

Courage to Choose

Courage to Lead

1 Samuel 20:1-42

Pastor Bryan Clark

I know some of you, maybe many of you have concerns, maybe even anxiety over the presidential campaign. So I'm here to put your minds at ease. There's nothing to worry about. I would even say it doesn't matter who you vote for because in January, all the presidential candidates will all become president of the United States. Now that makes sense, doesn't it? I'm going to guess there's not a single person in the room that would say that makes sense. I agree. So then why would it make sense that all the gods of the religions of the world, at the end of the story, will all be God? The religions of the world have very different views and definitions of God. But at the end of the story, there will only be one God, who by definition is God. He will be the King of kings and Lord of lords. The challenge of this life according to the Scriptures is we must choose which king we surrender to.

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 20. Last week in Chapter 19, David flees for his life, ends up in Ramah with Samuel. One would have to imagine part of that conversation was David just reviewing with Samuel, "You did anoint me to be the next king of Israel, didn't you?" because none of this could make any sense to David. Saul goes to Ramah after David; he ends up in some sort of strange trance for about twenty-four hours, giving David an opportunity to flee back to Gibeah of Saul. There we pick up the conversation between David and Jonathan.

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?" He said to him, "Far from it, you shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. So why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!" Yet David vowed again, saying, "Your father knows well that I have found favor in your sight, and he has said, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved.' But truly as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death." Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." So David said to Jonathan, "Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I ought to sit down to eat with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked *leave* of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family.' If he says, 'It is good,' your servant *will* be safe; but if he is very angry, know that he has decided on evil. Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is iniquity in me, put me to death yourself; for why then should you bring me to your father?" Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! For if I should indeed learn that evil has been decided by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you about it?" Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" Jonathan said to David, "Come, and let us go out into the field." So both of them went out to the field.

(*NASB, 1 Samuel 20:1-11)

So we'll just take that much. David is now in Chapter 20 moving from what we defined as a *flat character* in the last couple of chapters, meaning there was really no thoughts or emotions of David revealed, to what we would refer to as a *round character*, meaning now we find out what he's thinking, what he's feeling, how he's processing this. It's also worth noting that even though the chapters before have clearly indicated a deep friendship between Jonathan and David, this is the first time that the text reveals words out of David's mouth to Jonathan. So it is a significant moment in the story. The first words that David is recorded as having said to Jonathan is, "*What is my sin? What is my iniquity? What have I done wrong that your father wants to kill me?*" The language in this text is very formal. David understands Jonathan is the prince; Jonathan has a lot of position and power and David is very respectful to him. But he cannot figure out: why does Saul want to kill him? As a matter of fact he says, "*I feel like I'm one step away from death. One false step, and Saul will kill me.*" Now I think because we know how the story goes, we often fail to enter in to the confusion and the emotions in these moments in the story. We think David is just so super spiritual, none of this bothers him. But that's just not true. This is so confusing; he hasn't done anything wrong. He has trusted God; he has been faithful to Saul; he has served Saul; he has responded with courage; he has benefited the kingdom, and in exchange for that, Saul wants to kill him. He genuinely feels like one misstep, and he will die.

Jonathan isn't convinced. Jonathan doesn't think that's the case. Jonathan is still struggling to come to grips with what has become of his father. The last thing apparently Jonathan knows is that Saul vowed not to kill David. He seems to be unaware of the events that took place in Chapter 19. I raised this question before, but is Saul at a point in his life where he can be reasoned with? Reasonable people tend to think anyone can be reasoned with. Jonathan made a moral argument to Saul that it would be wrong; it would be sin to kill David. It was a very strong moral argument. But the question is: Is Saul at a place in his life where he has the moral integrity where he can conduct himself with moral responsibility? Jonathan is trying to sort this out. It's helpful to understand sometimes people reach a point in their lives where they simply can no longer be reasoned with. Reasonable people struggle to come to grips with that. Sometimes people just simply lack the moral integrity to conduct their lives with moral responsibility. Once you realize that's true, you have to rethink how you conduct yourself with that person.

So Jonathan's not convinced, but he's willing to listen to David. So David comes up with a plan that when we have the upcoming festival, I won't go; Saul will see my empty chair; let's see how he responds. So Jonathan is willing to go along with this. What David says to Jonathan, again in respect for the fact that Jonathan is the prince is: if your father the king responds harshly, he's asking Jonathan to remember that we have entered in to a covenant agreement. In other words, Jonathan then would have tremendous power, and what is he going to do with that power? David says if I've done something wrong, then he's asking Jonathan, "You kill me; you put me to death but if I've done nothing wrong, I'm asking you to treat me with kindness according to our agreement." Well, Jonathan knows that David has done nothing wrong, so there's an agreement that he will certainly warn David and be true to the covenant. Verse 12:

Then Jonathan said to David, "The LORD, the God of Israel, be *witness!* When I have sounded out my father about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if there is good *feeling* toward David, shall I not then send to you and make it known to you? If it please my father to do you harm, may the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also, if I do not make it known to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And may the LORD be with you as He has been with my father. If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die? You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every

one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.” So Jonathan made a *covenant* with the house of David, *saying*, “May the LORD require *it* at the hands of David’s enemies.” Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life. (Vs. 12-17)

So Jonathan agrees that he will certainly tell David if everything is okay, and he will warn David if there’s danger and he must flee. You clearly get the impression that they feel like this may actually be the last conversation they have together. So Jonathan says if it goes poorly, if Saul wants to do harm to David, he will warn David he will have to flee. But then he says: **May the Lord be with you as He has been with my father.** So this is where the text takes an interesting turn. This is a very important part of the text because at this point, what Jonathan is saying is if you have to flee as a fugitive, Jonathan believes that David will still be the next king of Israel. So that’s what he’s saying—that the blessing of God will be on David as it has been on Saul. Now stop and think about it. Even though Saul has been an arrogant, disobedient, unfaithful king, God has still been faithful. He’s still alive; he’s still the king. Israel is still relatively safe and secure; the Philistines haven’t taken over. Again and again, God has still been faithful to Saul. So Jonathan is offering a blessing that the Lord will be with David as He has been with Saul. But then he goes on to say, “David, when you come into your kingdom, I’m asking you to keep our covenant and show mercy and grace and lovingkindness to me and my family.”

In the ancient Near East, when there was a change of dynasty—so not just going from one king to the other within that dynasty, but a complete change of family—then the custom was that the new king, the new dynasty would kill every living relative of the old dynasty in order to remove any possible threat. So what Jonathan is asking is, “David, when you come into your kingdom, I’m asking you to show lovingkindness, to show grace and mercy to me and my family.” In other words, what Jonathan is saying is it is going to come down to Jonathan making a choice, and Jonathan chooses David. He’s surrendering his right to the throne; he believes David will be the next king of Israel, and he’s choosing David and he’s asking David to honor that when he comes into his kingdom. Now think about this: David is one man, and now he will be a fugitive. Saul is the king. He has at his disposal the entire army of Israel. Yet Jonathan, by faith, believes David will be king to such a degree that when he is king, he is asking David to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. Verse 18:

Then Jonathan said to him, “Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed because your seat will be empty. When you have stayed for three days, you shall go down quickly and come to the place where you hid yourself on that eventful day, and you shall remain by the stone Ezel. I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target. And behold, I will send the lad, *saying*, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I specifically say to the lad, ‘Behold, the arrows are on this side of you, get them,’ then come; for there is safety for you and no harm, as the LORD lives. But if I say to the youth, ‘Behold, the arrows are beyond you,’ go, for the LORD has sent you away. As for the agreement of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever.” (Vs. 18-23)

So here’s the plan; here’s how I will signal you. But the key there was the end of verse 23. The structure of Chapter 20 is divided into two halves. Both halves end with this statement that **the Lord is between you and me forever.** It’s a structural way of telling us that is the point of Chapter 20—this covenant that David and Jonathan have entered into. Verse 24:

So David hid in the field; and when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. The king sat on his seat as usual, the seat by the wall; then Jonathan rose up and Abner sat down by Saul's side, but David's place was empty. Nevertheless Saul did not speak anything that day, for he thought, "It is an accident, he is not clean, surely *he is not clean.*" It came about the next day, the second *day* of the new moon, that David's place was empty; so Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" Jonathan then answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me *to go* to Bethlehem, for he said, 'Please let me go, since our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to attend. And now, if I have found favor in your sight, please let me get away that I may see my brothers.' For this reason he has not come to the king's table." (Vs. 24-29)

So now it's time for the feast. I think David has calculated that if he's not there, it will so push Saul's insecurity buttons that Saul will erupt and Jonathan will see for himself what has become of his father. So now it's time to carry out the plan. It's time for the banquet. So Saul sits at his assigned seat. Jonathan sits in his assigned seat. Abner sits in his assigned seat. But David's chair is empty. This is not like they're having a party; maybe somebody will notice David's not at the party. This is the king's table. David is Saul's son-in-law. He has reserved seating. Everybody at the party can see David's seat is empty. So Saul reasons he must be unclean. There's a variety of ways to become unclean, it took twenty-four hours to become clean, so he's just thinking he has to wait a day; he'll be here tomorrow.

In trying again to get inside of Saul's head, it's so interesting how disconnected with reality Saul has become. In last week's chapter, I think Saul was genuinely surprised that his son Jonathan would not go out and kill David as ordered. Then when he encounters his daughter Michal, I think he is genuinely perplexed that his daughter will not reveal her husband David whom she loves and betray him and turn him over to her crazy father who wants to kill him. He's genuinely perplexed, "Why wouldn't you do that for me?" So now you get to the festival. After all that transpired in Chapter 19, Saul seems genuinely surprised that David has not shown up for dinner. There's just a massive disconnect between his actions and how those actions are affecting the people around him. He just thinks David will show up. In his mind, he must be unclean. But the next day, the chair is empty again. Just imagine how humiliating that must have been for the king. So he says to Jonathan, "What is the deal with the son of Jesse?" A very derogatory statement—you know, what is the deal? So Jonathan says, "Well, David asked me permission to go to Bethlehem and celebrate the festival at home with his own family, rather than here with the king's family." Now think about that. Rather than taking your seat at the king's table, he's going to go home to Bethlehem and celebrate the feast with his own family. I think David is convinced how Saul will respond. Verse 30:

Then Saul's anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die." But Jonathan answered Saul his father and said to him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Then Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down; so Jonathan knew that his father had decided to put David to death. Then Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved over David because his father had dishonored him. (Vs. 30-34)

So Saul immediately erupts in a fit of rage. The Hebrew in terms of what Saul said is crude and it's vulgar. Trust me; the English translation is very mild. Because there are children in the room, we will keep it that way, but it is a nasty vulgar thing that he says. When he refers to Jonathan's mother—his wife as being rebellious—the Hebrew word is not rebellious; it's wayward. Basically, what he's saying is this: it is obvious now that your mother was sleeping around and she became pregnant because it's clear now you are not my legitimate son. The only explanation for why you are acting this way, why you have chosen David over me, is you are clearly an illegitimate son—so your mom was sleeping around. Therefore, by your choice, you have *outed* her nakedness—basically you've exposed her immorality; you've exposed her for what she is. So in this moment of rage, that's basically what Saul is saying to Jonathan, "It's clear now that your mom was sleeping around; you are somebody else's child; you've exposed her nakedness," and he's just venting on Jonathan.

So Saul goes on to say, "As long as David, as long as the son of Jesse lives, you will not sit on the throne. Therefore, the son of Jesse must die." Jonathan now realizes that Saul's intent is to kill David, so Jonathan responds with anger and he wants to know, "Why, what has he done?" This response so infuriates Saul that he picks up his spear and he hurls it at his own son. Now again, getting inside of Saul's head, in one sentence he's saying David must die so Jonathan can be king, and in the very next moment he's hurling a spear at that same son to kill him. He is just completely out of control. Jonathan is now outraged and he gets up from the table and he leaves. The party's over. You know, a little advice: once the host of the party is hurling a spear at you, the family dinner is over and it's time to get up and leave the table. Some of you are thinking: I've been to that family dinner. (*laughter*) But Jonathan is grieved that his father has so dishonored David. David has been faithful; David has been loyal; David is a godly man, and his father has publicly dishonored him and Jonathan knows now David must flee for his life.

Now it came about in the morning that Jonathan went out into the field for the appointment with David, and a little lad *was* with him. He said to his lad, "Run, find now the arrows which I am about to shoot." As the lad was running, he shot an arrow past him. When the lad reached the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the lad and said, "Is not the arrow beyond you?" And Jonathan called after the lad, "Hurry, be quick, do not stay!" And Jonathan's lad picked up the arrow and came to his master. But the lad was not aware of anything; only Jonathan and David knew about the matter. Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad and said to him, "Go, bring *them* to the city." When the lad was gone, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David wept the more. Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'" Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city.

(Vs. 35-42)

So they executed the plan. David knows he's in danger; he's officially a fugitive. David comes out of hiding; Jonathan and David say their goodbyes. There is this reminder of the covenant. Jonathan has made his choice and he has chosen David. His father is outraged by it. But Jonathan believes, by faith, that David will be the next king of Israel and when that time comes, he's asking David to remember me and my family when you come into the kingdom. Will Jonathan and David ever see each other again? We'll have to see as the story unfolds.

I've mentioned several times it's very helpful to remember that in the story, David is a type or a shadow of Christ—he is a shadow of the promised King to come. About a thousand years later that would become a reality, where the God of the universe would take on human flesh. He would walk this earth declaring Himself to be the long-awaited Christ, the Messiah, the long awaited King. On that very first Palm Sunday, the people understood Him to be their long-awaited King. Everything about that entry into Jerusalem was about Jesus as King—from the donkey to the palm branches to the Hosannas, but what they thought He would do was not what Jesus was about to do. They were sure this was their moment when the long awaited King would free them from the oppression of Rome, that they would once again be a strong proud nation under their new king. But as the week progressed, it became more and more obvious that was not going to happen and the more disappointed the people became. Their excitement turned to disappointment, which then turned to anger as they went from celebrating their king, “Hosanna,” to cries of “Crucify Him!” as the religious convinced the Roman powers that Jesus must be executed. So Jesus was nailed to a Roman cross. Whatever hope the people had, that hope was now gone. Whatever they thought Jesus would do for them, it was obvious now he would not do that for them. He would not deliver them from the oppression of Rome. He would not set them free. This was a time of utter disappointment and hopelessness as this small band of followers of Jesus tried to understand what was going on.

In the midst of the hopelessness and despair, there came a voice from the cross next to Jesus. Next to Jesus was a common ordinary thief, in every way a sinner, a misfit and a loser. If there was anyone that day, in that moment, that had reason to be full of despair and hopelessness, it was this man. And yet, somehow, some way, in the midst of the darkness, there was something about Jesus that convinced him. Against all odds, at the end of the story, Rome doesn't win; the Jewish legalists don't win. Somehow, some way, this King wins! In that moment of despair, the thief on the cross said, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” Almost exactly parroting the words of Jonathan to David, with such great faith in that moment of darkness, he chose who he believed would be the ultimate one true King. Jesus, seeing into his heart of faith, promised him, “Today you shall be with Me in paradise.”

This great King died on that cross for the sins of the world, was buried and on the third day He rose, conquering sin and death once and for all as the conquering King. Ephesians says this Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Paul says to the Philippians, “One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that this Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God.” The Bible couldn't be more clear, that at the end of the story there is one King who reigns supreme. There is one God who stands as God and that is the crucified, resurrected living Christ. No matter what happens in this world, no matter how crazy or hard it gets, this one thing I do know: At the end of the story, Christ is the King of kings, the Lord of lords. It is Jesus Christ who ultimately wins triumphantly!

For our history as a nation, it seems to me that Christianity, what it means to be an American, patriotism, government—that's all been kind of meshed together. Our coinage says, *In God We Trust*. Our pledge of allegiance says, *One Nation under God*. Many of our government buildings have Bible verses and references to God in them. It has been this meshing together of Christianity, and what it means to be an American, and pop culture, and all this together. But it seems like that may be changing. That is not necessarily a bad thing. It may be time to begin to separate out cultural Christianity from what it means to actually embrace the gospel and be a Christ follower. More and more it may become costly to choose Jesus and maybe that's not a bad thing as we begin to separate all of the cultural Christianity out from what it genuinely means to choose Jesus.

In the first century, if you chose Jesus, it was highly likely that you would be imprisoned, tortured, and executed. In many places in our twenty-first century world, if you choose Jesus today, it is highly likely that you'll be arrested; you'll be imprisoned; you'll be tortured, and you'll be executed. It may be possible even in our own nation that more and more it will be costly to declare yourself to be a follower of Christ. And we'll begin to separate out the cultural Christians from those who choose Christ as their King. If you are going to be serious about being a Christ follower, if you are going to be serious about influencing others for Christ, you have to have the courage to lead, which means you also must have the courage to choose which king to surrender to. My prayer is that we as a church will, without question, regardless of the cost, choose Christ!

Our Father, we celebrate this morning that no matter what happens in this world, Jesus will emerge as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. God, my prayer would be that we as your church would surrender to Christ, and we would choose Christ, regardless of the cost, and, God, that You would use us to be a voice into the darkness that others may come to know the Jesus that has so radically changed our lives. Lord, this we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.

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Courage to Choose

Courage to Lead Series

I Samuel 20:1-42

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Opening Discussion

1. At one time in America Christianity, pop culture and patriotism were all meshed together in a pretty significant way. Our coins said, “In God We Trust,” our pledge said, “One nation under God...” crosses and Bible verses were part of our courthouses and other government buildings, etc. How has that changed in your opinion?
2. Was the blending of Christianity with pop culture in our country a good thing or a bad thing? How do you think this affected the message of the Gospel and the mission of the Church?
3. In the first century it cost many people their lives to choose Christ. In many places in the world today it costs people their lives to choose Christ. What has been the cost to choosing Christ in America in the past and what might it mean in the future? Will this be a good thing or a bad thing for the mission of the Church?

Bible Study

1. Read I Samuel 20:1-11. These are David’s first words recorded in Samuel to Jonathan and the first words from David in several chapters. How confusing must this all be to David? Review what has transpired since that day that Samuel came to Bethlehem.
2. Jonathan seems to be struggling to come to grips with what has become of his father. He seems to think that since Saul vowed not to kill David then David has nothing to fear. How do you know when others have moved past the point of being reasonable and past the point of being morally responsible? What then?
3. What does David ask of the Prince in verse 8?
4. Read I Samuel 20:12-17. What is Jonathan asking of David in verses 13-15? So what does Jonathan believe about David at this point?

5. Read I Samuel 20:18-42. What sets Saul off and why does it cause his anger to burn towards Jonathan? How does this open Jonathan's eyes toward his father? What is David's only real option now? What can we learn from both Jonathan and David in regards to how they responded to someone who has become irrational and unpredictable with the power and position to do serious damage?
6. At great risk Jonathan covenants with David believing David will be the next king in Israel. At this point in the story Jonathan has no reason to side with David other than his faith that God will make David king. Jonathan basically was asking David to remember him and his family when he comes into his kingdom. How is this similar to the thief on the cross and his faith to choose Jesus?
7. What does it mean to choose Jesus today? What might that cost you today? How does knowing Jesus wins in the end affect how you process events and circumstances in our culture today?

Application

1. Do you have a Saul in your life? What are some practical steps you need to take?
2. What does it mean for you to choose Jesus today? What might this mean at work? At home? At School? What should this look like in very practical terms?
3. If you choose Jesus and you know He wins in the end how should that affect your thoughts and emotions on a daily basis? How does this free you up mentally and emotionally to focus on the mission God has given you?