and the other against him. and the people who are with him. This is the only true division in life. All the time in the news we're hearing about other divisions and hostility between people over in America, between Donald Trump and his supporters and the people that oppose him.

Over here, Brexit, with people who want to stay in the EU and people who want to leave. And even in Scotland, between those who want independence and those who want to stay as part of the United Kingdom and countless more we can think of, such as World War I or any other number of ones from the past or from the present.

However, none of these divisions that I've mentioned deserve as much attention as the division we're discussing here tonight, because this is a life and death scenario, i.e.

[24 : 22] everlasting life or everlasting punishment. If we are with Jesus, then we are safe and our future is secure.

We will be welcomed by Jesus and be given a glorious inheritance. And if we are on the opposite side of this division, then you are in great danger.

no one knows when their life is at an end. If we die without receiving forgiveness for our sins from Jesus, then we will find ourselves eternally separated from Jesus and eternally on the wrong side of this much greater division.

And we will be trapped on the wrong side of this division. to go back to the First World War, Roger Kipling, a favourite and a famous author from that time, wrote in a national newspaper at the time in an effort to drum up national pride and patriotic fervour for the war effort.

However the world pretends to divide itself, there are only two divisions in the world today. Human beings and Germans I don't agree with that.

[25 : 40] Don't take that home with you either. But even in the terrible days of the First World War and all the suffering and inhumanity, that assertion there is incorrect.

And whatever other division we would think about today that I've mentioned is incorrect. Despite what was going on at the time and people's feelings and the war and all that, there was only ever been this one divide we have spoken about here this evening.

The divide between Christians and non-Christians. Those who have been forgiven of their sins by the Lord Jesus and those who have not. If you're here tonight as a Christian, again, you're on the correct side of this division and you are secure.

If you're here this evening as a non-Christian, however, then you are on the wrong side of this division from God and from Jesus and need to come to Jesus and ask for forgiveness and shelter as well.

Let's just pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and what we have read here tonight.

[26 : 55] we thank you that you have sent the Lord Jesus to bring us over this divide to yourself, Heavenly Father, that although we are sinners, we can have this forgiveness and cross this divide and be secure in the knowledge that when the Lord Jesus returns again, that we will be on the right

side of this division and we will be welcomed and we will not be rejected.

Heavenly Father, we just pray that you will help us to think in these things and think in your word in this week to come and think of this division and where we are in regards to it.

And we ask this all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.