

Friendship, Loyalty, and Separation

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[0 : 00] Well tonight we are continuing our short series in the life of Jonathan. This is our second last sermon in this study and Phil will conclude the series next Sunday evening. The title of our series is Living by Faith When Life is Unfair. And already we've seen that Jonathan is one of the most fascinating figures in the Bible and in so many ways we've seen over the past few weeks that Jonathan was a hero. He was a man of courage, wisdom and humility.

He was a great leader and it's so clear that he would have been such a good king. But although Jonathan as an individual is heroic in so many ways his life is heart-breaking.

We've seen that his father Saul was the first king of Israel and although at the very start things looked promising soon he began to fail and as time went on he failed more and more gradually descending into deeper and deeper paranoia and aggression. And as a result of Saul's failures the kingdom's not going to go to Jonathan. It's going to be passed instead to David and to his descendants. David is the man after God's own heart. He's the shepherd boy who was to go on to become Old Testament Israel's greatest king and so Jonathan sees all of this happening.

He sees his father become king, he sees himself become prince, he sees the prospects of his himself becoming king and then it all gets taken away. He sees David identified as God's chosen king and yet amazingly in all of that Jonathan rejoices. And his greatest quality is that he is far more concerned that God's purposes get fulfilled than he is about any personal status or glory that he might have for himself. And the result is that even though David is going to get the throne instead of Jonathan the two of them become the closest of friends. But what that meant was that Jonathan's best friend was the man that his father wanted dead. And that caused huge difficulties in the life of Jonathan and in so many ways it was all so unfair. And what I hope we'll see again tonight is that if you find yourself feeling that life is unfair then Jonathan has got a lot to teach us. We're going to be kicking about the whole of the passage that we read but let me just read the last two verses again verses 41 to 42. As soon as the boy had gone David rose from beside the stone heap and fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times and they kissed one another and wept with one another. David weeping the most. Then Jonathan said to David go in peace because we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord saying the Lord shall be between me and you and between my offspring and your offspring forever. And he rose and departed and Jonathan went into the city. Our title this evening is friendship, loyalty and separation.

And we're going to just look at each of these three in turn as we see them in this passage. So first of all friendship. I think it's fair to say that that the greatest example of friendship in the Old Testament is Jonathan and David. And that gives us the opportunity to talk and think a little bit more about friendship because it's one of the most important things that we have in our lives. It's also one of the most important themes in scripture. So often you know you'll find in life people will talk about you know when you make your plans for life you think you know you're going to go to a good school and some people will go to great lengths to get their children to go to a good school with high educational attainment. You know you'll work really hard to get the qualifications that you need because you want to get a good job.

[4 : 09] And you know if you could get that good job that you've worked hard for you know that's that's the goal in life and so much effort is put in thinking you know that's going to be the key to a happy life. Good education, good qualifications, good job and in many ways you know it is an important thing. But the thing that is going to be far more powerful in determining whether or not going to school or work tomorrow is wonderful or awful. The thing that's going to determine that is not the job title, it's not the school's reputation, it's whether or not the people that you are going to be with are friends. And if the people that you're going to be with are horrible to you then these things will be a nightmare. Friendship makes such a massive difference to life. It's also a theme that

runs right through the Bible, right through what we call redemptive history, God's plan of salvation. Now when we're thinking about that we're thinking about the big plan of the Bible we can sum it all up in four words creation, fall, redemption, renewal and that's summing up the whole of God's plan of salvation. Creation obviously the beginning of the

Bible God creates all things, He alone is creator. Fall is when humanity fell, sinned against God and the relationship with God was broken. So creation Genesis one and two fall is Genesis three. Redemption is Genesis three all the way through to the end of Revelation and then at the end of Revelation we see the promises of the renewed creation in Jesus's return and so that's the great pattern that scripture follows. Friendship is key in all of these. So you look at creation, friendships are massive part of that. Humanity is made for friendship that's part of how we reflect the image of God because when we learn more about who God is as he's revealed in scripture we discover that God is not some isolated solitary being that for all eternity has been in perfect isolation. That's not the God revealed in the Bible the God revealed in the Bible is the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit forever existing in beautiful friendship. So as we bear the image of that God we know that we are made for friendship with him and with one another. We're not made to be solitary we're made for relationships. Friendship is a key part of the fall because that relationship, that friendship with God and with one another has been damaged, ruined by sin and it's been replaced with enmity and hostility between humanity and God between fellow humans. Friendships are key part of what Jesus has come to restore. He has come to bring reconciliation with God with one another so that enmity is exchanged for friendship and friendship is a glimpse of the new creation that wonderful renewed new heavens and new earth an eternity with Jesus where friendship will thrive and all of this makes sense because the centrality of friendship to the Bible storyline to the gospel to redemptive history that explains why everyone in Scotland no matter what they believe everybody knows that friendship matters. Jonathan and David are wonderful friends and we've already seen that highlighted in the chapter before us you can look at the start of chapter 18 the start of chapter 19 Jonathan's soul was knit to the soul of David and in 19 one Jonathan's soul son delighted much in David. I love that word delighted because that's what good friends are. Good friends are just a delight to one another and it's just you know a social joy just a brilliant thing to have.

Friendship is such such an incredible gift from God. Now for two minutes I want to mention something here that you may have come across or seen in a book or online or maybe even someone said it.

[8 : 46] From time to time people have looked at Jonathan and David's friendship and they've seen the strength of that relationship and they've said ah they they must have been in a homosexual relationship and I've seen that in articles in various places and it's something that you may have come across and often they'll go to to the start of second Samuel when Jonathan's killed and David says as he mourns Jonathan's death he says I'm distressed for you my brother Jonathan very pleasant you have been to me your love to me was extraordinary surpassing the love of women.

So people put two and two together and they get 47 as is often the case. So you may have come across this claim and it's it's a completely inappropriate and inaccurate conclusion for at least two reasons.

One because if you actually read the whole of the narrative of Jonathan and David it's absolutely clear that they both have wives and they both have children and particularly in the life of David when you read through to what happened with Bathsheba you see that it was when seeing a naked woman bathing that David couldn't control his lust that was where his sexual passion was was directed.

Secondly though that this whole suggestion that that's the kind of relationship they had is is actually far more of a reflection on our society and culture just now because we live in an age just now kind of post mid 20th century post 60s whereby we think everything's about sex and that seems to be the kind of framework in which we look at everybody and everything and so you know if you if you come across two men who say they love each other or two women who say they love each other we think oh there must be a secret couple because everything is interpreted in those ways but you know it's really a wee bit childish to think like that it's a wee bit like you know when even in the school playground if a boy and a girl play together you're like oh they're boyfriend girlfriend they're just playing and you know history sociology and really even basic common sense tells you that you can love someone with all your heart without them ever being a sexual partner

and so if you read someone ever saying that about Jonathan and David I don't want you to be alarmed by it and I don't want you to be influenced by it and it really has no basis at all. I want to leave that though to one side because the key thing I want us to recognize is that David and Jonathan remind us that friendship is just an utterly wonderful thing. Friendship gives us company people that we can share our lives with. Friendship gives us laughter moments of just joy where we smile and laugh together. Friendship gives us encouragement whereby we support one another as we go through life it gives us comfort when we face sorrow and hardship.

[11 : 48] Friendship gives us adventure where we can go and do amazing things together. Friendship is where we are accepted where we just know people will stick with us that they are our friends and all of that arises from and reflects what God created us to be and that's why a church should just be overflowing with warm happy genuine wonderful friendship and I have been so encouraged by by what I've seen of that even in the last few days. Thursday night we were here and the hall at the back was full of pews so we had to make a circle of chairs here and so we sat here for our Bible study and it was just brilliant. We sat looking at God's word together and we were hearing just hearing each other speak talking about lessons learned from people who lived long ago talking about experiences that we faced just as we go through our lives together just friends together around God's word it was so good. Yesterday we were at Dalmore racing on the beach eating burgers and sausages going on the bouncy castle it was fantastic and then this morning and with our lunch together as a community as friends it was just brilliant it's just exactly what God has created us to be and this is so crucial because often people will say or think if I become a Christian I'm going to lose my friends. I have heard people say and think that so many times if I become a Christian I'm going to lose my friends. Now four things I'm going to say to that very quickly. One if your friends abandon you because you start following Jesus then they are shallow friends. It means that you know you can only be their friend if you conform to their expectations but that kind of thing is you know it's more like bullying than friendship where basically you're saying you know as long as you do what I want you to do as long as you conform to what I expect of you then I'll be your friend that's not friendship at all. Two there will be certain things that Jesus will expect you to stop that you are maybe used to doing with your friends but none of them are things that matter in friendship so some very common examples would be gossip it's something that as Christians we are not to do and sometimes that can be a big part of friendship big part of things that we do with people you know we get together to get the latest news on people and that's something that as Christians we leave behind because Jesus tells us not to do that. Drunkenness would be another example I'm not saying alcohol is perfectly okay for Christians to drink socially and in a responsible way but to the point of drunkenness to the point of losing self-control as Christians again we're instructed not to do that and another example a third example we'll be using inappropriate language often we can get together and people's language with their friends can become uh well I don't need to explain what it can be you know fine what can happen but again if your friendship depends on gossip thinking too much and swearing then again you've got to ask what kind of friendship do you have. Number three following Jesus will make us far better friends to those who are still to come to faith in Jesus this is really important that that following Jesus doesn't mean that you abandon your non-Christian friends following Jesus means that you become a better friend to your non-Christian friends and this is something that we can easily get wrong and we get it wrong because we can confuse the fruit of kind of fruit of formal religion as opposed to the fruit of the spirit so we get these two things confused the fruit of religion and the fruit of the spirit the fruit of of a formal religion can leave us critical, aloof, judgmental, pretentious none of that's Christian the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control are any of those things going to make your friendships worse and then number four following Jesus opens the door to so many additional friendships with so many wonderful people that's one of the amazing things that might be in a Christian is that you can go to any place in Scotland any place in the world you can meet somebody who is a brother and sister in Jesus Christ and you instantly have a bond with them so please don't think that becoming a Christian means that you're going to lose your friends friendship is a crucial part of the gospel it's an amazing gift from God it's a source of so many wonderful things in our lives but one of the key things that we learned from Jonathan and David is that biblical friendship is not just about having brilliant moments together biblical friendship is also about sticking together when things are awful and that takes us to our second point loyalty the circumstances in this chapter are difficult and distressing Saul's hostility to David

has been increasing in chapter 19 and Jonathan had kind of tried to cool Saul down a little bit and it looked as though things had improved in fact Saul had kind of made this oath that he was not going to harm David but it didn't last long at all by the end of chapter nine David had had to flee from Saul again and at the start of 20 as Phil read David comes to Jonathan says what have I done and it looks as though at that point saw Jonathan still thinks that Saul's better than this and doesn't it doesn't look as though he's aware of what's happened in the second half of 19 that that Saul has started pursuing David again in order to kill him and so they're trying to work out what's going on David saying look I am a step away from death because your father's trying to kill me so they agree to find out once and for all what's going on and the plan is that they're both expected to be at this monthly feast that takes place and David says well I'm not going to go and you can explain you can just say to Saul that I'm away with my brother at a feast in Bethlehem and if Saul is like okay that's fine then we'll know that he's okay but if he reacts angrily then you will know that Saul wants to kill me and they agree that in order to to to explain the result of what happens at the feast there'll be a signal whereby Saul will come to the field he's going to fire his arrows and he's going to send a boy to get them and if the boy if he when the boy goes if if Jonathan shouts out and says the arrows are this side of you come back then David will know to come back but if if Jonathan says the arrows are further on you need to go then that's the signal to David you need to go because it's not safe and of course that's exactly what happened what I want us to focus on though is that in the course of their discussions and plans David and Jonathan both use the language of covenant David does it in five to eight you can see it there Jonathan then does it in 12 to 17 I won't read those texts out but I'm just highlighting it there because that language of covenant is so important it's telling us that their friendship wasn't just based on getting on well with each other delightfully with each other as good mates their friendship was grounded on a formal covenant relationship a relationship of the deepest commitment a relationship of the utmost loyalty that's what a covenant does it binds two people together it's a life and death commitment and in the bible it's the strongest connection that can be formed between two parties and that's a really important point because it's telling us that although Jonathan and David delighted in one another they loved each other's company they got on great their friendship wasn't grounded on moments of joy and delight it was deeper than that their friendship was grounded on covenant loyalty that meant that they were going to stick together no matter what the joys or the sorrows might be and that is something that's crucial for us to think about because often we can we can get that wrong in our friendships we can ground our friendships on moments of joy and we will maintain our friendships as long as joy and delight continues in other words if you got really good crack with somebody if you get on really well if the banter's good then the friendship will continue but if things become difficult for one person or for both then it's all too easy for that friendship to fade now you might think yourself that's not true Thomas we you know as friends you know we stick together well is it true because I look at my life and I can think of people who I want some of us friends and their lives are now a mess and I asked myself when was the last time I reached out to them and maybe it's the same in this community maybe there's people who who you were friends with once whose lives are now not full of joy and delight it's good for us to think about when when was the last time we reached out to them the language of covenant points us to a friendship that's deeper than just enjoying good times together David and Jonathan's friendship was grounded on the deepest commitment to one another and that's so crucial because things are only about to get worse with Saul but no matter how fierce Saul's aggression becomes David and Jonathan are never going to abandon their friendship and the depth of that commitment is emphasised by an amazing little word that's tucked away hidden in these verses it's the Hebrew word *Hezeth* which you may have heard of before if you can remember a long time ago we looked at that word when we studied Ruth way back in 2014 it's a very hard word to translate you can see it in verse 8 and you can see it in verses 14 and 15 in verse 8 it's translated deal kindly and in verses 14 and 15 it's translated steadfast love it's one of the most important words in the Old Testament and it's the word that describes covenant love loyal love steadfast love unflinching love or we might say unforgettable love unforgettable love now not unforgettable in the sense of oh wow that's amazing I'll never forget it but unforgettable in the sense of nothing will ever ever make me compromise or neglect or forget this love it will never fade it will never be a memory that's the love that a biblical covenant is grounded on that's the commitment that David and Jonathan have towards one another now there's two really important lessons that arise from that one is that the covenant love shown between David and Jonathan and means that they behave in a way that

completely contradicts the conventions of their time that's really easy for us to miss but we need to recognize that Jonathan and David's friendship is unexpected and astonishing and that's because they're both rivals for the throne in Israel Jonathan is heir to the father his father's throne but David has been appointed and anointed by the prophet Samuel now in those days if you met somebody who was the rival to your throne you did one thing you killed them see that's many times in the Old Testament not just the individual but their whole family is wiped out that's why Jonathan speaks of being preserved in verse 15 because he knows that that the throne is going to go to David and so when it speaks of

[25 : 30] David's enemies being cut off the normal pattern would be for David to kill Jonathan and so when David and Saul were facing you know the danger that they were in particularly David fleeing Saul in the world size the last person he would go to would be Jonathan and yet that's exactly where he goes why because of a covenant love that they have one for another and all of that's confirmed but if you go a little bit further down to verses 31 30 and 31 you discover that Saul thinks that Jonathan is a complete idiot and the wonderful thing about Jonathan is that he doesn't care he doesn't care what the conventions are he doesn't think that his father thinks that he's an idiot he is going to be faithful to the covenant that he's made with his friends and there's a fascinating contrast that highlights this in verses 30 and 34 and if you look at 30 you see that Saul is angry if you look at 34 you see that Jonathan is angry they're both angry but for very different reasons Saul because Jonathan is harming himself and his prospects Jonathan because Saul is trying to kill his friend now we live in a culture that is much less violent but it's no less ruthless because people will do anything to protect themselves and their dreams even if it means hurting one another even if it means breaking promises you only have to look at politics for a week to see that people will use their power to make sure that anyone who's a threat is kept away it can happen at work somebody you know might see you as a threat at work and they can make your working environment very very difficult it might even happen in a classroom as well if someone's jealous of somebody people can behave really badly towards one another it can happen in relationships even in marriage where until death do us part actually means for as long as you are what i want and all of that means that in many situations today commitment has got to be convenient promises are optional friendship has got to be useful that is so different to the way God thinks

God's idea of friendship is completely different to that it is grounded on the deepest commitment it's grounded on covenant love i saw when i was reading up for this sermon i i read a commentary by a guy called Dale Ralph Davis um he's a much smarter davis than this one um and uh this quote really struck me he said life does not consist in achieving your goals but in keeping your promises i think that's a really really powerful lesson for us all so this covenant love defies cultural conventions in david's time and in our own but secondly all of this is a glimpse into God's covenant faithfulness towards us because the bible doesn't just use the language of covenant to describe friendships like that of Jonathan and David the bible uses the language of covenant to describe our relationship with God in fact covenant is really the big theme that holds the whole bible together you go back to that language of creation fall redemption renewal all of that's in the context of covenant from from our creation through the relationship ruined by sin to the restoration in Jesus and to the promises of the new creation it's all in the framework and context of covenant that means that the extraordinary commitment that you and i can see in david and jonathan's lives is a glimpse into the incredible covenant commitment that Jesus has towards his people that Jesus has towards you and both David and jonathan are glimpses into that David because as king he's going to be faithful to jonathan he will protect them that's a glimpse of Jesus he uses all his status power and glory to keep you safe forever if you are a christian but jonathan is also a glimpse of Jesus because he is going to remain faithful to david no matter how much it costs that's an amazing glimpse of Jesus because Jesus's commitment to you has come at the greatest cost it's come at the cross of dying on the cross and in doing so Jesus is showing that even though friendship with you and me is going to cost him his life to Jesus that's worth it to Jesus it's a price worth paying and it is all because god's covenant love is unforgettable love you look at that framework creation fall redemption renewal why does all of that happen that's the summary of redemptive history the great narrative of the bible and actually the great narrative of the whole of history and existence why does all that happen it's because god is not going to forget you and make no mistake you could have so easily done that and we know it's easy to forget because how often do we forget god and yet he won't

forget you he won't because of his covenant love for you and i want you just to think about that i want you to think of everything that makes you feel forgettable of everything makes that makes you feel like you're disappointing to god or to other people and when you think of everything that makes you feel like you're a waste of space everything that makes you feel unworthy of god's friendship and then listen to what he's saying he's saying i love you with unforgettable love and that's crucial for our last point separation the outcome of the chapter is what david and sol feared but didn't want to believe you david and jonathan feared but didn't want to believe sol is determined to kill david that means that they can't stay in contact and they have to separate and it's captured so powerfully in the closing versions that we read at the start and that are on the screen and the result is that the old testament's greatest friendship is ripped apart now at this point they don't know if they're going to see each other again it turns out they do they meet again in chapter 23 when they renew their covenant commitment to each other but at this point the separation would have felt as though it could have been permanent or at least for a very long time and even though they did see each other again things would never be the same and it's heartbreaking for them it's all because of sol's paranoia and madness it's all so unfair but what i want us to think about as we close is the fact that that pain of separation that david and sol felt in this moment is a pain that everybody here has felt it's something that i know all of you can relate to and understand sometimes it's circumstances that separate us from people that we love and that can be temporarily or for a long time and even more painful is when we are separated from people we love because they die and and it becomes more difficult for us because the greater the delight of friendship the greater the pain of separation isn't that true and it's such a painful thing to go through the more you love someone the more it leaves a massive hole when they're not there but i want to highlight an amazing phrase that jonathan uses in verse 42 where he says the lord shall be between me and you forever now in jonathan's mind i think that he would have primarily been thinking in terms of his relationship with david and in terms of the relationship between their offspring remember we said that you know the the cultural expectation there will be that one would destroy the other and jonathan is i think primarily thinking about the fact that that that's not going to happen that they'll remain faithful to one another's offspring that's actually what did happen and you can read second Samuel chapter nine to discover how david wanted to to search out any descendants of jonathan in order to keep this promise but i think that jonathan is saying more than he realized he did i think that's often the case when we read scripture i think often people particularly in the old testament say more than they probably realized because where are david and jonathan now like right now where are they they're together they are together with jesus in heaven and there they are awaiting the resurrection and the new creation on the last day and the reason that they're together is because the lord is between them in other words through jesus they're united to him as saviour they're united together as brothers in christ and this is so massively important because this is what the gospel is all about we said a moment ago that the greater the delight of friendship the greater the pain of separation that is absolutely true the more we love someone the more agonizing the separation and so to deal with that often people will address the pain by limiting the friendship and so you don't let someone get too close you don't allow yourself to get too attached the world's solution for the pain of separation is to address the pain by limiting the friendship jesus has a far better solution jesus addresses the pain by destroying the separation that's what jesus has come to do that's what the restoration part of god's plan involves he's come to save us yes as individuals but in doing so to bring us into a covenant community where we will be with him and with one another forever that means that if you're a christian or if you become a christian you can look at another christian and say to them the lord shall be between me and you forever forever because of what jesus has done we can enjoy friendship with him and with one another forever that's true for everybody who trusts in jesus that means that we can look forward to the company of jonathan david of mary martha peter john of every christian who has lived throughout history of every precious brother and sister who once sat here the person who once sat next to you who you love so much and miss so much the amazing thing about the gospel is that it does not soothe separation it reverses it it that's what jesus has come to do everybody here knows that separation is horrible and the potential of it is so real but jesus has come to reverse it to undo it so that we can enjoy being with him and with every other christian forever now that potential for separation has got to do two things for us as a church it's got to motivate our mission because when we look at people and we're not sure yet if they become a christian if they're a christian or not we have got to be thinking we do not want them to be lost and

for anyone here who is not yet a christian this has got to make you think this has got to make you think think about you know just like two christians a christian husband and wife or two christian friends two christian brothers and sisters or whatever one of them can lie in their death bed and say to the other the lord will be between you and me forever and their separation is only temporary that is what the gospel is offering you and that is what you're turning down when you turn down the gospel and that's what jesus wants you all to have friendship loyalty separation the gospel establishes the first one it never compromises on the second one and it destroys the third one it reverses it in a life that is so often unfair that's everything that we need Amen let's pray Father we thank you so much for the gift of friendship with you and with one another we thank you for your incredible loyalty your covenant love and faithfulness and we thank you that Jesus has come to reverse separation forever please may we all all come to know that and come to know you amen