

Biblical Bit Players: Jonathan  
2 Samuel 1:23-27  
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### **Introduction to the character and text:**

Today we continue our sermon series: Biblical Bit Players, which reveals the minor roles and the major impact of people like Shifrah and PauhPuah, King Cyrus and Andrew (the brother of Peter). Our biblical character today is Jonathan. Before we read our scripture and expound upon our topic, I would like to provide some context to our passage and character. It is best for us to start not with Jonathan but a woman named Hannah.

Hannah was a barren Israelite woman who famously beseeched God for a child. She fervently prayed to God; so fervently, in fact, that those who witnessed her prayer contended that she was drunk. God heard Hannah's prayer and Hannah gave birth to Samuel, which means "God has heard". Once Samuel was weaned, Hannah gave him to the priest, Eli, thus dedicating Samuel's life to the service of God. "Samuel grew in wisdom and favor before the Lord and men", we are told.

One night while Samuel was in bed, at the age of 12, he heard a voice, the first time he did not answer, the second time he called to the prophet Eli asking him what he wanted, the third time he heard the voice and he called out to Eli again; this time the prophet instructed Samuel to ask the voice who was speaking to him. When Samuel responded to the voice, God spoke to him, informing him that he was to be the prophet of the Lord after Eli because Eli's children were corrupt. Samuel kept this to himself, just as God instructed.

After Eli's death Samuel led the people of Israel well. When Samuel was nearing the end of his life the Israelites noticed that Samuel's sons did not walk in the ways of God; so they asked for a king like other peoples. Samuel was offended, but God told Samuel that they were not rejecting him, but God, as their King. God, therefore, told Samuel to warn the people what would be due to a king. The Israelites decided that despite what would be due, they wanted a king. Consequently, God provided a tall, strong and handsome Benjaminite, named Saul, to be Israel's first king, which ended the long reign of judges that had guided the people of God and began the monarchy.

King Saul led the Israelites out of bondage from the Philistines. He slaughtered armies that opposed him. For a very brief period Israel enjoyed a place of power. Saul took wives for himself and had sons -- one of whom is our character today, Jonathan. Then, one day, Saul decided not to heed the word of the Lord: one time deciding not to wait for Samuel to fulfill the priestly duties, in order to calm a restless hoard of people and another time taking mercy upon an enemy by not slaughtering everything and everyone as the Lord commanded. Thus, the prophet Samuel proclaimed that God had chosen another to lead Israel.

With this news, Saul became paranoid. He sought respite and reprieve from the evil demons that plagued him. He called upon a young boy, named David, to play the harp in order to sooth him from this paranoia; *thus the lives of Samuel, Saul, David and Jonathan intersect.* After killing Goliath, David married Saul's daughter and became a commander over his armies. That same boy would be proclaimed a man after God's own heart by the prophet Samuel. Eventually Samuel informed David that he, not Saul, was to be the king of Israel.

When Saul found out that David was to be King he hatched a plan to have David killed. Jonathan learned of this plan, he warned David and hid him; because their souls were knit together, the Scriptures tell us. Although David was a rival for the throne and a known enemy of his father Jonathan was not able to turn from his deep friendship. In fact, when David had to flee for his life from Saul the two men wept. Multiple times Jonathan helped David escape his father.

Saul accused Jonathan of betraying his family and of throwing away his birth right to the throne. Despite his father's shortcomings Jonathan never betrayed Saul. In fact, while Saul sought to find David and engaged in war, Jonathan fought beside him. Until one day, the Philistines, the enemy of Israel, who had taken David in, killed Jonathan and King Saul fell upon his own sword, so the Philistines could not have the privilege of killing the King of Israel.

This is where we find ourselves in our reading today: Saul and Jonathan dead. David proclaimed king of Israel; distraught over the death of his dear friend. Hear now the word of the Lord...

### **2 Samuel 1:23-27 (2 Slides 15 and 16)**

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O Daughter of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

Aristotle held friendship in high regard. So high that he wrote at length on the topic, proclaiming that: friendship held cities together (churches, I believe as well), was placed in higher esteem than justice or honor and was one thing that no person could live without. His understanding of friendship was broken into three groups: the friendship of 1) utility, 2) pleasure and 3) virtue.

Friendship of utility, he wrote, sought to better the self in some regard. It can be the type of friendships one often has with their teachers, their mailman, their physicians, congresswoman, or police officers. It is those relationships that stem from the services you receive or desire to receive from another.

The friendship of passion, Aristotle believed, was a shallow friendship based on the self; this friendship takes root in our desires. These friendships may often be found between lovers, at political rallies or even at churches. It is the type of friendship that relies on believing the same thing or rallying around the same cause. It is often fleeting for it depends upon what may change in us or around us.

Set a part from the friendship of utility or passion is the friendship of virtue, which Aristotle proclaimed is the most difficult friendship to obtain for this friendship takes a great deal of time and effort; even more, it depends upon a value of loving over being loved. It is not discarded with outdated desires nor does it depend upon what services maybe rendered unto you; instead it is rooted in mutuality, care and concern, hope for another.

This, I believe, is the same type of distinction that Jesus makes with Peter when he asks Peter if he loves him three times in the Gospel of John. Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him (in the agape form, which the Greeks thought to

be a divine love) and Peter responds using the phileo form of love, meaning a brotherly love. This is also the type of relationship that Jesus is calling us to share when he tells his disciples that he no longer calls them servants, but friends. A relationship that will last through time, a friendship rooted in care for one another.

This is one major thing our bit player Jonathan can teach us: how we may care for one another as friends. How are you as a friend? What do your friendships consist of? Are they based on utility or passion? Have they weathered the difficult times?

And what about your friends? Are they interested in your well-being? Do they merely want something from you? Are they drawn to you because of some fleeting fancy?

In an age where you are allowed up to 5,000 friends on Facebook; In a reality where you don't need friends to play video games but can link up with competitors anywhere in the world; I wonder about our value of friendships; I wonder about our ability to put in the necessary time and effort to care about a few other people, well.

I love the church's motto: A place to believe, belong and become. In particular I point out our desire to create a space of belonging. For this is no easy task. While I tend to be on the more liberal or progressive side of the spectrum of faith, I appreciate that this church specifies that we are neither liberal nor conservative.

May Jonathan be our guide to developing the type of friendships that will stand the tests of time: friendships that will not wither when we don't have the right things to offer; friendships that won't fail when we don't say the right thing or look the right way to arouse or attract. May we take the time to learn about one another, enjoy our common life, and pray God to show us the way through this tangled web we weave.