

INTRODUCTION

One word could be written across the pages of the bible to summarise this chapter and that word is covenant. This chapter teaches us to find our security in the covenant of God. In an uncertain and unsure world it is good to know that there is one who always acts with loyal faithfulness towards his people and always treats them with amazing love and grace. In a marriage relationship what is it that each partner can depend upon when that marriage goes through a rocky patch?

What can they depend upon when circumstances and situations bring difficult times into that marriage relationship? The only thing that a married partner can depend upon is the covenant commitment that each one made before God and sadly one reason why so many marriages are breaking down is because of a failure to understand the nature of the covenant commitment made before God and to each other.

Likewise in our Christian lives during rocky patches and during periods of trials and difficulties the only sure thing that we can be sure of is that the God of the covenant is committed to us and will continue to treat us with a covenantal commitment of love. When things are difficult and when love seems far away remember the God who has made a covenant with you and has promised to treat you with covenant love. In a world of uncertainty that truth is vital and it may be the only thing that we are able to hold on to at times. Let's look at how this covenant theme is worked out in this chapter.

1. THE COVENANT PROVIDES SECURITY IN UNCERTAINTY (vs. 1-9)

Saul being overcome by the power of the Lord for a day and a night (19:24) gave David time to escape and so he arrives in Jonathan's home presumably in Gibeah. David knows what Saul is trying to do but what he longs to find out from Jonathan is why Saul is seeking his life (v 1). Is there something that David has done that he is unaware of that has caused this problem?

If there is then David wants to know so that he might be able to do something about it; at very least David would like to try to understand Saul's irrational behaviour towards him. It seems that Jonathan was a little naive because he remains a little unconvinced that there is any real danger to David (v 2), after all Jonathan is his Father's confidant and Saul has not disclosed any new plan for getting rid of David to him. But of course there is now a reason why Saul does not confide and reveal his plans to his son. Jonathan and David are committed to one another in friendship (19:6) and Saul would have worked that out by now so no wonder he does not reveal his plans to Jonathan anymore (v 3).

Jonathan consents to assist David in whatever way he can and so David proposes a test situation that may reveal Saul's mind concerning David (read vs. 5-7) and then we are told why David has turned to Jonathan for help (v 8). It seems mad to turn to the son of the man who is out to kill you. But the reason why David does so is because of the covenant that Jonathan has made with him before the Lord (v 8), that is a covenant in which the Lord is the witness.

The covenant involved firm promises and solemn commitments which is why in all his uncertainty and in his insecure lifestyle of moving from place to place to avoid Saul he turns to the covenant made with Jonathan. There was this security, this haven of rest in the midst of a dangerous and helter-skelter time. David expects Jonathan to show kindness to him and act accordingly with the information received (v 8).

The word translated “kindness” (v 8) is the Hebrew word “hesed” it is a covenant word, it appears nearly 250 times in the Old Testament and this word carries the idea of love, compassion, affection, mercy, loyalty, reliable and faithful. “Hesed” is not only love but loyal love, faithful love, committed love, dependable love.

David appeals to Jonathan to treat him with loyal dependable love and mercy because of the covenant and if David is guilty then he asks Jonathan to kill him rather than allow his enemy Saul to do it (v 8). But of course Jonathan will not do that for he will simply tell David if there is anything wrong (v 9).

David is putting his whole life into Jonathan’s hands and the reason why he believes Jonathan will act faithfully towards him and not betray him is that Jonathan and David are bound by a covenant witnessed by God. To be disloyal to David meant that he was being disloyal to God. The binding ingredient in the covenant is friendship love; because David and Jonathan commit themselves in friendship love to one another and therefore David’s security rests on that covenant love and commitment.

This human covenant points us to another covenant one made by God who took the initiative and promised to be our God and that we would be his people. It is a covenant that is based on love; not our love for God but God’s loyal love for us and therefore God is committed to us and loyal and faithful to us in all situations because He has made a covenant with us.

God’s covenant with us flows from God’s nature (Exodus 34:6) because God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithful (“hesed”); then He chose to make a covenant with his people through Abraham where He promised to be our God. He will always treat us with “hesed” love; He will always be faithful to us he will always be compassionate towards us and always slow to anger when we grieve him and He will always be abounding in love towards us.

Therefore when like David our world is unsure; perhaps it is an uncertain future because of work insecurities or health concerns or family worries then we can be sure that if we turn to our covenant God then He will treat us with “hesed” love and will constantly demonstrate his commitment to us in all situations of life. In times of confusion and trouble go to the one who made a covenant with you and find your rest and security in him for He will always treat you with loving kindness; He will always show us mercy and grace because He chose to make a covenant with us. We did not chose him but He chose us and took the initiative and made a covenant with his people so that He will always treat us with love and show kindness and faithfulness towards us.

2. THE COVENANT PROVIDES THE BASIS FOR UNUSUAL LOYALTY (vs. 12-17)

Verses 12-17 do not have to be part of the text in fact one can go from verse 11 to verse 18 without losing the flow of the passage, it would read better without this section (vs. 12-17). This raises the question what is the point of this section why did the author put it in here? I think the answer must be that these verses are very significant; they are teaching something that the author clearly thought we all need to learn.

The lesson that is being taught is that the covenant provides opportunity for unusual loyalty. Let me explain what I mean. In verses 12 -13 Jonathan goes on oath to formalise his commitment to warn David should he find out that his father Saul does indeed intend to kill him or harm him. Jonathan is formally committing himself to always acting in ways that are loyal and in keeping with his covenant commitment to David. But this sort of loyalty is unusual because one simply did not

normally do what Jonathan did; you did not usually hand over your royal position to your rival and then promise to protect him. But that is what Jonathan does, he should be the next king not David; you do not normally just hand over your treasured position on the basis of some loyal friendship.

Normally what you would expect to happen is for Jonathan to kill David; to get rid of his rival but the fact that he has no intention of doing so and the fact that he decided to protect him angers Saul (vs. 30-33). You see Jonathan's covenant commitment flies in the face of political sense but that is what the covenant does, it makes people act in unusual ways. This is certainly true with God's covenant with his people. His people were sinful, rebellious and God haters by nature and by practice.

What you would normally expect to happen would be for God to destroy us for we were his enemies but instead He lavishes his love upon us and saves us from our sin and makes us a child of the living God (Romans 5:7-8). He grants to us forgiveness, new life, justification and an eternal home and the reason He does all that is because of his covenant commitment to us. He promised to love us and to demonstrate his "hesed" love and loyalty to a people who were by nature hostile and enemies of God. That is not natural that is not how human beings act yet that is how God acts because of his covenant commitment to us. This unusual loyalty is seen in another way in this section for Jonathan urges David to be faithful and loyal to his family who of course are David's enemies (vs. 14-16).

Time will come when Jonathan and not David will be the needy one and so Jonathan asks David; that when that time comes he will continue to be loyal to the covenant by showing loyalty and kindness to Jonathan and his family (v 15). David agreed to Jonathan's request and promised that when he came to power he would preserve the lives of Jonathan and his descendants (v 17).

This is another action that would be unusual except for the covenant commitment for normally when a new regime came to power the first thing you did was destroy any traces of the old regime because the new King needed to cement his position quickly and could not leave anyone who would undermine his position alive. But not David; he was committed to his covenant made with Jonathan he was committed to be loyal to him and to his family.

The application of this principle for us is that unlike common convention we are told by Jesus to love our enemies and to do them good and the reason for such behaviour is that we are in a covenant relationship with God (Matthew 5:43-48) He is committed to us and we are committed to be loyal to him and that means doing what He does which is loving our enemies.

God in Jesus loved us while we were his enemy and as a consequence of being brought into this covenant relationship with God we show our love for our enemy by praying for them and doing them good. Our sinful human nature tells us to hate our enemies and seek to do them harm but the covenant makes all the difference for at the heart of the covenant is "hesed" love, a loyalty to God and God tells us to love and do good to our enemies.

This is the sort of life that will make an impact in our world where love is so shallow and where covenants are frequently broken. Pray that God will make us act in covenantal ways so that sinners may see that being in a relationship with God makes a difference to the way we act. We should be people who do not do as others would expect us to do because at the heart of this covenant is "hesed" loyal love.

Ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to show "hesed" love to someone who is your enemy and they have made that fact known by their words and actions towards us. It may be someone in work or in our family or in our neighbourhood but ask the Lord to show "hesed" love of the

covenant to them. Seek ways of doing them good and then pray that God might use that good act to reveal his covenantal love to them personally.

3. THE COVENANT DEMANDS COSTLY COMMITMENT (vs. 24-34)

As planned David goes into hiding waiting to receive the signal as agreed with Jonathan (vs. 18-23). The King held his feast as usual and David is there and Jonathan is there but David's seat is empty. Will the King notice? Saul said nothing that first day thinking that David had become ceremonially unclean but when David's place was empty on the second day Saul asked Jonathan where David was (vs. 24-27).

Jonathan told his Father the story about granting David permission to go to Bethlehem to observe a sacrifice with his family (vs. 28-29). Saul was angry at Jonathan because he knew that Jonathan had sided with David and now Saul demands David's death (v 31). Jonathan tries to reason with his father but Saul is no longer in the mood to listen instead he even tries to kill his son by throwing his spear at Jonathan and from that moment on Jonathan knew for sure that his Father was out to kill David (v 33). Up to this point he tried to reason Saul's behaviour away; putting it down to his mood swings and depression and the influence of the evil spirit but now Jonathan knows that Saul is determined to kill David.

He got up from the festival and went to tell David the next day using the signal that had previously been agreed and the result was that Jonathan and David part company; Jonathan goes back into town but David goes to live in Nob (vs. 35-21:1). Their covenant bond of friendship had cost them greatly it cost Jonathan his relationship with his father and ultimately his friendship with David as it is now too dangerous to continue such a friendship.

But it is the same with us because we are in a covenant relationship with our God there will come times when that covenant will cost us. Our loyalty to God will always take precedence over our loyalty to others including our family. But then that is what Jesus demands from us; He gave himself for us and in return He demands our total obedience and loyalty to him. This means in practice putting our loyalty to him above any family loyalty we may have (Luke 14:26). Being united to Christ in covenant means that we must seek first his kingdom (Matthew 6:33); we must put him first in our lives and that will always be a costly business.

Therefore as I conclude let us remember that God made a covenant with us He took the initiative in this covenant and sent his Son to die so that we could be brought into a relationship with him. Therefore we are always secure in him nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Death itself cannot separate us because God in Christ is committed to us.

No matter how hard our life may be at times remember God is in covenant with us which means He will always be loving and kind towards us even though we do not deserve it. But this covenant demands our loyalty; a loyalty that must take precedence over every other relationship even over those that we are in an earthly covenant with.

We must love Christ supremely which means that it is risky being in a covenant relationship it means loving the unlovely and undeserving but then that is what Christ our covenant head did for He took the risk and loved us. Let us follow his example and be committed to God's covenant even when that commitment may cost us greatly.

Amen