

## **MESSAGE — Who Has My Allegiance? — 1 Samuel 20**

God is good! (all the time)  
All the time! (God is good)

### **But what's our definition of good?**

At yesterday's memorial service I asked the question:  
*If the LORD really is good,*  
*Then how do we make sense of the evils in this world?*

And I said...  
Sometimes we can't fully make sense of it.

But here's what Scripture shows us:

The world is broken.  
Evil is real.  
And God never asks us to pretend otherwise.

### **God opposes evil even more than we do!**

This is why the writers of the Psalms can talk about their suffering in one breath,  
Then in the next...  
declare that the LORD is good.

### **But what happens if the evils of this world begin to harden our hearts?**

What if, over time...  
Anger and hate start to become part of our everyday vocabulary.

This is exactly what happened to Saul.  
And unfortunately...  
It can happen to us.

Btw — those of you in the 1 Peter Sunday School class...  
I don't know if you got to chapter 5 yet...

But if you did,  
You might remember that Peter warns us to **be alert**.

He says:

**[SLIDE 0] 1 Peter 5:8-9 - Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.**

If we're not alert,  
We're easy prey.

And what's really dangerous...  
is when we've convinced ourselves  
That the enemy can't deceive us.

We might be thinking:

*I know my Bible.*

*I show up to church.*

*I'm a good person.*

But the reality is...  
If we're not alert to what's shaping our hearts.  
What happened to Saul...  
Can happen to us.

1 Samuel 20 shows us that...

**[SLIDE 1] What's evil in the eyes of the LORD, has become good in the eyes of Saul.**

**I mean...**

**Were any of you shocked when Saul tried to kill his own son?**

This actually isn't the first time Saul tried to kill Jonathan.

In chapter 14, Saul issued a command.  
But Jonathan didn't hear it.

So when Saul prayed to the LORD,  
And the LORD didn't answer,  
Saul assumed someone must have disobeyed him.

That's when he blamed Jonathan and tried to kill him.

But the LORD's silence had nothing to do with Jonathan.  
It had to do with Saul's heart.

Saul was still seeking the LORD at that point,  
But deception had already set in.

And now in chapter 20,  
Saul's not seeking the LORD anymore.  
Instead, he's trying to stop the LORD.

**And the tragedy that flows underneath all this...  
Is that this is the kind of king Israel asked for.**

Back in chapter 8, they wanted a king that was like the other nations.

Samuel warned them that when they cry out for relief from their king...  
The LORD would not answer them.

But they didn't care.  
They still wanted a king.  
And so the LORD gave them what they asked for in Saul.

And, you know, it's interesting...  
Saul didn't start out as a bad guy.

Remember when Samuel invited him to his table?  
Saul didn't see anything special about himself.  
After all, he was a farm boy...  
not a king.

Honestly, it didn't seem like he even *wanted* the job!

But... My, how things have changed.

**Saul has moved from hesitant obedience,  
to outright rebellion against the LORD.**

But every time Saul acts against the LORD,  
The LORD stops him.

We've already seen him try to kill David several times.  
Each time failed.

The last attempt was particularly humiliating.

If you remember last week,  
We talked about when Saul was overpowered by the Spirit of the LORD,  
He lost control of himself.

He stripped his royal robes and lay face down in front of Samuel.

Imagine how that made Saul feel.

The king who craved power... was rendered powerless.

Only a day or two passes...

And the next time we see Saul,  
He sits down at his table,  
While David is hiding out in the field.

**[SLIDE 2] 1 Samuel 20:24 - So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon feast came, the king sat down to eat.**

So, at the beginning of every month,  
Israel observed an ancient festival called the New Moon Feast.<sup>1</sup>

It didn't have anything to do with worshiping the moon.

It was just a time set aside to honor the LORD with  
trumpet blasts, offerings, and a fellowship meal.  
And the celebration itself could last for several days.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 10:10, 28:11-15

But by the time we get to 1 Samuel 20,  
we'll see that the LORD isn't even mentioned at the table.

So, Saul comes in the room...

**[SLIDE 3] 1 Samuel 20:25 - He sat in his customary place by the wall,  
opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was  
empty.**

Believe it or not,  
the seating arrangement actually tells us a lot.

This is a royal banquet —  
Each person is seated according to their position under the king.

Saul's seat was probably at the head of the table.  
It's the place of highest authority.

He also had his back to the wall,  
where he could see everyone in the room...  
No one could come up behind him.

Abner sat beside Saul.

He was the commander of Saul's army.  
He also happened to be Saul's cousin.

So Abner isn't just a random dinner guest.  
He represents Saul's military power,  
and he's part of Saul's inner circle.

Jonathan sat where a crowned prince would sit.

David's seat was right next to him...  
Except it was empty.

It *shouldn't* have been.  
People didn't normally skip this meal.  
It's not optional, unless of course you have a really good reason.

Still, after everything that's happened,  
we might wonder:

### **Why did Saul expect David to be there?**

It wasn't that long ago that David escaped from Saul.  
And just the other day,  
Saul was humiliated in front of Samuel.

But this also wasn't the first time Saul tried to kill David.

And despite the craziness,  
David always came back and continued serving under Saul.

So maybe Saul figured this wouldn't be any different?

**[SLIDE 4] 1 Samuel 20:26 - Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, "Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean—surely he is unclean."**

In order to participate in meals like this,  
You had to be ritually "clean."

If you came into contact with blood,  
or other things the Law considered unclean,  
you'd need to wait until the next day before participating.

So Saul figures this is what happened to David.

He's thinking David should definitely be at the table tomorrow.

So fast forward to the next day...

**[SLIDE 5] 1 Samuel 20:27 - But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?"**

Now Saul is starting to suspect something.

And by the way...

One scholar I read this week said the fact that Saul didn't say David's name was meant to be insulting.<sup>2</sup>

"Why hasn't *the son of Jesse* come to the meal..."

At this point, David is married to Saul's daughter.

David's part of the family...

He's like a son to Saul.

Not only that — David has a pretty high status in Saul's court.

He's an extremely successful military commander.

So for Saul to refer to him as merely "the son of Jesse," was a way to minimize David's significance.

Saul speaks as if David's just an outsider...

As if he's someone who doesn't really belong in the royal household.

So, when Saul asks where he is...

**[SLIDE 6] 1 Samuel 20:28-29 - Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."**

This is, of course, a carefully constructed lie.

If you remember...

Jim read earlier in the chapter that David and Jonathan came up with a plan.

David would stay away from the feast for two days.

Jonathan would tell Saul that David had to go back home for a family thing.

And if Saul became angry,

That would be a sign that David's life was still in danger.

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<sup>2</sup> The Naked Bible Podcast, episode 469, 1 Samuel 20. Dr. Michael Brown

So even though Jonathan is using deception,  
**He's testing his dad here.**

He needed to know what's really in the king's heart.

Which raises an interesting question...

**Is Jonathan the last person to realize Saul wanted David killed?**

Because as far as Jonathan knows,  
his dad was still keeping the oath he made in the name of the LORD  
when he promised not to put David to death.

So this is the moment of truth.

Listen to how Saul reacts...

**[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 20:30 - Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?"**

That almost sounded like Saul was going to say something else!

He's not using profanity in a modern sense,  
But the intensity is the same.

When he says to Jonathan, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman!"  
That's a highly offensive statement — not just to Jonathan,  
But also to Jonathan's mom!

This is what verbal abuse sounds like.  
But Saul didn't hear it that way.

His words were filtered through an angry heart,  
Which is why he felt justified to talk like this.

He's angry because he feels that Jonathan's loyalty  
was to David over his own father.

So Saul said...

**[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 20:31 - "As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth,**

**neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die!"**

Saul knows David is the LORD's choice to be next on the throne...  
Not Jonathan.

And the fact that Jonathan is okay with this,  
Infuriates him.

And so in Saul's mind,  
David must die.

And now Jonathan knows his dad's intentions.  
He sees that his dad is no longer aligned with the LORD...  
Although I don't know how he missed that.

So Jonathan appeals for David's life as he did before...

**[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 20:32-33 - "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.**

Notice that Saul's abusive words led to violent action.

And this entire scene happened without the LORD sending a spirit to torment Saul as He did in previous chapters.

Remember — Saul hurled a spear at David *three* times.  
And each time a spirit from the LORD was there, tormenting Saul.

I believe those moments were opportunities for Saul to recognize the seriousness of what was happening inside him.

Then in the previous chapter,  
The Spirit of the LORD Himself came on Saul and overpowered him.

This isn't the first time he's felt the Spirit of the LORD.

But rather than coming to his senses...  
Saul is more infuriated than ever.

Honestly...

I couldn't help but notice how closely Saul's actions resemble the pattern of the snake in Genesis.

Saul isn't Satan.

But whether he realizes it or not...

He's aligning himself with the same kind of opposition to God's will.

Just like the snake in the Garden questioned what God said, Saul is now resisting what God has made clear.

**Again, what is evil in the eyes of the LORD, has become good in the eyes of Saul.**

Jonathan sees this in his dad,  
And it deeply grieves him.

The next morning Jonathan went out to the field to meet with David.

They both were upset.

They knew David would have to leave for good...

**[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 20:42 - Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.**

This scene can sometimes raise questions for modern readers.  
But what we are seeing here is **covenant loyalty** — not romance.

In the ancient world,  
covenant language was the strongest way to express committed faithfulness.

Jonathan was the heir to the throne.  
But he already recognized that the LORD chose David.

And instead of competing with him,  
Jonathan humbled himself,  
and got on board with what God was doing.

And the kiss mentioned in this verse?

That was a normal cultural expression of affection and respect.

It's a very common thing we see between family members and close friends throughout the entire Bible.<sup>3</sup>

David and Jonathan were like brothers.

Their friendship was shaped by their shared trust in the LORD.

They both were committed to the LORD's plan.

Unlike Saul...

Their loyalty is God-centered...

Not throne-centered.

And so the two friends say their goodbyes.

Jonathan went back into town,

David left for a nearby town.

**And that's where 1 Samuel 20 ends.**

**So what are we seeing in all this?**

Well, I purposely spent a lot of time on the scene at Saul's table.

I wanted us to see how far Saul's heart has drifted from the LORD.

When we're first introduced to Saul,

We see a lot of fear.

And over the past 10 chapters,

We've seen the enemy's strategy of fear played out:

**[SLIDE 11] The Enemy's Strategy of Fear**

Fear distorts reality...

It magnifies the threat...

And slowly erodes our trust in the LORD.

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<sup>3</sup> For examples, see: The Naked Bible Podcast, episode 469, 1 Samuel 20. Dr. Michael Brown

Which opens the door to deception...  
And eventually, a willingness to resist God Himself.

That's the real danger of sin.

Because once sin matures...

**Suddenly what's evil to God,  
seems good to us.**

That's the progression we've seen in Saul.  
What started in fear grew to full on resistance to God.

And honestly,  
I'm not sure Saul even realized it was happening.

That's what deception does.

It keeps us unaware of our own misplaced allegiance.

**And that's exactly what chapter 20 is showing us.**

We see the allegiance of three men:

**[SLIDE 12] Saul, Jonathan and David [their allegiance]**

**Saul's allegiance,**  
is to himself...  
his throne...  
And his legacy.

*Spiritually* speaking — his allegiance is with  
the very same enemy that deceived Adam and Eve.

**Then we see Jonathan.**

His allegiance is first and foremost to the LORD.

...but that puts him in a very difficult position.

He's aligned himself with David,  
because David is the LORD's choice for the throne.

But Saul is still his king...  
and his father.

So Jonathan is walking through a very painful situation.  
His allegiance to the LORD is unwavering...  
But it's not without cost.

**And then we see David.**

His allegiance is clearly with the LORD.  
But he also has a loyal love for Saul's family.

Michal, Saul's daughter, is his wife.  
And Jonathan is like a brother to him.  
And, despite Saul's threats, he's still the king...  
And we'll see that David deeply respects that.

The reason I'm emphasizing allegiance is because in this chapter,  
there's an important Hebrew word that David and Jonathan use  
to describe their relationship.

That word is *hesed*.

**[SLIDE 13] *hesed* = loyal love.**

It's a loyal love that does not give up.  
It's a faithful love that keeps its promises.  
It's a love that remains committed even when it's costly.

**And it's the kind of love that the LORD has for His people.**

Exodus 34 says that the LORD is:  
compassionate, gracious, slow to anger,  
and abounding in *hesed* — loyal love.

**[SLIDE 14] It's a steadfast, unbreakable, unyielding, heartfelt allegiance**

Jonathan is showing *hesed* toward David  
because he trusts the LORD's plan.

David shows *hesed* toward Jonathan  
because he trusts the LORD's promises.

But Saul's story shows us what happens when our allegiance slowly drifts away from the LORD.

For Saul, fear became stronger than trust.

**Protecting his own kingdom became more important than surrendering to God's kingdom.**

That's the tragedy unfolding in Saul's life.

**So today's chapter invites us to examine our own lives and ask:**

**[SLIDE 15] Where have I placed my loyal love? Who has my ultimate allegiance?**

The world constantly pulls our allegiance in different directions.

Political divisions...

The love of money...

Status and reputation...

The need to take control...

Even fear itself...

All fight for our allegiance.

But it's all just noise.

It's a smokescreen the enemy uses to slowly erode our trust in Jesus.

**But how do we know?**

**How can we tell if our trust in Jesus is drifting?**

Think about it this way...

Are we more passionate about political division...  
or righteousness?

Are we more inclined to take...  
than to give?

Are we more concerned about how others see us...  
than how God sees us?

Do we find ourselves trying to control outcomes...  
More than trusting the LORD with them?

Does our fear keep us from going to the LORD in prayer?

All of these are signs that our hearts are being pulled away from God.

**This is why Jesus calls us to seek *first*  
his kingdom and his righteousness.**

Because...

**[SLIDE 16] Seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness is the only way  
we can see through the smokescreen and recognize truth in the middle of  
all the noise.**

When our hearts are aligned with the LORD...

we begin to love what He loves...

we actually trust what He says...

And we walk in the kind of loyal love — *hesed* —  
that reflects His own heart.

**So let's not be deceived by the kingdom of the world.**

When we see division...

when we hear hate...

*None* of that aligns with God's heart.

This is why the LORD looks at our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7).

Because our hearts are what show whether or not we're serving  
the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of the world.

Let's not be caught unaware.

Remember — we are the people of God!

Our allegiance is to Jesus before anything else.

And when anything threatens that allegiance...

We stand firm in Christ.

We push back the darkness with the light of the gospel.

We become the kind of peacemakers and light-bearers  
that Jesus calls us to be.

So let's allow His will,  
and His loyal love,  
to shape our allegiance.

May His good,  
be our good...

Even when it costs us.

### **Let's Pray**

#### **We pray as Jesus taught us to pray:**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into testing, but deliver us from the evil one.  
For Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever,  
Amen.