

# A Firm Friend and a Ferocious Foe

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Preacher: Ian Naismith

[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening everyone. For those who don't know me, my name's Ian. Thank you very much to Gary and to everyone else who has taken us through the service so far. We have a very long passage to look at this evening and hopefully we can make a little bit of sense of it.

There are some people who really polarise opinion. You either love them or you really hate them. So here's a classic example, President Trump. Among the many news stories about President Trump this week, there was one, there was a survey done of some academics in America, apparently across the political spectrum, rating all the presidents of the United States.

They rate them a range of factors, came up with a score out of 100. At the top was Abraham Lincoln, who got 95, Washington just below and then down you went. And right at the bottom, 44th out of 44, Donald Trump with 12 points.

So a lot of people don't think much of Donald Trump. On the other hand, if you were to go to some of the states in the USA, there would be people there who would tell you Donald Trump is probably the best president they've ever had.

He's the one who's made America great again by putting America first and so on. Someone who really polarises opinion and some people think he's terrible and some people think he's really good.

[ 1 : 14 ] Don't have to go across the states to see that kind of thing. Jeremy Corbyn, is he the man who's put principle back into British politics or is he actually just a weak and indecisive leader who is dangerous for the country?

Other side of the spectrum, Nigel Farage. Is he the man who has set Britain on the way to greatness again by prompting our exit from the EU or is he someone who's destroying the country?

And even now, quite a number of years after her death, Margaret Thatcher. Some would say she's the greatest prime minister the country's ever had. Others would say that she's the person who's done more than anyone else to make inequality and division in our country.

People who almost everyone will have quite a strong opinion on, but that opinion will be very different depending on your perspective. Well, tonight as we're looking at David, we see someone else who polarised opinion.

Most people absolutely love David, at least at this stage in his life. As we read through chapter 18, we find that Jonathan loved him. We find that his soldiers were really pleased when he was promoted in the army.

[ 2 : 28 ] We find that the women were out dancing and singing his praises. We find that Michal, Saul's daughter, fell in love with him. We find that the whole of Israel and Judah loved him.

Someone who had great popularity and there was one person who took totally the opposite view. Saul came to absolutely hate him. And so it was the many against the one, at least at this stage in David's life, but very much polarised.

Most people thought David was great. Paul thought, Saul thought that he was a big threat and he wanted nothing to do with him. So what I want to look at this evening is a bit of that and just to think through these chapters.

We're going to do another of these three headings. They'll broadly take us through the two chapters. I'm not going to do it necessarily totally sequentially, but they'll broadly take us through the two chapters. We're going to think of David, particularly his relationship with Jonathan and with Saul.

We're then going to think about Saul. Why was it that Saul got such a hatred against David that he was determined to kill him? And this is very much the backdrop to the rest of Samuel. Quite a number of chapters to go.

[ 3 : 36 ] They're all about Saul trying to kill David and David on the run. And then we'll say, well, why is it that despite all Saul was trying to do, David escaped and indeed his status grew?

Lady Lack of Providential Plan. I'm sure you can guess the answer to that one, but we'll look a bit at it at the end. So these are the three main headings that will take over the next 20 minutes or so as we think about David.

So let's begin at the beginning of chapter 18 and we have David has come back from battle. We had last week Neil took us through chapter 17 and David's great triumph in slaying Goliath.

David's coming back and he meets Jonathan and they instantly click. Nothing romantic about anything, that kind of thing. It's just they become really best mates for the rest of their lives.

They think the world of each other and they make a covenant with one another. You may have seen pictures of David and Jonathan that look something like this. Two young lads together.

[ 4 : 41 ] That probably isn't right. It looks as if Jonathan was significantly older than David. I saw one person to Jess that Jonathan might be as much as 27 years older than David.

I think that's probably pushing it a bit, but certainly could have been 20 years older than David. So it's a young man in his late teens, early 20s and it's a man in middle age. And yet they develop this very strong friendship because Jonathan looks at David and he sees that David is the one who is bringing about God's will.

And he sees also that David is the one who deserves to be the king. And so in the early verses of chapter 18, we have this story of how Jonathan took off his robe and gave his sword and so on to David.

And that was a symbolic action. That was what they might have called a covenant action. It was Jonathan saying, That's quite a remarkable thing.

Jonathan, who in the normal course of events would have expected to succeed King Saul as Prince Charles expects to succeed our queen in due course. He was saying, I recognise here someone who is more worthy than me to be the king, the one who has been called by God.

[ 6 : 12 ] And I want to submit to him and make a covenant that I will serve him. When you think about it, Jonathan in many ways had a lot more to lose than Saul did through this.

Saul would have been a relatively old man at this point, certainly probably into his 60s if not beyond, which would be quite old in those days. And I hadn't that much longer to live.

And there was no immediate threat to him from David, really. But Jonathan was saying, I am renouncing my claim to the throne. And what a contrast that is with Saul.

We'll look at Saul in a bit more detail in a minute. But Saul clearly wanted to cling on to the throne that he had. He saw David as a threat. And that influenced his actions for the rest of his life.

And actually effectively ruined the rest of his life because he was all taken up with trying to kill David. And not being able to do anything constructive or to think in any kind of positive way.

[ 7 : 16 ] And so David, the man, he divided this family. Michal will look at it a bit later on. And also she came to love David Saul's daughter. It was a family where one man hated him and others in the family loved him.

He was someone who polarised people's views. Who else polarises views? Well, above all, the Lord Jesus does.

Here are his words from Luke chapter 12. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other. Three against two. And two against three.

And as we look in our world, perhaps even as we look in our families, as we look round about us, we can see the truth of Jesus' words. There is no one in history who has been so loved by so many.

But equally, there is no one in history who has been so hated by so many. He came in the knowledge that he would divide people, that he would, even within families, see different reactions to him.

[ 8 : 24 ] And it's important that we recognise that and remember that. As we seek to live for the Lord, as we seek to witness for him, we will see lots of different reactions.

And it may be people in very similar circumstances will have completely opposite reactions. We shouldn't be surprised, even in our own families, if there are some people brought up in a very similar kind of way.

And we say to all intents and purposes, they've had the same opportunities. And yet some choose to follow the Lord Jesus and to live for him. And some choose to move away and not to trust and to follow the Lord.

Now we must pray, continue to pray and never give up praying for those who make that decision. But it shouldn't surprise us because that is how things always have been.

And it's only by the grace of God that Jonathan or any of us have come to that love of God. And we have come to the love of the Lord Jesus because he in his grace has called us and brought us to know him and to love him.

[ 9 : 32 ] He is someone who divides, who divides as no one else ever has. So David similarly was a man and there's a picture of the Lord Jesus who brought division even within families.

The second thing we want to look at was Saul. Was Saul mad or bad? That's a bit of a bold way of putting it, but it's a good enough heading. If Saul had been alive today, if Saul had been king of our country, he would have been diagnosed undoubtedly with some kind of mental illness.

I've seen paranoid schizophrenia suggested as perhaps what Saul's medical problem was. But the Bible is more concerned with a spiritual problem.

And the Bible has already identified for us in Samuel that Saul has made choices which were bad ones. He has done things which were in disobedience to God's command and to God's will revealed through Samuel.

And because of that, he had been rejected as king. And most importantly, God's spirit had been removed from him. The spirit was now with David as God's new anointed one.

[ 10 : 45 ] And as Saul goes on and has lost the spirit and he says he has an evil spirit, perhaps that is an evil spirit from God. Perhaps that is similar to the situation we talk about with Pharaoh where it says he hardened his heart and then God hardened his heart.

Perhaps similarly with Saul. Saul disobeyed God and then God let him go down the course that he had chosen for himself. But for Saul, it's a very slippery slope that he's on.

And he has a great jealousy for David. It seems to have been brought on particularly by this song that the woman sang at the court of chapter 18.

Talking about Saul slaying thousands and David tens of thousands. Now both of these descriptions undoubtedly were hyperbole. They were exaggerations. And actually the woman may have meant nothing by it.

It was just poetry and the fact that it said more for David than for Saul may not have had great significance. But it was very important to Saul. Saul felt that his authority was stepping away.

[ 11 : 50 ] Someone else was seen as being ahead of him. And so Saul was very jealous of David. Saul was jealous of David because of his success.

Because of the adulation that he was getting from the woman. He was jealous of David because he felt that David was a threat to him.

And he was jealous or perhaps envious is right. But he was envious of David because David had God's spirit and Saul didn't. And that jealousy and envy really got to Saul and it ate away at him.

And it was accompanied by fear. Three times in chapter 18 it talks about Saul being afraid of David. And he was afraid of David because the Lord was with David.

The Spirit of God had left Saul and was with David now. And Saul realised that that meant that David was God's chosen anointed one. And because of that Saul was afraid of David.

[ 13 : 00 ] And that fear turns into hatred. Three times again we can see very easily Saul's hatred of David and demonstration of it. As he tries to pin David to the wall with his spear.

As he sends him out to attack the Philistines but actually trying to get him killed. Thinking well sometime some Philistine arrow's got to get him and I'll get rid of him in that kind of way.

Saul really hated David and he wanted him dead. And his jealousy had given way to fear and that had led to hatred.

Jealousy is a terrible thing. As we read through the New Testament time and time again we're warned against jealousy. And we're warned often alongside sins that we might naturally think were worse than jealousies included among them.

1 Corinthians chapter 3. Paul is writing to the Corinthians who have this great high opinion of themselves. And he says there is jealousy and quarrelling among you. Are you not worldly?

[ 14 : 08 ] If we're jealous of others then we're displaying a worldly attitude. In Galatians just before the fruit of the spirit Paul lists the works of the flesh.

Let me read some of them out to you. Sexual immorality, idolatry, sorcery, fits of anger, drunkenness. Things where we would all look at and say these are terrible things.

And in the midst of them there is jealousy and there is envy. And perhaps we don't take jealousy and envy as seriously as we might some of the others.

But Paul classes them alongside them as things which Christians really have to avoid. If we move on to James. James says where jealousy and selfish ambition exist there will be disorder and every vile practice.

So again and again the New Testament tells us that if there's jealousy, if there's envy among us, that is going to lead to other things. It's going to lead to worldliness.

[ 15 : 18 ] It's going to lead to disorder. It's going to lead to disharmony. It's going to massively disrupt our own spiritual life and the spiritual life of others.

One of the New Testament quotes, I'll read this one up on the screen. This is Mark chapter 15, the Lord's trial. And it says, Pilate perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.

In other words, from a human viewpoint, it was the envy and the jealousy of the Jewish religious establishment that led to the death of the Lord Jesus.

As they saw the authority that he had that they didn't have. As they saw the power that he had that they didn't have. As he saw the respect of the people that he had that they didn't have.

They were envious of him. And ultimately that led them to get him crucified. We must make sure that jealousy and envy don't become big things in our lives.

[ 16 : 23 ] We are not to look at others and to look at the things that they have that we don't have. Whether it's money or looks or abilities or position in society or whatever it is.

We are not to look at others and to think, I want that. I'm envious. I'm jealous that they've got something that I haven't got. Rather, as Graham was reminding us this morning, we have to find our identity in the Lord Jesus.

And rather than looking at others, we look to him, look at the kind of attitude that he had, and look to please him rather than to please others. If we allow envy and jealousy to creep into our lives, then inevitably other things will creep in that will draw us away from the Lord Jesus and may even draw others away from him as well.

So let's not look at others with feelings of envy or of jealousy. Let's accept what God has given us, the great things that God has given all of us. And let's seek to live for the Lord Jesus and to serve him and to look only for his praise, not for the praise of others or not to be seen as better than others.

Saul allowed jealousy to get hold of him and his life became totally dominated by it and by his hatred of David. Let's not any of us go down that road.

[ 17 : 57 ] Our final point I've called Lady Lack or Providential Plan, and this follows David through the two chapters. Two chapters where Saul is trying to kill David.

Now it looks possible that in chapter 18, David didn't realise what was going on. Yes, Saul hurled his spear at David at one point in chapter 18, but people might have said, well, that was just Saul having one of his turns.

It wasn't really anything personal, David. Fortunately, you escaped it, so everything's okay. And the way that people sometimes try to stick up for others when they think there's a problem, people might have tried to minimise that with David.

Maybe he didn't realise that there was a problem with Saul. But it very much comes down to the opening in chapter 19, when Paul calls his close advisors round them and tells them he's got to get David killed.

Jonathan then warns David, and from then on, effectively, David is on the run. So let's just follow through very briefly what's in these two chapters and how David escaped many things.

[ 19 : 01 ] So the first thing is, on probably three occasions, there's two mentioned in chapter 18, and then chapter 19, verse 10, it's mentioned again. Saul hurls his spear at David, and David manages to avoid it.

Now, whether that was because Saul had quite a bad aim or because David took decisive action, we're not sure. But this very direct attack of Saul on David, it didn't succeed.

His more indirect attack, as I've said, was in trying to get David out to defeat the Philistines, or rather, to say to David, go and defeat the Philistines, and actually to get him killed.

So we have the incidents with Saul's two daughters, where Saul wants David to go and fight the Philistines. He offers them one daughter in marriage. David says, No, who am I to be the king's son?

So he refuses that. But when Mehal falls in love with David, Saul sends him out again against the Philistines. And Saul is hoping that David will get killed.

[ 20 : 03 ] Surely among these thousand Philistines that Saul is sending David out to kill, one of them will be bold enough and strong enough to kill him. The sequence, incidentally, of the foreskins is that the Philistines were the only nation around Israel at that time that didn't practice circumcision.

So bringing a foreskin back from an adult would be proof that it was a Philistine, rather a gory thing, but that's the background to it. But David, by his own abilities, and no doubt by the grace of God, is able to go out in battle, in regular battle against the Philistines, and also in this rather gory mission that Saul sends him on, and he's able to be victorious, indeed to bring back twice what Saul said he should.

So perhaps at this point, it's God protecting David through the abilities, through the gifts, the military strategies that he's given to him. God makes use of our gifts to help us and to protect us in our lives.

Moving to chapter 19, we have two incidents when Saul's children are instrumental in saving David. So at the start of chapter 19, Saul gathers his advisors around him and tells them that he wants David killed, and Jonathan realises a huge threat here to his best friend.

He tells David, and then he goes and pleads with Saul, and manages, at least in the short term, to persuade Saul not to kill David. That only lasts as long as the next battle, and David wins the battle, comes back to the praise of the people, and Saul again tries to kill them.

[ 21 : 48 ] So God, first of all, uses Jonathan to protect David, and then he uses Michal, David's wife. Saul sends his messengers, his army, round to their house to try to kill David.

There's this little deception where Michal pretends David's ill and puts the idols in bed as David has fled and deceives the soldiers, and by the time Saul comes back again, then David is gone.

Interesting question here, which I'm not going to go into in detail. To what extent is it valid for us to use deceit, deception, as Michal did, to save someone or to fulfil God's purposes?

Lots of instances in the Bible where it happens. You've got the midwives in Exodus who say to the Pharaoh's people, oh, the women have their babies too quickly, we can't kill the boys. You've got rehab in Jericho and deceiving the people who came into our house so the spies could escape.

You've got Michal here. Is it justifiable? Did they do the right thing? The Bible doesn't say it was wrong. On the other hand, the Bible does at times warn us against lies and deceit.

[ 22 : 59 ] I'll leave you for that to think about. I'm not going to talk about it in detail this evening. Now, one way or another, Michal saves David. She manages to deceive Saul and David gets away.

And David goes to Ramah. He goes to see Samuel. And you might expect the next thing on the screen would be, Samuel saves David. No, actually, Samuel doesn't save David.

Although Samuel is the spiritual one, although Samuel is the prophet and the one who has anointed David as king, actually David is saved at Ramah by an act of God.

See, sometimes God uses our own abilities to help us in difficult situations. Sometimes he uses others to do what is needed to protect us. And sometimes he doesn't use any human agent at all.

He saves us by himself. Now, this at Ramah is rather a strange one. So Saul sends his armies there. He sends people there to take David and to bring him back.

[ 24 : 04 ] And they get caught up in this static prophesying that is going on around Ramah. Not sure exactly what it is, but it undoubtedly would have had some element of singing and of dancing.

And Saul's messengers get caught up in that. Three times that happens. And then Saul says, look, I've had enough of this. Can't trust my men. I'm going myself.

If they can't do it, I definitely will. And he goes, and what happens? The same thing happens to him. He gets caught up by the spirit and he is involved in the prophesying.

Part of that, you've noticed, is that Saul takes off his clothes. Now, he probably didn't strike totally naked, as it might be implied from the reading, but he certainly took off his outer garments. And there's a bit of an irony in that.

Remember chapter 18, Jonathan takes off his garments and gives them to David to say, you are the rightful king. End of chapter 19, Saul takes off his garments, not in a voluntary way, not knowing what he's doing, but I'm sure it's symbolic of the fact that he is no longer the rightful king.

[ 25 : 14 ] Second irony. Chapters 10 and 11, Saul is anointed by Samuel and is to become the king of Israel. And one of the things he does at that point is to prophesy.

The spirit of God comes on him and he prophesies. And the people say in awe, is Saul also one of the prophets? Chapter 19, Saul comes to Ramah again.

And again, he is involved in what is called prophesying. And the people say, is he one of the prophets? But not this time, I think, in awe or thinking this is a great man.

This time they're thinking, what is he doing? Does he think he's one of the prophets? Why is he acting in this kind of way? Saul has completely fallen.

He has gone from one extreme to the other and his kingship in any valid form is utterly over. He's disgraced himself before his people.

[ 26 : 14 ] But that's all we really want to think about just now. It is God's providential plan for David. God has a plan for David and that plan will be worked out and it won't be derailed.

Nothing Saul can do is able to harm David. And indeed, Saul's worst actually increases David's popularity, increases David's wisdom as well, I'm sure, as he sees what's happening.

It has exactly the opposite effect to what Saul intended. Great for us to know as well, isn't it? That we have a God who cares for us and who protects us and who will bring out his will in our lives.

Someone said that all Christians are immortal until it is God's time for them to go to be with him. That has some truth in it. God has a plan for my life and for your life.

And as long as we stay with it, his will is still as long as we are committed to him, that plan will be worked out. Even in the midst of evil and of opposition, God will work his plan out.

[ 27 : 27 ] How do we know that? Again, we look at Jesus. This is Peter's sermon from Acts chapter 2. Peter, a few weeks before, been absolutely devastated at the death of Jesus.

Couldn't understand what was going on. By the time he preaches this sermon, he knows what's going on. He says, This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

In other words, you Jews were guilty. You high priests, chief priests, rulers of the Jews, you were guilty. But actually, all along, God was in control and it was part of his definite plan and foreknowledge that Jesus was crucified.

And the next verse talks about Jesus' resurrection. God has a plan for our lives and there is nothing, if we stay faithful to him, there's nothing that can derail that plan.

He will be with us and he will fulfill his purposes through us. Let's take that away as something that can really encourage and strengthen us in the weeks to come.

[ 28 : 32 ] If you go through difficult times, if things seem to be against you, if people seem to be against you, remember we have a God who is on our side and that there's nothing can separate us from his love and he works all things for our good if we know him and we love him.

Let me finish with a rather trivial story, but perhaps to illustrate the point. There was a man who got shipwrecked on a desert island. Seems to be a story like that.

This man got shipwrecked from a desert island. He was all by himself and he was really struggling. He was really hoping that a ship would come and would rescue him. And time went on and nothing seemed to happen.

He learned how to gather fruit from the trees and so on and eventually he managed to build himself a little home, a little shack that he could live in. And then the one day when he came back from his fruit gathering and he came back to his shack, he found that it had gone up in flames.

There had been a big fire and it was totally destroyed. And he thought, oh no, I'm ruined now. All this effort I put in by myself on this island, it's come to nothing.

[ 29 : 46 ] Then the next day, along comes a ship. The ship comes to the island and picks him out. He says, how did you know? That's amazing. How did you know to come and to pick me up? And the captain of the ship, well, it was obvious.

We saw your spokes signals that went up yesterday and we just followed them to come to you. In other words, something that he thought was a real disaster, in the end, it turned out for good.

And for us too, things that we think are disastrous, things that we think are big problems, God can turn them around and he will work them for our good. So let's learn the lessons of today.

The lesson of the love that we should have for one another, that covenant love that Jonathan and David had. The lesson to avoid jealousy and envy and all things that come with them.

And the lesson that we need to depend on God and we know that whatever our circumstances in life, he is bigger than our circumstances, he will do what is best for us.

[ 30 : 47 ] Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for your word to us this evening. We thank you for David. Thank you for all that he achieved for you in his life.

And thank you for the way in which you protected him and you were with him and your spirit led and guided him, even through the times when Saul was after him and determined to kill him.

Help us to have a trust in you and to recognise that you are able to control all things for our good. Help us too to avoid sin, particularly the sin of jealousy and of envy, that we may not look at others and wish that we had what they have, but that we may be thankful for all that you have given us and that we may find our identity in the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for our time together. We thank you for our worship. We thank you for what we've learned about your work. And we commit ourselves to you now and pray for your blessing through this coming week that we may live lives for Jesus and be good witnesses for him.

We give you thanks in his name. Amen.