

Let Not the King Sin Against David
1 Samuel 19-20
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Introduction

Robert Downey Jr. is one of today's most successful Hollywood actors after playing Iron Man in a dozen Marvel movies. His life and career, though, were at a low point in his twenties when he struggled with drug addiction. But he went through rehab, got clean and sober, and resurrected his career that took off in the early 2000s. As admirable as defeating addiction is, and as impressive as his success has been, there's something about Robert Downey Jr. that I admire much more: he sticks up for his friends. When Mel Gibson was blackballed in Hollywood for his drunken rants, after a few years, Robert Downey Jr. was at an awards ceremony where he made this plea on Gibson's behalf: "'I humbly ask that you join me... in forgiving my friend his trespasses, offering him the same clean slate you have me and allowing him to continue his great and ongoing contribution to our collective art without shame.'"¹ More recently, his friend, Chris Pratt, was being criticized for being a Christian and going to a church that held to historic Christian teaching. Once again Downey was there to defend his friend: "The 'sinless' are casting stones at my brother, Chris Pratt... A real Christian who lives by principle, has never demonstrated anything but positivity and gratitude... If you take issue with Chris... I've got a novel idea. Delete your social media accounts, sit with your OWN defects of character, work on THEM, then celebrate your humanness."²

Sticking up for other people is a trait we should all admire, especially when it might cost you something. I'm sure there was backlash against Robert Downey Jr. in defending these men who other people were intent on cancelling. There's always a cost associated with sticking up for people; I'm not talking about defending bad or abusive behavior, I'm talking about loving people enough to speak out when others are kicking them when they're down. As a kid, you knew that if your friend was being bullied and you stepped in, you might become the new bully's target. As an adult you'll still find that sticking up for others may result in them coming after you. But our faith is built upon a God who protects the weak, the sinful, and the condemned, and stands ready to take the attacks meant for them.

In the Scripture passage today, our protagonist, David, had his life threatened often by the bully, King Saul. He was defended and protected by multiple people. Our first eight verses record that

I. Jonathan Protected His Friend (19:1-8)

¹ And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David. ² And Jonathan told David, "Saul my father seeks to kill you. Therefore be on your guard in the morning. Stay in a secret place and hide yourself. ³ And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything I will tell you." ⁴ And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you. ⁵ For he took his life in his hand and he struck down the Philistine, and the Lord worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?" ⁶ And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death." ⁷ And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan

¹ <https://www.thelist.com/74465/stunning-transformation-robert-downey-jr/>

² <https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/culture/story/robert-downey-jr-mark-ruffalo-defend-chris-pratt-73734574>

reported to him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before. ⁸ And there was war again. And David went out and fought with the Philistines and struck them with a great blow, so that they fled before him.

These chapters are going to contrast two men in the palace: King Saul and his son the prince, Jonathan. They both interacted with David, the up-and-coming new warrior hero in Israel, and they both had to decide how they were going to treat him. They each had a lot to lose, a lot at stake. One of them will fight David and try to tear him down, while the other will befriend and protect him. And by extension, they will fight against, or support, the work that the Lord was doing.

The writer H.G. Wells had a character in one of his books named Mr. Polly, and he said this about him: "He was not so much a human being as a civil war."³ That's a pretty accurate description of King Saul at this point in his life, isn't it? He loves David, then he's jealous of him, then he hates him and tries to kill him, then he relents and sends him off to war, then back to hate and murder attempts... he's a wreck. At the beginning of this chapter, Saul plotted against David's life with his household. He didn't realize the depth of the bond that had developed between his son and his now son-in-law. Or perhaps he thought that Jonathan's self-interest in protecting his future and his throne would overrule that friendship. But Saul didn't understand selfless covenantal love.

Jonathan did, and it led him to side with David and warn him. Honor your father and mother... until they ask you to sin. Jonathan could not go along with his father's plan to murder David, so he laid out a strong case reminding Saul of a number of things: that David had done nothing against him, but had only brought good to the king, risking his own life and killing Goliath, which the Lord used to save Israel from the hands of the Philistines. Jonathan called the idea of killing David a "*sin against innocent blood... without cause.*" Apparently, Saul was in his right mind and heard the logic in his son's pleas, so he made an oath: "*As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death.*" I don't know if he had his fingers crossed behind his back or not, but Saul goes against his oath in pursuing David's death multiple times in the future, the next passage included. This time

II. Michal Protected Her Husband (19:9-17)

⁹ Then a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing the lyre. ¹⁰ And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night. ¹¹ Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, "If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." ¹² So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped. ¹³ Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats' hair at its head and covered it with the clothes. ¹⁴ And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." ¹⁵ Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him." ¹⁶ And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with the pillow of goats' hair at its head. ¹⁷ Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me thus and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" And Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go. Why should I kill you?'"

Saul lost his mind again listening to David play his lyre, the 10-stringed harp's music that in the past had calmed the king down. In a Deja-vu scene from last week's passage, he threw a spear at the young warrior-musician; but again, David escaped. Then he went home to his wife. That, in itself, is a victory for David because he did not retaliate. He had just had amazing success on the battlefield, he could have easily anticipated Saul's murder attempt, hid a slingshot or other weapon among his

³ H.G. Wells, *The History of Mr. Polly* (New York: The Press of the Reader's Club, 1941), p. 5.

things, and taken the king out. But, as we will see later, David respected Saul's kingship as given by the hand of God, and he would never strike back.

But if David thought he had escaped Saul's murderous mood, his wife (Saul's daughter) knew that he wasn't safe. Perhaps she spotted the royal hitmen outside their house, or maybe she just knew that her dad's anger lasted a lot longer than that – either way she helped him escape. Then she pulled the old “pillow of goats' hair” fake body in the bed trick! The hobbits did something like that in *The Fellowship of the Ring* to escape the Ringwraiths; perhaps this is where Tolkien got it from. And when Saul confronted his daughter, she pulled the “he threatened me” alibi to escape her father's wrath. She had less faith in him than her brother, Jonathan, had. She didn't even try to talk Saul out of killing her husband, she just flat out lied and deceived him. She loved David and they were bound by a covenant, just like David and Jonathan were, but this was the covenant of marriage. Shame on Saul for assuming that she would turn on her new husband out of loyalty to him, in the same way that he thought his son would turn on David as well.

The next incident follows David on the run where

III. The Holy Spirit Protected the Anointed King (19:18-24)

18 Now David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and lived at Naioth. 19 And it was told Saul, “Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah.” 20 Then Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. 21 When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. 22 Then he himself went to Ramah and came to the great well that is in Secu. And he asked, “Where are Samuel and David?” And one said, “Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah.” 23 And he went there to Naioth in Ramah. And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. 24 And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night. Thus it is said, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”

We haven't heard anything about the prophet Samuel since he anointed David in his home many years earlier, but apparently David knew where to find him. Samuel was living among a company of other prophets as their leader, so David lived there with him for a time. Eventually, Saul used his “Find a Friend” app on his iPhone to locate David. And then comes one of the strangest episodes in all of 1 Samuel. Saul sent three sets of messengers, who were probably more like armed soldiers, to force David to come back. But all three groups of messengers couldn't help but join in on the prophesying that the prophets were engaged in. I'm not sure exactly what was going on there, but apparently if you wandered into the midst of this spiritual activity, the Spirit came upon you and you had no choice but to join in. So Saul headed down to see for himself, perhaps thinking he was immune to the Spirit of God working in him now, but he was drawn into the prophesying too! He went even further than everyone else, too, stripping off his clothes and lying around naked.

What is going on here? Well, this was not the first time that Saul had joined in prophesying with a group of prophets. Back in chapter 10, after Saul had been anointed by Samuel to be the king, Samuel told him that when the prophets came to town, they would bring a bunch of instruments and be prophesying. “*Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.... And all these signs came to pass that day*” (vv. 6, 9b). So, the incident at Ramah was a repeat of sorts, but it signified the end of Saul's reign rather than the beginning, because it protected the man who would ascend to the throne after him. It was a humiliation of Saul, trying to get through to him that he should stop attacking David.

But, of course, Saul was more stubborn and hard-headed than that. The next chapter returns to **IV. Jonathan Protected David Again (Chapter 20)**
(Read 1 Samuel 20)

So David went back to meet with Jonathan and find out why Saul wanted to kill him so badly. Jonathan naively didn't think that his father was going to keep trying to kill him, but David knew better. So he proposed a test – "When I don't show up for the next banquet to which I am expected to attend, you can gauge your dad's reaction to determine his intentions towards me. If Saul is fine with the excuse that you give, then I'm safe; if he's angry, he intends to kill me." So Jonathan agreed.

In verse 8, David said, "*Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you.*" Two things about this: number one, the Hebrew word translated "deal kindly" is *hesed*, which means "steadfast, loving kindness." I've made a big deal about that in other sermons because it is the word that God uses to describe His covenant, unconditional, eternal love for His people. David has asked Jonathan for the deepest kind of love there is, and what had he based that on? Jonathan's having made a covenant with him. Just a casual friendship would probably not have made Jonathan go against his family and ruin his own chances at the throne. But a covenant friendship was a committed, deep friendship. And Jonathan asked David for something in the context of this covenant in verses 14-15, you might want to put an asterisk in your Bible there and write 2 Samuel chapter 9 next to it. When I preach on that passage, we will refer back to Jonathan and David's covenant that had kept David alive and would also protect Jonathan's family. That covenant, *hesed* steadfast love would last beyond his death.

Jonathan worked through the entire dinner plan, lying to his father about David's absence. And sure enough, he found out that Saul was planning to harm David – in fact, Saul got so angry that he threatened Jonathan too! Apparently, Jonathan was a bad liar in verses 28-29 where he gave the alibi for why David was not at the feast, because Saul immediately flew into a rage and accused his son of caring more for David than for himself and his family. Saul has just told Jonathan that as long as David was alive, he would never inherit the throne, and then he threw his spear at him, which would have ended Jonathan's ability to reign even more definitively! Jonathan left the meal angry, humiliated, and disgraced. He went back to the field and went through the whole arranged "shoot an arrow and have the servant fetch it" to warn David. Their time together ends with bowing, weeping, kissing, and the reminder of their deep commitment to one another. And then David fled.

Conclusion

I've decided that Jonathan is one of my favorite people in the Bible. He gave up his royal inheritance for the sake of his friendship, for what he saw as the best course of action – that his friend, David, would become the next king. It made no political sense, a selfish person like Saul had no idea why he would act this way. Jonathan had essentially renounced the throne to David before, and now he'd even taken on the danger of being associated with the future king. His father took out his anger on him; Jonathan was attacked and humiliated for being loyal and sticking up for his friend. You know you have a great friend when they stick up for you when you're not around. We see it in a very dramatic way here where Jonathan intervened with his father and pleaded for David's life. It's always easier to join in other people's negativity, but a true friend doesn't let others criticize or plot against you when you're not around. They speak up and they defend you, no matter how big or small the slight is to you. If your friends don't defend you, or worse, join in when others attack you verbally, it's time to get new friends. And if you stay silent when others make fun of, or gossip about, your close friends, it's time for you to stand up and learn to be a true friend.

But even more than friendship, loyalty, and courage, this story is ultimately about God's protection of His people. 2 Peter chapter 2 talks about God keeping Noah and his family alive when He flooded the earth, and keeping Lot and his family alive when he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, and then Peter makes this point: "*the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteousness under punishment until the day of judgment*" (v. 9). God, in His sovereign power, can rescue us from any situation that we are threatened with. He does not always choose to take us out of difficult situations, often using them to shape us and grow us to be more Christlike. But, as the Heidelberg Catechism says: God "preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation." All things have been ordained by God to pass, and that includes every detail of your life, and God watches over you in the same way that He watched over David. God kept David alive through many different people and means until David would eventually take the throne he had been anointed for. God will protect you physically, sometimes in ways that you didn't even realize, but there's something more important than physical protection. When the evil one throws his accusations at you, when he brings up all of the bad things that you've done in your life, he doesn't have to lie; you are guilty and you stand condemned. But Jesus stands before you, defending you, claiming your life for His kingdom. His blood covers your sin and protects you from being punished for it.

This past week, three men who had served in larger churches in our denomination, the PCA, went to be with the Lord. You've probably heard the most well-known one, Tim Keller, who was the founding pastor of Redeemer Pres in NYC and authored dozens of books and had a profound impact on countless pastors and preachers, died after several years of fighting cancer. Harry Reeder, who pastored several churches including Briarwood Pres in Birmingham, AL and had a wonderful book and ministry called *From Embers to A Flame* that helped struggling churches revitalize, died in a car crash mid-week. And Steve Smallman, who was the pastor of McLean Pres in VA and the Executive Director of a World Harvest Mission, died last weekend. Please pray for their grieving families and those they served in ministry. I'll close with a quote from Steve Smallman since he is the least well-known of the three (from his book *The Walk*):

"The gospel is the story of Jesus, who came to bring peace, God's *shalom*, from heaven to earth. Jesus called this 'the kingdom of God.' He accomplished it by going to war against Satan and the final enemy, death. He cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, and faced death himself at the cross. And Jesus won! His death and resurrection marked the turning point in God's great plan to remove every aspect of the curse of sin. The war isn't over, but the outcome is certain, and the whole creation is waiting for the time when God completes what he plans to do for his children and Jesus returns to restore all things. No wonder Paul can say that any suffering that we must endure while we wait cannot be compared to the glory that will follow."⁴

Thank you, God, that those men have entered into their eternal rest and heard you say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And thank God that every one of us who have received forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus can have certainty that He will protect and defend us until we are standing before Him in glory. Amen!

Benediction - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*"

⁴ Stephen Smallman, *The Walk* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), pp. 141-42.