

Love's Strengthening Quality

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[0 : 00] from verse 15. Read from verse 15 down as far as verse 18. David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life.

David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan Saul's son rose and went to David at Horesh and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you.

You shall be king over Israel and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this. And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh and Jonathan went home.

That wonderful relationship between David and Jonathan is mentioned a number of times in the chapters where we find information about them and about that relationship.

If you didn't know what happened after the death of Goliath, after David had killed Goliath, you might be tempted to think that surely David was given a great promotion by Saul.

[1 : 14] Surely he would have had him as his right-hand man. Surely there would be nobody else in the nation that Saul would prefer ahead of David. Of course, you know that that's not what happened.

We might think that the prospects for David were bright after he actually led this campaign against the Philistines, killing their champion Goliath in battle. Unfortunately, David was hounded by Saul and came to be persecuted by Saul for many years.

Indeed, all the way through to Saul's own death, David was actually hounded by Saul from place to place. He didn't have an easier life of it after he had shown his prowess in killing Goliath.

It was actually the other way about. But you know from, not only from this, but from many of the Psalms, that for David, trial was really something which shaped his life positively.

Not that in every situation of triumph, David was as he should have been, but by and large, trial, suffering, difficulty, persecution for David, they were instances, they were events, they were circumstances in which he sought the Lord, in which he knew that his own strength would not be sufficient for him.

[2 : 38] They shaped David's life greatly. But while he lived, Jonathan was very much a part of David's development. And what you read here, and in the other passages, we'll mention a few verses related to this tonight, you'll find that many times David came to experience how Jonathan strengthened him and encouraged him as he went about his business.

Like you find it here, for example, he went out to where David was at Horesh, and he strengthened his hand in God. That's a wonderful expression that carries through into our own lives as Christians, into our own relationships with each other, into what we need to be as individuals, but also as a congregation or as a group of people in Christ, strengthening his hand in God.

Saul's persecution of David was something that actually arose out of envy or jealousy, to use another word. Back to chapter 18, we were at, you find there in verses 8 and 9 especially, you find a description there of how things came about.

As they were coming home, David returned from striking down the Philistine. Women came out of the city singing and dancing, and we sang through, we read through what they sang there as songs of joy, celebrating the victory of David.

But the words they used were interesting. They said, Saul has struck down his thousands, and David is ten thousands. In other words, they were singing about, as they saw it, how David had outdone Saul by ten to one.

[4 : 24] And really, that's when Saul was determined from that time forth. Saul was very angry. This saying displeased him.

And you can see from the way it's worded there, they have ascribed to David ten thousands. To me, they have ascribed thousands. You can tell that there's jealousy eating away at his heart.

You can tell that's envy that's really moving him in his view of David as it now is. And then when you go forward again to verse 12, Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him, but had departed from Saul.

In other words, Saul actually knew that David had things which he did not, that he had abilities which he did not, but above all, that he had the Lord in his life in a way that Saul did not.

It all remains a mystery in terms of his faith, his relationship to God. Different opinions of that have been presented to us over the years. Different commentators say he was never really a good man.

[5 : 30] Others say he was, but he went astray. In respect of that, it's obviously the case that Saul was motivated by jealousy and envy against David.

And jealousy and envy is something that caused him, instead of focusing on his leadership of the nation. He focused instead on getting rid of David. David had to be killed.

He had to get rid of David. Otherwise, he was going to take over the kingdom because of his popularity with all the people. And of course, envy, as that's developed in the Bible, is such a powerful, powerful, destructive force.

Whether it's envy or jealousy, whatever word we use, both in the Old and in the New Testament, you find that envy is a powerful, destructive force in anybody's life.

Jesus, for example, spoke of envy as something. In Mark chapter 7, verse 22, he mentioned things which didn't defile a person. To eat with unwashed hands, he said that's not what defiles a person.

[6 : 35] Defilement comes from within, from within the heart. And he mentioned a number of things that come out from the heart. Murders, adulteries, envy was amongst them.

These things come from within a person, from within the heart. These are the things, he said, which defile a person. 1 Corinthians 13, wonderful chapter about love, and we're going to focus on the love between David and Jonathan tonight for a wee while.

But that great chapter on love has amongst all the descriptions it gives of love, that love does not envy. Love does not have a jealousy against those that are loved.

In fact, it's a contradiction to say, I love you, but I'm actually very jealous of you. Because love does not envy. And then when you find 1 Peter, for example, just to take one other example, 1 Peter chapter 2, which follows on, of course, from what he had said previously about salvation and so on.

As you come to chapter 2 of 1 Peter, well, you'll find Peter saying, therefore, putting aside or putting off enmity amongst other things, all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk.

[8 : 02] In other words, he's saying, envy is part of the bad clothing, part of the dirty clothing that you put off metaphorically, of course, spiritually. And instead of that, you put on those things which are the opposites to envy and jealousy, love being preeminent preeminent amongst the other qualities of a Christian life.

So envy lies behind Saul's attitude to David. And it's in that context that it's important for us to actually see Jonathan's relationship to David.

Jonathan, of course, is the heir to the throne. He is Saul's son. And Saul is looking at handing the kingdom over to Jonathan whenever that time will come, whether it's through Saul's death or otherwise, but that's what he has in view.

But this is a wonderful emphasis in the relationship between David and Jonathan, that despite the fact that he's the king's son, he has David as a very special person in his heart.

He loves David as his own soul. Their soul was knit together, chapter 18 puts it, and that really means being tied so closely together in the bonds of love.

[9 : 22] And it's often the case, isn't it, that you find in Scripture, you find those who are perhaps like David or like Paul or like Peter on the front line of the church's activity on the preaching of the gospel or whatever mission it may be about, you very often and indeed almost always find that those who are prominent in that way have behind them some sometimes unnamed saints of God, but certainly those saints that stay in the background pretty much.

And all the way through Paul's letters, for example, you'll find him talking about people who were very much his supporters, but didn't write any epistles, weren't really in the forefront, if you like, of the church's mission or activity, at least not in a prominent sense, where he mentions likes of Aquila, Priscilla, Clement, Tychicus, and others.

That's how it always is in the church. Just because we're not prominent, just because we're not given a place that's obvious to many people, doesn't mean that we're not serving the Lord in a very, very important way to actually support his cause whatever way he gives us to do that.

So Jonathan's relationship with David was rooted in these bonds of love. What kind of love was it? Well, if we take a few verses from these chapters, we can see four things about that love that tells us what kind of love it was, what kind of quality of love, especially, was between David and Jonathan.

It was, first of all, a godly love. Back to chapter 18, and the first verse there says, as soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

[11 : 19] It was a very genuine, a very godly love. And that's important, especially in the days in which we live. Because as you very well know, a friendship of this kind between two men might be looked at very suspiciously.

And in fact, you'll find some people of the view that this was actually a same-sex attraction. I know that sounds distasteful to us, but some actually take that view of this relationship, of these descriptions that you find of the love, the relationship between David and Jonathan.

But this was a godly love. There's nothing distasteful about it. There's nothing about it that should raise any suspicions that it was in some way or other sinful or unwholesome.

If you go to 2 Samuel and chapter 1, you can see there Paul's, Saul's, sorry, it's Jonathan's reference to it, David's reference rather to Jonathan in 2 Samuel chapter 1 and verse 26.

This is David's lament following the death of Saul and Jonathan in battle. And this is how he actually finishes that lament where he says that verse 26, I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan.

[12 : 48] Very pleasant have you been to me. Your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women. And as I said, that does not describe something unwholesome, something sinful, something that would in modern parlance be regarded, as we said, as some sort of unhealthy attraction.

Your love for me surpasses the love of women because there was such a special bond between them. Not even the love between a man and a woman could actually come near to the quality of the love between David and Jonathan for its faithfulness, for its sheer brilliance in terms of being genuine and godly and unselfish.

And what that really says in that version in 2 Samuel chapter 1, surpassing the love of women, what David is really getting at is the unselfish love of Jonathan for him.

Jonathan was the heir to the throne. He had everything going for him. He was the son of Saul. He would be the next to take over the throne ordinarily and yet selflessly and in his love for David he was prepared even to put that aside.

It surpasses he says the love of women in its unselfishness as he says. It doesn't mean that the love of women is a selfish love of course not saying that either but he's actually saying this is something really quite unique and quite special and we must never distort that into something that seems unseemly or distasteful.

[14 : 28] It is holy and pure and God honoring in every way in which it's spoken about when you take the words as they are at face value and to read something else into them is not only just to dishonor the love that existed between them but it's to dishonor God and dishonor the word of God that describes the quality of this godly love between them.

We read that it was knit they were knit together in chapter 18 their souls were knit together bound together in such a way just as you bind threads or something together so the two souls of these two men were bound together in love.

It was a godly love. Secondly it was a giving love generous love a giving love and really that of course is of the essence of love isn't it?

you can't really think of love other than it is a giving thing it's a love which gives out it's a thing which actually doesn't act selfishly such as you find that's where you find these descriptions in 1 Corinthians 13 does not seek its own love gives and love is prepared to give abundantly and in the case of David and Jonathan that was the case as well if you go back again to chapter 18 and look at verse 4 here is Jonathan saying he stripped himself of the robe that was on him and he gave it to David and his armour even his sword and his bow and his belt and that's symbolic that shows you the mind of Jonathan that shows you the quality of his love for David because what David what he told David was that as he made a covenant with him there and then you go on to chapter 23 and verses 17 to 18 you'll find

Jonathan there absolutely convinced that David is going to be the next king of Israel and he went out and strengthened his hand in the Lord he said to him do not fear for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you you shall be king over Israel and I shall be next to you here's the heir to the throne giving not just his cloak and his robe to David symbolically as if to say well I know that you're going to be king so this really properly belongs to you he's actually saying here I know I know that you will be the next king of Israel and that I will be next to you well it didn't turn out that way sadly but that's what Jonathan was committed to you shall be king and I shall be next to you Saul my father also knows this Jonathan knew the workings of his father's mind he knew the jealousy the evil intent of his father's heart and he was taking that into account as well as he went here to strengthen the hand of David one of the ways he strengthens the hand of David is to assure him

[17 : 35] I know how things are going to be I know what the Lord's will is and therefore I'm committed to that and I'm committed to you in that he wants the best for David and that of course is a great challenge to ourselves in our relationships with each other the relationships that we have in our human lives whether it's in our homes and our marriages or in congregational terms of love between each other as Christians in Christ the challenges that we give ourselves to each other that we make such time for each other as shows that our regard for others comes even ahead if you like of the regard for ourselves for our own well-being and for our own comfort and of course that's very difficult that's very challenging but then you go to the best example of all of that is Jesus himself the apex of a giving love of a generous love of a love that puts others ahead of himself is in

Jesus himself what do you read in John 15 there where Jesus is speaking of himself he said greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends and you are my friends you do whatever I command you as you see Jesus hanging on the cross you can just see these words of John 15 almost as if they were written above the cross greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends the greatest of all gifts is the giving of himself he gave himself to the death he died why did he give himself to the death he died well not just so that you and I wouldn't have to die that death but because his love is of such a caliber and such a quality as shows in its essence that it's generous to that extent that it's giving to that extent that he gives himself and so it was for Jonathan's love for David as well and the love between them reciprocated on David's part no doubt but the emphasis here is on

Jonathan especially in chapter 23 here strengthening his hand in the Lord by telling him this is how I see it this is how I know things will be and should be and therefore what a strength what an encouragement that was undoubtedly to David so it's it's a godly love it's a love which honors God love which is pure a love which regards God himself very carefully it's a love which is a giving love even to the extent of giving himself giving up the career that he had ordinarily and would be his in the ordinary course of things that was Jonathan saying no I know that that's not how it's going to be so I'm giving over the throne to you this is going to be yours rightly yours this is God's will a godly love and a giving love but thirdly we find that this love is a guarding love as well it's a love which looks after things in a proper way and again it's something that is shown in the way that Jonathan defended

David guarded David's reputation and was concerned that David would not be misrepresented that he would not actually be spoken of even by his father in a way that wasn't true to David's character because again you can go back to chapter 19 this time verses 4 and 5 and when you look at these verses again this is Saul and Jonathan speaking together David isn't present at that time but it does remind us there in verse 1 chapter 19 Jonathan David's son delighted much in David 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 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 and Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul and said to him let not the king sin against the seven

David because he has not sinned against you and because his deeds have brought good to you 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 and Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan and Saul swore as the Lord lives he shall not be put to death and Jonathan called David and Jonathan reported to him all these things well unfortunately Saul was not very steadfast in mind he could just flip flip just like that which is exactly what happened because when you go onwards in chapter in chapter 23 again verses 17 to 18 you'll find that that's exactly what happened do not do not fear the hand of Saul my father shall not find you he says and you shall be king over over

[22 : 56] Israel and even though David wasn't present Saul Jonathan was determined to support him to speak well of him before his father even knowing that his father at that point had actually committed to killing David and there is love and there is love as it is said for us as well it's not about our own reputation it's not about whether people will or won't speak well of us it's not about making friends just for the sake of it and thereby very often not really being faithful to the truth and not as Jonathan is determined whatever his father will think of it whatever his father will do about it he is going to defend David he's going to defend his reputation he's going to show that his love for David is not going to be deflected by even any thoughts his father might have of putting David to death or even putting Jonathan to death which of course he did at one time try to do by throwing his spear at

Jonathan as well and so that's of course for us as well such an important factor and it's important especially in terms of our relationship with the Lord because just as Jonathan came to defend David in the presence of his father a hostile father so you and I have to defend the Lord not that he needs us to defend him strictly speaking but you do speak up for him you do speak up for his cause you do speak up for the values of the gospel for the principles of the gospel against the hostility of the world in which we live that's out to kill the gospel that's out to put to death anything representing Jesus or resembling Jesus what do you do you don't just go and hide yourself you don't go and say well I'll just leave that to someone else I'll just go into the background let this pass no you say my Lord's reputation is tied up with this whatever movement it is that's against the gospel whatever movement it is that requires support against atheism or against whatever kind of ideology is trying to destroy the Bible and the character of a

Christian life you and I say well that involves me and it involves me in whatever way is open to me legitimately and lawfully to do so to actually come to show that my commitment is to the Lord to his truth to the quality of life that he requires of me and of God's people and so if it means that God's people are under threat then I have to come to their defense I have to come to their support or whatever way we do that you can do that different ways you know yourselves it's not just a matter such as it was in the days of Samuel or days of the apostles you do that by engaging with those who are in authority you do that by representing the cause of Christ whether it's by writing letters or contacting your MSP whatever else it might be you get in touch with those in authority you say this is not on this is not this is not conducive to a proper truthful righteous society but it's the Lord's reputation primarily that's at stake and when you find the Lord's name and the Lord's reputation trampled upon you can't sit easy or stand back and just let that happen just as it was for

Jonathan he wasn't prepared even though Saul the king was his father he wasn't prepared to stand there silently and say well I better not get too involved with this otherwise I'll lose my life if I speak up for David Snow in the presence of my father who's out to kill him what's that going to do to me so he said no well whatever it's going to do to me David is the friend that I love deeply and I love him in the Lord and I love him as the Lord's choice of the next king and I can't stand by and not speak up for him and not put in a word in his favour whatever it's going to mean for myself that's really what you get coming across there in the way that Jonathan supported and stood for David and came here in chapter 23 to go out to him to strengthen him and strengthen his hand in the Lord so love that love that Christian love is a godly love it's a giving love it's a guarding love but just to try and keep the

G at the beginning of the words the fourth point is it's a galvanizing love by galvanizing I mean the way we often use the word galvanized you galvanize something something or someone galvanizes you spurs you into action that's what I mean by a galvanizing love it's a love which especially encourages it's a special aspect of love that it's an encouraging thing you could take from this passage in 23 in 1st Samuel 23 that it's it's love's strengthening quality that's really brought before us when you find this man Jonathan and his love for David and he went out to him and strengthened his hand in God love strengthens sharing love strengthens relationship strengthens individuals nothing strengthens a marriage like genuine committed love nothing strengthens relationships in a congregation like genuine committed godly giving guarding love a love which galvanizes you into encouragement into action this is really as we say what you find in chapter 23 here but when you go to 23 verses 16 and 17 that's exactly what you find here in the text before us he went in person to David we're very familiar of course in our day and it's it's a great advantage that we have we're very familiar with texting with emails with different ways of communication and that's a superb facility that god in his kindness has made available to us and it's so much easier and sometimes it's really the best thing to do for for speed's sake certainly to use that just so you get your message to the person as quickly as possible we thank god for all of these facilities because they've changed our lives for the good in so many ways having said that there is no substitute for personal in person relationships there is no substitute for simply coming alongside a person even if you're just sitting down and sharing their experience sharing with them and their support and their sorrow or in their happiness whatever it might be but the fact that it is a person-to-person exchange physically is something that cannot actually be replaced by any electronic means and this is really david and and so and jonathan here if you like a really an example of what it is to come he made a special effort you see jonathan he he went out to him he was in the wilderness he was under danger from saul but he rose and went to david at horesh and strengthened his hand in god so often you find people that have been praying that day somebody would come and visit them feeling the loneliness difficulties the challenge of living on their own or not being able to leave the house and just longing that someone would come in and talk with them and the lord put it into the heart of somebody that day to go and visit that person whether it's minister or what doesn't have to be but another christian or whatever and very often you go into that home and the first thing the person will say to you well i was really praying that somebody would come and visit me see that's the lord stirring up the hearts of his people so that the love between them this galvanizing love moves you to take action and very often when you take action sometimes not necessarily knowing exactly what's going to be involved but then

[31 : 38] you get the great benefit of all of this coming together and a sharing in love of things which really are mutually encouraging to each person and that is a part of individual and congregational life especially isn't it you remember the new testament itself you find the likes of ephesians for example ephesians 6 verse 22 i'll mention a few verses in closing ephesians 6 and verse 22 and where you find uh paul saying i have sent him talking here about tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the lord he will tell you everything i have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts see david paul in this instance and like jonathan with david he wasn't prepared just to send him a letter or to send him a message by uh by way of an impersonal message it was just sending this man tychicus when paul himself couldn't do it he sent this man in his place as his representative and you find the same in colossians 2 verse 2 the same emphasis he's sending tychicus so that he will encourage your hearts first thessalonians um again an instance with you remember the passage paul dealing with the resurrection and with uh participation in the coming of the lord on the part of god's people whether they have died or whether they've been raised similar to first corinthians 15 this is what he says in from verses 13 to to 17 he gives out this wonderful teaching about and then he concludes this therefore you know so like that is to first corinthians 15 ending therefore therefore encourage one another with these words encourage one another with these words in the same in the same letter you find at chapter 5 and verse 11 therefore encourage one another and build one another up just as you are doing that really gives you an insight into the the meaning of encouragement because to encourage is to embolden or to give strength to people when you encourage someone what you're actually doing is seeking to give them strength to help them to to strengthen up and especially in difficult circumstances we need strengthening up primarily from god of course but in the relationships christians have to each other it's so important that we're like what paul is saying here to the thessalonians that we are encouraging one another and building one another up because it comes to the same thing if we're encouraging each other this is what's happening we're building each other up if we're building each other up then it's really an encouragement that we're engaged in a ministry of encouragement it's not a short-term emotional fix if you like just for somebody in a certain situation and then that's an end of it no encouragement is something that's shared continuously between the lord's people they encourage each other in the lord or in the words of first samuel they strengthen each other's hands in the lord and we need that we all need that we all need that ongoing activity of encouraging each other in a love that's a godly love and a giving love and a guarding love and a galvanizing love so that for the lord we may be known as encouragers building one another up in

love may he bless these thoughts to us let's pray we give thanks lord our god for the way in which your word teaches us so much in regard to our relationships one to another as well as our relationships and responsibility to you as our god and we thank you tonight lord for that encouragement that we all have through your spirit especially or your spirit is the great comforter your spirit is the one who comes alongside of us and lives in us and to bring us encouragement and strengthening from day to day we thank you lord under the direction of your spirit that we are called upon and seek to be encouragers of each other as well to encourage one another in all aspects of our christian life to face the challenges to share in the joys to be as we should be lord as a people who are set on building one another up in love and we pray that you would enable us to do that that you would enable us increasingly to be as the apostle called on the philippians to abound in love more and more hear us now we pray and hear our prayers for jesus sake amen good you you you you