

Ready To Let Someone Else Be The One

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[0 : 02] Well, as I mentioned, tonight, we are continuing a study that we began to a few weeks ago into the life of Jonathan. We read two passages from First Samuel. I want us to focus on the second one. So I am going to read again verses one to four forward of First Samuel 18. As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David.

And Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And David took him that day, and Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a Covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David and his armlet and even his sword and his bow and his belt. The title of our series is Living by Faith When Life Is Unfair.

And that's something that we see so powerfully in the life of Jonathan. His life is incredibly heroic. In so many ways, Jonathan is one of the great heroes of the Old Testament, but at the very same time, his life is tragic. And there's so much that seems unfair in terms of his experience. And for all these reasons and for many more, there's so much that we can learn from Jonathan.

Not long ago, I was listening to lectures by a man called Lincoln Duncan, and you may have heard of him. He's a lecturer in one of the seminaries in America, and he's written several books. And while I was listening to him, he said, One of the people I'm looking forward to meeting most in heaven is Jonathan. And in many ways, that was the comment that sparked my interest that made me look more deeply into Jonathan's life. He's a fascinating person, and he's got so much to teach us in our sermons.

So far, we've been observing that in the teens chapters of one Samuel, we are presented with a contrast between Saul's failure and Jonathan's success. Saul, as we said, was Israel's first King. Jonathan was his son. So that meant he would have been heir to the throne. And it's very clear that he has all the qualities needed for kingship.

[2 : 18] But we have to say that he would have been heir to the throne because it never happened. He would have been the King, but Saul was rejected by God and the throne was given to David. That's why we read from Chapter 16. That meant that for Jonathan, who in so many ways had all the gifts and qualities to be a brilliant King, he has to be ready to let someone else be the one. And that's our title for this evening.

I'm sure you would all agree that there are lots of ways that life can feel unfair. Maybe even in this past week, you've experienced things that have made you just inwardly or even outwardly cry that's just not fair. Often it can be related to events that we see around us, particularly when we look at the news. We see injustice all over the world. But sometimes that feeling of unfairness can be in relation to ourselves.

That can happen in lots of ways. Maybe in terms of our health, you maybe are weary of pain or tiredness or just an ongoing condition that wears you down. We may feel it's unfair in terms of how other people treat us. Maybe at work someone blasted you for doing something wrong, or maybe parked in the wrong place in town. Or maybe you said the wrong thing at school and your classmates weren't very impressed.

Or maybe it can be when we have to do something that we don't want to do that can often feel very unfair. Earlier this week, our dog Rosie, rolled in something horrific, and when she came back washing her definitely didn't feel fair at all. But at that more personal level, sometimes the experience that can feel most unfair is when we have to watch somebody else get something that we always thought was meant for us. That's what happened to Jonathan. He was going to be King and he was going to be a really good King, but it never happened.

He had to watch someone else take his place as heir to the throne. Now, you might say to yourself, well, if that was me, I wouldn't want to be King or Queen anyway. And that's understandable. And it's probably a wise judgment. But the broader point is crucial, because the key thing here is that we all have dreams.

[4 : 47] We all do. And sometimes we have to watch those dreams come true for somebody else instead of us. It can happen in school. Maybe in primary school you were the fastest runner, or maybe you were the best at maths. And then you go to high school and you find that there's other people who are faster than you and who are better at math than you.

Maybe you've left school. Maybe that was years ago. Maybe recently you leave school, you study or you train, you apply for a job and you think, I really want to get this job. And you get the interview, you put everything into it and you're so hopeful and they give it to someone else. Maybe you get the job.

Maybe you dream of reaching the top, but then somebody younger than you comes in and they end up getting promoted ahead of you. It might be your dream house that you build. After years of saving, it's got the perfect view. And then a few years later, somebody buys the land in front of you and they build their deep house right where your ideal view once was. Or perhaps most painful of all, you fall in love with somebody and you watch them get happily married to somebody else.

There's lots of other ways that this can happen. I'm sure that you can think of many examples. It can feel incredibly unfair and very painful when we have to watch somebody else get what we always thought was meant for us. That's what happened to Jonathan. He was next in line to be King.

He has to watch David take his place. And yet the incredible thing about Jonathan is that he was totally willing and utterly delighted for that to happen. Instead of him being crushed by disappointments, instead of him immediately plotting how he could fight his own corner and defend himself, instead of him being consumed by jealousy or gnawed away at by bitterness, he was totally willing, totally ready to let somebody else be the one who gets it all. How did he do that?

[6 : 59] Well, that's what I want us to think about tonight. And this has got to be one of the most urgent lessons for us to learn, especially today, because we live in a culture that tells 100% of people to chase after dreams that less than 1% of people only have the slightest chance of ever getting. And you don't need to be the best in maths in your class to see that. That means that the vast majority of people today are having to deal with life, not turning out the way they dreamt it would. What Jonathan shows us is that the gospel gives us everything that we need to cope with that.

And I want to suggest that Jonathan understood three crucial things. He understood what's wrong with the world. He understood his identity, and he understood love. What's wrong with the world, his identity and love. Jonathan understood all three of these, and we'll go through them one by one.

So first of all, Jonathan understood what's wrong with the world. Now, when we talk about what's wrong with the world, that's just us referring to what the Bible describes as sin. It's really important to remember that when we talk about sin, we're not just talking about naughty stuff. That's kind of fun to do. That's not what we mean at all.

When we're talking about sin, we are describing everything that is destructive, everything that's cruel, corrupt, and horrible in the world. Sin is the cause of everything that is wrong with the world, the cause of everything that makes people suffer. It is the opposite of everything that's good. And that's reminding us all of this reminds us that there are two key ways that we can see the reality of sin or that we can prove it. One is to ask ourselves, Have I sinned in the past week?

And I'm not saying that to sound all doom and room. It's just an important question to ask. And looking back at the last week, Have I sinned? And often the answer to that question will be given to you by your conscience. Just prodding us at something we did that we wish we hadn't, something we didn't that we wish we did.

[9 : 19] Occasionally though our consciousness are numb, and sometimes it's only through deliberate reflection or sometimes maybe even through the Council of others, that our sins can be highlighted and that we see behavior in our lives that shouldn't be there. Another way to ask the question, Have I sinned in the past week? Is to ask yourself the question, Was my behavior impeccable in the past week? Because at the end of the day, that's the measure of standard that God works at, and anything less than perfect in every single way means that we are sinners. A single dot on a white sheet of paper means that that paper is no longer blank.

And so the reality of sin is seen in our own lives. And the fact that we ourselves are sinners. And I say that to myself before any of you. But the other way to see the reality of sin is to ask ourselves, Have I suffered in the past week?

Have you suffered because the suffering that you experience is a consequence of the damage that sin has caused to humanity and to the world around us? And that suffering might be partly the result of your own actions, maybe bad decisions you've made, or it could be because of something that's completely out of your hands. It doesn't matter to sin. Sin has no mercy. It's got no existence.

Being fair, and in its mission to destroy humanity, sin will gladly cause as much collateral damage as possible. Now, if we take these two things together, the fact that people are sinners and the fact that sin can cause widespread damage, we get an explanation for what is happening in Jonathan's life in these chapters. Jonathan is an outstanding man. He's courageous. He's a strong leader.

He's skillful, wise and humble. He would have been such a good King. But it doesn't happen. He misses out on what looks like the greatest privilege and opportunity of his life. And it is all because of someone else's sin.

[11 : 27] It's all because of his father's sin. It's because of the mistakes Saul made. Saul, like everyone else, like Jonathan, like David, like all of us, Saul is a sinner. But the key point is that Saul's sin and Saul's mistakes don't just affect his own life. His mistakes rob his son of the chance of being King.

And that raises a massively important lesson for every one of us, especially for those of us who live and were raised in the west in the last 60 years. Because we live in a culture that is so individualistic, everything is so individualistic that makes us expect that we should be the one. It makes us expect the dream life that we should have. But even more seriously, it leaves us thinking that our sins will only affect us, and that's one of the biggest mistakes that we see in the world around us. We have an individualistic view of dreams, but we also have an individualistic view of sin.

Thinking, well, if I dabble with sin, it's only going to affect me. So I can dabble with greed, with pornography, with short temperedness, with lying, and it'll only affect me. I'll just keep it hidden within my own life. And that is not how sin works. And that's completely obvious when we look at the world around us because we see so many people suffering as a result of the inappropriate behavior of others.

And I'm sure every single one of you knows how that feels. And it's reminding us that we must never forget that the knockon effects of sin are enormous. Jonathan experienced that firsthand. These chapters are all showing us that Jonathan would have been a brilliant King. But the whole thing is falling apart, not because of what he has done, but because of what Saul has done.

And that's what makes sin so unfair. Sin doesn't just Mount up as a burden on our own backs, affecting just us as we go through life. Sin leaves a trail of destruction behind us that hurts as many people as it possibly can. Jonathan understood this. He really did understand this.

[13 : 49] He could see his father's feelings. He knew what God was doing. He knew that the Kingdom had been taken from Saul because of his feelings and that it was being passed to David. We saw this just last week. Jonathan could see that Saul had made such a foolish vow in chapter 14.

Jonathan knew his father was failing. He knew that he was no longer going to be heir to the throne. He knew that his life was going to take a different path because of the terrible mistakes his father made. Now, this raises a point that we've all got to think about when this sort of thing happens, when we read about Jonathan and Saul. And when you see Saul's mistakes altering Jonathan's life irreversibly in our individualistic mindset, from the Western culture that we're grown up in, our instinctive reaction will be, I don't want to be like Jonathan.

In other words, I don't want to suffer because of somebody else's actions. I don't want my dreams ruined by what somebody else is doing. I don't want that because that's not fair. And if you feel like that, that's understandable. And it's true.

But God forbid that in all our desperation not to experience suffering like Jonathan did, God forbid that we forget. There's probably a far bigger risk of us causing suffering like solve it.

My sin this week has got huge potential to harm others, and so does yours.

[15 : 38] As we share our lives with our families, with our colleagues, with our neighbors, with our community. That's a lesson we must never forget.

Jonathan understood what was wrong with the world. Second thing that Jonathan understood was he understood what was wrong. He understood his identity. He understood what was wrong with the world, and he also understood his identity. Look again at verse four.

Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him, and he gave it to David and his armor and even his sword and his girdle and his belt. Now, this is the kind of verse that's so easy to read, and you think it's not that big a deal. This is an utterly astonishing moment. Jonathan is the heir to the throne. He's a key military leader.

He's a national hero, and he takes his robe, his armor, his sword belt, and bow. In other words, everything that identifies him as heir, leader, and hero. He takes these things and he gives them to David. In other words, Jonathan is basically renouncing his position and his privileges, and he is giving them all to his friend. And that's astonishing because people just don't do that sort of thing.

People didn't do it then, and people don't do it now. You look at the Olympics. No athlete is in first place in the last 10 meters of an Olympic final and then just eases off to allow somebody else to take gold instead of them. People who work for years to get their dream job don't just resign after a week and say, oh, actually, I want someone else to have it. People who finally finish buying or building their dream house don't then just take the keys and give it away so that someone else can live there yet.

[17 : 29] That's exactly what Jonathan's doing.

And just think of what he's giving up. Think of the power he was in line to have. He was going to be the most powerful man in the nation. He would have been at the very top. Approval.

The crowds would have been singing his name. He was already a hero. He could have become a legend. He'd have had all the glory, the prestige, the honor of being King and comfort. Think of the comfort he'd have enjoyed.

Money, food, women, all of that was at his fingertips. And these things are all incredibly attractive. We all want power, whether that's been the boss at work, whether that's been listened to at home or maybe even dictating what we like at Church. Power feels so good. We all crave it.

We all want approval. It's great when people think we're great and we all want comfort, house, car, salary, clothes, affection, intimacy, fun, freedom. We want it all. Jonathan had power, approval, comfort at his fingertips at a level that nobody else in Israel would have had, and he takes it all, and he gives it to David. And what that means is that basically he's handing over his identity.

[18 : 50] So Jonathan, the heir to the throne, hands that inheritance to David. Jonathan, the military commander, hands that power over to David. Jonathan, the national hero, hand that status over to David. As you read on, as we read on in that chapter 18, it's not Jonathan's name that gets sung anymore. It's David's.

And what I really want us to recognize is that all that's incredibly hard to do. If we think about what makes us who we are, all of that's incredibly hard to hand over. And they were all different. And it's different for every one of us. Maybe you worked really hard to be in charge at work.

Maybe you're the boss. People look up to you. You have power. Maybe you've poured years of energy into making your home beautiful. You live there, it's your home.

And people can look at your house and think, wow, that's just a really nice house that they've got. Same for your car, maybe even for your phone, whatever it might be. Maybe you've worked hard to have a really comfortable retirement. You've done it. House is paid for.

Children are well set up. You can have nice holidays if you want to. People can look at you and think, they've made it in life. Our identity is bound up in all of these things. Now, that's a crucial point.

[20 : 09] Our identity is bound up in all of these things. And if you think that it doesn't apply to you, then I'll just say to you, prove it and give one of them away.

Not easy.

Not easy at all.

That's what Jonathan is doing. We are watching on as Jonathan hands his identity over to somebody else.

Except actually, he doesn't, does he?

[20 : 46] He doesn't. Because this stuff is not where his identity actually lies. His identity doesn't lie in his status, in his achievements, or even in his robe, his sword and his bow. His identity lies in his relationship with God and in the fact that knowing God, trusting God, following God, matters more to him than anything else. And that's why he could hand the rest of the stuff over.

No problem. And instantly this confronts every one of us with the question, Where does our identity lie?

And the way to find the answer to that question is to ask yourself, what can't I give up?

What can't you give up in life now? You might say, Well, I can't give up my family, my friends, the people I care for and work, and the people that I support and help. And that's all perfectly okay, because these are God given responsibilities that he wants you to fulfill. But if in that list of things you can't give up, it includes things like your salary, your cash, your pension, your Facebook account, or even your Sunday afternoon routine. If these are equally immovable, then you've got to stop and think.

And if when you think about stuff that you can't give up, if Jesus isn't one of them, in fact, if he's not the most important one of all, then you've really got to stop and think.

[22 : 23] So often our identity is bound up with our dreams, either in success, when our security and self esteem rides on a crest of a wave because we made it and we were the one that we dreamed we would always be, or more likely, in failure, where our whole lives are bruised by the fact that we were never able to do what we always thought we would be.

When we struggle with that bitterness of our lives in a shadow of a dream that never happened, we might succeed, we might fail.

We might not be the one who has the life that we dreamt of, and probably we won't be. But the key point in all of this that we learned from Jonathan is that none of that has to define you, because dreams are the wrong place to find your identity. Jonathan understood this. He understood this so well. And what makes Jonathan such a hero is not what he held on to with a vicelike grip.

What makes Jonathan a hero is that he is quite willing to let go of stuff that ultimately does not matter for him. It was everything that was symbolized by his robe, his sword, his belt, his bow. For us, well, there's loads of things that could be house, car, clothes, job title, salary, routine, reputation. We can pour so much energy into these things. And if our identity lies in these things, whenever they are threatened, we will cry, that's not fair.

But when it becomes clear to Jonathan that the throne is going to go to David, he does not cry, that's not fair. Instead, he rejoices and he willingly steps aside so that God's purposes can be fulfilled. We said at the start that these teens chapters are presenting us with a contrast between Jonathan and Saul. Here, when you come to chapter 18, the contrast with Saul could not be cleared out because when you read on into verses six to eleven, the verses I read in Gallic, or some of them that I read in Gallic, you see that Saul is just consumed with envy towards David, so much so that he tries to kill him. And not just in this chapter, but many more times.

[25 : 03] If you read on into the 20s chapters, the lesson here is that Saul was so desperate to hold onto the throne that he let go of God.

I've got to ask, is that you are you letting go of God in order to hold onto something else?

Saul was so desperate to hold onto the throne that he let go of God. Jonathan would never let go of God, even if it meant giving up the throne.

But how was he able to do that? Well, that brings us to the last thing that we see. Jonathan. As we've been saying, he understood what's wrong with the world. Jonathan understood identity.

Most of all, Jonathan understood love.

[26 : 10] At the heart of everything that's happening in these verses is the fact that Jonathan loved David. You see it so clearly in verses one to three. The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David. Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Jonathan made a Covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul.

These two men are like brothers, and their love for one another is an extraordinary example of friendship, commitment, and loyalty. We'll look at that in more detail in a couple of weeks time. What I want us to see tonight is that in both of these men, we see shadows of Jesus. In David, we see God's chosen King, the one through whom God's purposes are going to be fulfilled. That's a glimpse of Jesus, God to King, the one through whom all of God's purposes are going to be fulfilled.

But in Jonathan, we see the same thing, because in Jonathan, we see somebody who is quite willing to set aside his own glory for the benefit of others. That's also a glimpse of Jesus, because Jesus did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped and held on to, but he humbled himself and became a servant, becoming obedient even to the point of death. All so that you and I might be saved. And all of it, the shadows of Jonathan and David and the reality in Jesus, it's all grounded on love. Everything that Jonathan and David are doing is grounded on the love that they had for one another and the love that they had for God.

Everything that Jesus does for us is exactly the same. It's all grounded on love. And this raises two lessons, two crucial lessons that I want to conclude with. Number one, throughout the sermon tonight, we've been talking about how unfair it is when things don't work out the way we want, when we're not the one, when we have to watch somebody else having the life that we thought was meant to be ours. And the key question is, how do we cope with that?

How do we cope with not being the one?

[28 : 18] The answer to that is love.

Jonathan understood that he could delight in handing everything over to David. Why? Because he loved him.

It wasn't hard for Jonathan to hand it over to David because he just delighted to see this man whom he loved so much, fulfill the purposes that God had for him. Jonathan understood that. And the practical relevance for us in all of this is huge, because when we are gripped with jealousy, when we're bruised with disappointment, when we're frustrated that things have worked out better for others and not for us, the great medicine for all of that is love. Now, that is not easy, but of course, hate is always 1000 times easier than love. We need to pray for God to help us.

But what I want us to recognize is that it's so effective. If we love one another, then jealousies and frustrations will melt away. Or as Peter says, love will cover a multitude of sins. And you might think, oh, that all sounds you know, that all sounds so idealistic, but it's actually completely true. If someone else is living in your dream house, love them and you'll soon stop caring about the house.

If someone gets promoted ahead of you at work, love them and be a blessing in their lives, and the disappointments will soon fade away. And even if someone that you really liked marries somebody else, love them as a couple and friendship will thrive. And you'll probably soon discover that they weren't the Mr. Perfect that you thought they were anyway. And if somebody thinks differently from you in Church, love them.

[30 : 16] You'll soon discover that you've got far more in common than you think. And you might instinctively say yes, but Thomas, all of that's not fair. Well, if you think like that, just go and ask Jesus what he thinks about loving people who have treated him badly.

The second lesson that we need to understand is that all of this is teaching us something crucial about love. It's teaching us that love will free you and love will bind you all at the same time. In other words, love liberates and love incarcerates, and that balance is inescapable. Love is where we feel the most free in life, but at the very same time, love is where we are at our most bound. And you might think, well, that sounds like a total contradiction, but it actually makes perfect sense, because the things that we love are the things that fill us with joy that make us feel so free.

And they're also the things that we can never let go of.

They're the things that we're bound to love binds us to something else. This is why the great expression of love in Scripture is this word. Here the word Covenant. We see that in these verses. It doesn't just say David and Jonathan loved each other.

It's that they formally expressed and committed to that love by way of a Covenant. And you see that many times in the Old Testament, they made a Covenant, and that meant that they were bound to one another with the deepest commitment. It was a life and death commitment to one another. And that Covenant meant more to Jonathan than his robe, his armor, his bow, his belt, his glory, his status. Jonathan understood that loving David meant being bound together in commitment, loyalty, and Covenant love.

[32 : 25] And this highlights what's probably the most important lesson of all for us. When we think about the stuff that we love, when we think about the stuff that we dream of, the things that we long for, we will often think that we have a grip of whatever it is that we love. So whatever it is, you can think of something that you love, and it could be a good thing. Your husband, your wife, your children, your family, your friends, whatever something that you love. And we think these are the things that we really hold onto.

And that's two on one level. I can think of lots of things that I love, and I hold onto them tightly, but the real truth is that whatever you love is actually gripping you the thing that you love is actually holding you. When Jonathan entered this Covenant with David that meant that for the rest of his life he was committed to David. In other words, David had a grip on him. The same was true for David.

It worked both ways. Jonathan could not go back and be prayed David even though it meant that if he had he'd have got the throne for himself same was true for David. They were committed to one another. They had this grip on one another. It's teaching us that the thing that you love most the thing that you cannot let go of that is the thing that's holding you what is it what is that thing what's the thing that you love most that's the thing that's holding you and what I want to say to you is that you will find peace, joy, security and freedom.

Only when that thing is Jesus a dream house won't do it neither will a dream job neither will I dream relationship neither will any level of power, approval or comfort. Only in Jesus will we find a love, a joy a peace that nothing will take away. And the reason for that is because if you hold on to him the real truth is that he is holding you. And that means that being the one having all your demons come through impressing everybody else. None of that matters.

And that sets you free. And you're free because you're being held by him forever.

[35 : 20] Jonathan understood all of that, do you.