

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me take notice of things today.
to notice other people in need and do my best to help;
to notice the amazing beauty of the world all around me;
to notice problems around me that can be solved with Your help;
to notice the effects of what I do, and seek to learn from them all;
to notice You, and talk to You, whenever I can. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Bible

Thank God today for the Bible, for its amazing history and the people who have given their lives so that we may have it, and for the way the Holy Spirit has used it throughout history.

On-going prayers

- *Praise God for all forms of renewal in the church around the world*
- *Pray that governments around the world will respect civil liberties.*
- *Pray for leaders of industry*

Meditation

Lord God, Holy Father, Almighty Saviour and Lord;
Embrace us, empower us, enrich us, inspire us!

Our lives have no meaning without power and drive;
Energising, controlling, motivating, guiding.

Our spirits need to feed from the power of the Spirit;
Creatively, lovingly, artistically, scientifically.

Our souls crave the love and affection of the Father;
Cherishing, cleansing, nurturing, enlivening.

Our bodies cry out for the healing touch of the Saviour;
Restoring, remaking, reviving, rebuilding.

Our minds thrive on the challenge of living for You;
Intellectually, practically, logically, thoughtfully.

Thank You, Good Lord, for Your abundant love;
For now, and forever, until the end of time!

Bible Study - 1 Samuel 18:1-9

¹ When he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ² Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. ³ Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ He stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

⁵ David continued on and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved. ⁶ As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the

Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. ⁷ And the women sang to one another as they made merry, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." ⁸ Saul was furious, for what they said upset him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?" ⁹ So Saul kept his eye on David from that day on.

Review

We left the story of David yesterday with the young champion standing before the King of Israel. His defeat of Goliath gave him, in human terms, almost limitless power and authority which he could have used to further his own ends, but instead, he replied to King Saul with courtesy (17:58), and deferred to him. Until the tragic death of Saul many years later at the hands of the Philistines (1 Samuel 31) David insisted upon calling him 'the Lord's anointed'; he had to live with the irony of being anointed to be King of Israel but giving respect to the man who already occupied the throne even though God had rejected him. All the time, David was growing stronger by doing the Lord's will, whilst Saul was failing, repeatedly.

At the beginning of our story today, a strange episode is recorded telling of the friendship of David and Saul's son Jonathan. It does sound as if the relationship is extraordinarily close, and if you read it without reference to all that has happened in this long and complex story line, you might be tempted, as some have been, to wonder how far the relationship went. When the Bible says 'Jonathan loved him as his own soul', and describes how he stripped his clothes and gave them to David, it sounds as if the relationship is edging beyond normal heterosexual friendship. However, to follow this thought beyond what the Bible actually says is to miss the point of this story entirely. The fact is that these verses come nowhere near describing or implying a sexual relationship between these two, they only speak of a powerful friendship between two men; and the suggestion of homosexuality trundles us down a dead end. The writers of this story, under the inspiration of God's Spirit, are not interested in this but they are trying to convey to us an important issue to do with rights of lineage to the throne of Israel.

When David finally became King, he needed to unite all the tribes of Israel and Judah (the two main 'regions' of what we call 'Israel'); he went to great lengths to try and win over those who had previously supported Saul and his 'house' or, 'court'. Jonathan's actions demonstrated to those who believed Saul to be the first King of Israel, that David was entitled, by the normal rules of hierarchy and lineage, to accede to the throne after Saul in the place of Jonathan, because Jonathan had acceded that right to David through covenant friendship. Without this friendship and this story, Saul's supporters of later years would have resisted David more strongly and pursued Saul's right to the throne by presenting an heir of Saul, through Jonathan.

This is all rather odd to us today, but I ask you to consider some facts about what had happened to Jonathan in the story so far – most of which has happened in passages of 1 Samuel prior to these website studies. Jonathan was Saul's son and heir by right to the throne of all Israel and Judah. He, as well as David, had proved himself in battle at the expense of his father (see 1 Samuel 14), except that Saul had rashly made an oath before battle which Jonathan had unwittingly contravened, resulting in a fierce argument between the two in which Saul had cursed his son and heir, threatening him with death. Jonathan had only been saved by the intervention of the people (1 Sam14:45)! This was not merely a bad episode in a relationship; the curse was Saul's way of denying the rightful heritage of the throne to his son! In our story today, the close relationship between David and Jonathan resolves the issue, in particular, the handing over of clothes by Jonathan indicates his acceptance that David is the rightful heir to the throne; hence the talk of friendship sealed by 'covenant' (18:3). David had not killed Saul to gain the throne (see yesterday's study), he did, however, by mutual friendship, acquire the right to succeed the mentally ailing King.

The story goes on to illustrate David's right to the throne by describing the public support he enjoyed. The praises of the people are an affront to Saul not because it was a matter of one-upmanship in valour and war, but because they were to him like the threat to his throne of a more powerful and influential man. In those days the matter was clear, the one who could protect the people from their enemies had the greatest claim to sovereignty; hence Saul's comment 'what more can he have than the kingdom' (18:8)

Just as we saw yesterday, David was a man of God and knew that this 'way of the world' was not God's way. He is described as being successful in what he did, but no comment of his is recorded on the praise that is heaped upon him. He is recorded as neither accepting it nor rejecting it. Perhaps the greatest spiritual lesson we can learn from this passage is that the success and praise we may receive in this world may be part of God's will for us, but they are a poor guide to the ways of the Lord and no good for our spiritual health! Our hearts should, with David, find their sustenance in the long term will of God and not the ups and downs of the present, however attractive they may seem.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Have you come across the view that this passage is an indicator of homosexuality in the Bible? What do you think of this?
2. Do you think I am right to assume David's silence at the praises he receives? How do you respond to praise?
3. How do you respond when you find passages of the Old Testament which speak of people being killed in this way?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The issue of David and Jonathan has been discussed for years, but unless we put this aside and are prepared to look at important issue of David's right to the throne, then we will miss what scripture says. I find it disappointing that we cannot use the story of David and Jonathan today without some people implying what is not there.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What success have you had in your life? What failures have you had in your life? Write them down, prayerfully hand them over to God and be at peace about them.*
- *Read through some of the story of Saul from chapter 13, to familiarise yourself with the story.*
- *Miss a meal in order to pray, or spend a day in fasting for the senior leaders of God's people in the world today*

Final Prayer

Great, awesome God of compassion, strength, righteousness and mercy; deal with me each day according to your plan for my life. Save me from being side-tracked by issues that do not help me, and give me peace, I pray, that I am following in the right pathway. In Jesus' name; AMEN