

### **“Jonathan: The Model of a Follower”**

**Introduction:** Jesus came riding into Jerusalem and the crowds shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” In many ways, this shout affirms the promise of God that we have seen in our study of 1 and 2 Samuel, that from the offspring of David, God would raise up a king whose kingdom would be eternal (2 Sam. 7). As the angel had informed Mary, he would be given by God the throne of his father David and he would reign forever (Lk. 1:32-33). This one, the prophet Zechariah had anticipated, would come riding to his people on a donkey (Zech. 9:9). And so the one who had been sent by God was now here, and the crowd had begun to cheer.

But Jesus knew that the crowd would need to do more than cheer if it was to receive him properly. Beginning that day, Jesus would pose to the crowd the question that would linger throughout the rest of the week we now call Holy, the question that he puts to each and every person who comes face to face with him, and the question that he puts to each of us, each and every day, is this: “What are you going to do with me?” In Jesus the King of kings has come. Are we willing to lay down our sword and follow him, putting him above all others? Jonathan, I think, can help us see what this looks like.

#### **I. Not only Friend but Follower**

A. Now, most often, Jonathan is lifted up as an example of a good friend, and last week we considered the power of this friendship. We saw how Jonathan came alongside David and helped to protect him from the murderous threats and attacks of King Saul. We also saw how Jonathan sought to protect David’s heart from giving up or from growing in hostility, encouraging him to find strength in God. And we considered how Jonathan put David’s needs ahead of his own, seeking to help David become all that God had called him to be. It was an incredible, humble, and powerful friendship! What a gift to have friends like that and to also have the privilege of being such a friend to another.

B. But the relationship between Jonathan and David reveals to us not just the power of friendship; it is also a model for us of discipleship. Especially if we can recognize that David points us to Jesus, that Jesus is the long-anticipated ancestor of David and the ultimate successor to David’s throne, then Jonathan is not just, or even primarily, teaching us how to be a good friend; he is teaching us how to be a real follower. Yes, Jonathan loves David as a brother, but he also recognizes him as king. That is the recognition we are to offer Jesus; it is where our “followership” begins, and how it is to continue.

C. We see this recognition on Jonathan’s part as Jonathan turns over his royal paraphernalia—his robe, tunic, sword, bow and belt—to David. Jonathan is not sharing what he was wearing because David was cold! Instead, as the son of, and would be successor to Saul, Jonathan is giving to David that which would have marked Jonathan out as king. He turns that all over to David in recognition that David, not he, is king, that David is God’s anointed one. Jonathan is taking off his right to be king and giving it over to David. “Don’t be afraid,” Jonathan says a bit later. “My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you” (23:17). This is significant on several levels.

#### **II. Who Is the King?**

A. First, Jonathan prompts us to ask ourselves, who is the real king in my life? Have I “laid down my sword” in recognition that Jesus is king and not me? What might that look like? In ancient days, to

lay down one's sword and hand it over to someone else was symbolic of surrender. It indicated that you were bowing to one who had a greater authority. In the book of Revelation, we have a picture of the twenty-four elders (representing, probably the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles), worshipping the One who sits on the throne of the universe. As they do so, they lay their crowns—their symbols of authority—before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being' (Rev. 4:10-11). It's a picture of those who have been created praising their Creator and acknowledging his ultimate authority.

Perhaps a modern-day equivalent would be walking into a classroom and being asked by your professor to put your cell phone into a basket so that he or she might have your undivided attention for the next hour! It's not a sword or a crown, but it's sure a symbol of our power and self-interest and our desire to promote and look out for our self. In the classroom, however, the prof is king.

B. So in life, Jesus is king. Are we willing to recognize this?

Imagine your teenager coming to you and declaring, "Mom, Dad, I am sick and tired of your rules. You're always trying to tell me what to do. Now let me tell you what's going to happen around here. I'm going to come and go whenever I feel like it. I'm going to go to bed as late as I want. I'm going to keep my room however I please. I'll have whatever friends I want over to the house. I'll dress as it suits me. I'll listen to my kind of music as loud as I want. I'm not going to put up with any more of your attempts to run my life. I am going to be my own boss." As a parent you'd not only be shocked but greatly saddened. Why? Because you know that your "rules" or boundaries were entirely for the good of your child. You set them out of love and concern for your child.

Well, too, might we seem and sound like immature adolescents before God, demanding to go our own way, acting like we are king and not he. But, might not the One who created all things know what's best for us? It's why, when he first came on the scene in a public way, Jesus called people to repent—to lay down their swords—and follow him, if they wanted to experience the life that is truly life, life the way the Designer designed it to be lived. Another way he issues the call to follow him as king is through his call to take up our cross. As Jesus did when he took up his cross, it's an action that declares, "Not my will but thy will be done. We embrace his will as we follow him, learn from him, and put what he says into practice. "It says to Jesus: "You are king and not me. I am willing to trust that you know best."

C. Importantly, we cannot trust him half-way. The seriousness of the unqualified allegiance that Jesus calls for is seen in his words about relationships with our family, the ultimate of relationships in the ancient world, as well as today. They seem strange sounding words at first hearing. "I have not come to bring peace . . . but a sword." Jesus is known as the Prince of peace. The angels declare at his birth that he has come to bring peace on earth. But Jesus seems to know that division will come, and that he will be the cause of it. Certainly, it is not division for the fun of it. But he knows that some within a family will understand their need for a savior, and lay down their sword, and others will not and continue to wield theirs. When that happens, love for him and his kingdom must take priority.

D. This warning is matched, however, by his remarkable promise that he will acknowledge to his Father in heaven those who acknowledge him, and that those who lose their life for him will actually find it. If we entrust our future, as well as our present, to him, he will provide. As Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*:

If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you will find both yourself and me. [10:38-39]

This willingness to look beyond family, and find your family provided for, was experienced by Jonathan. He was willing to put his relationship with David, the king, above that of his relationship with Saul, his father. He knew where his loyalty needed to be and entrusted his future to David. Years later, after he had died tragically in battle, and when his own son, Mephibosheth, needed care because he was unable to care for himself, being lame in both feet, David brought the boy to his table and enfolded him into the royal family:

Don't be afraid, David said to him, for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul and you will always eat at my table (2 Sam. 9:7).

This is a beautiful picture, one of restoration and care. It's a picture, like many in the Gospel accounts, of the trustworthiness of Jesus, a picture that reveals to us that Jesus is the king, the leader, we can trust. That is critical in this day and age where there are many examples that cause us to question the trustworthiness of our leaders, be they politicians, teachers, coaches, parents, or even pastors. But Jesus says, "Hang with me this week and meet me at the cross. There I'll show you what kind of leader, what kind of king I am. There you will see that I'm not in it for myself, but I'm in it for you. There you will see my humility, my self-giving nature, my willingness to be vulnerable and even taken advantage of. There you will experience the hospitality of my table and the hope of new creation. There you will see how much I love you and how worthy I am of being followed, above all others."

### III. The Need to Choose

A. The events that we will recall this week are an interesting contrast to those we mark at Christmas. Then, we celebrate the birth of a baby, and a baby feels safe. You don't really have to choose to accept him or reject him because (unless you're its mother) a baby kind of just sits safely off in a corner of your life without making much of a demand on you. It's why, I think, Christmas is still relatively popular in our secular culture. Everyone loves babies! But now, as we find ourselves just days away from Easter, we are forced to recognize that the baby has grown up! Not only that but he has gone to the cross and risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father where he rules over all and from where he will come and call us to account. He is no longer off in a corner but in your face, calling you to follow him, not as a threat but because he really just loves you and wants the very best for you.

B. Jonathan had to choose between a relationship with David and a relationship with his father. Within that choice, he had to choose whether he, or someone else, would be king of his life. He chose David, as the king, and the king cared for him. David's greater son has come among us and we need to choose as well. We need to take up our cross *daily*, as Luke reminds us, and follow Jesus. There can be no accommodation or half-hearted followership. But if we entrust our lives to him, if we put down our sword and allow him to be king, his promise is that we will begin to experience the life that is truly life, both now, and into eternity.