



Studies in the Life of David

Text

First Samuel 20:24-42

Topic

God uses the little lad gathering Jonathan's arrows as a sign to direct David to flee from Saul

Title

*"This Little Lad of Mine,
I'm Gonna Make Him a Sign"*

Introduction

In English literature classes I remember discussions about how to find the main character in a story.

It's not always easy. For example, who is the main character in the original *Star Wars* trilogy? Luke Skywalker? Princess Leia? Han Solo? How about Darth Vader? Or possibly one of the annoying robots, R2D2 or C3PO?

There are several prominent characters in the last half of First Samuel chapter twenty. Saul, Jonathan, and David play major roles, of course. Abner gets a mention.

Easily overlooked is the nameless little "lad" that accompanies Jonathan into the field to retrieve his arrows. The little "lad" is referred to at least **twelve times** in this chapter! He's a major character.

For our purposes this morning *he is* the main character. He teaches us something. Jesus once instructed us about the kingdom of God, saying,

Mark 10:14 ... "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Jonathan's arrow-fetching little "lad" becomes for David, and for us, the example of receiving the kingdom of God "as a little child." Only by being a child-like subject in the kingdom of God would David be a great king over men. Likewise, our success on the earth will be measured by our child-like reception of God's rule over our lives.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Like A Child In The Kingdom Of God When You Submit To God's Delegated Authority, and #2 You Are Like A Child In The Kingdom Of God When You Submit To God's Direct Authority.

#1 You Are Like A Child In The Kingdom Of God
When You Submit To God's Delegated Authority
(v24-34)

David had fled Naioth to enlist Jonathan's help against the madness of King Saul. Jonathan was holding out hope he could smooth things over with the king, who was also his dad, and bring David back to the table. Jonathan and David had concocted a plan by which Jonathan would secretly let David know if Saul was at peace with him or still intent on murdering him. David would either return to his place in Saul's kingdom or become a fugitive on the run.

Of interest to our theme in these opening verses, about being 'like a child' in the kingdom of God, is the spiritual submission of Jonathan to Saul. He submitted to him as best he could as both his father and his king. When we understand what a terrible father and king Saul was, we can appreciate Jonathan's submission all the more.

It instructs us because, even though Saul was terrible, he was nonetheless God's delegated authority as father and king to Jonathan.

We see in Jonathan our own need to submit, as much as biblically possible, to delegated authority - *even when it is terrible*. And not just our need to submit, but the grace that is provided to enable us to do it.

1 Samuel 20:24 Then David hid in the field. And when the New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat the feast.

The plan was for Jonathan to sound-out Saul once he realized David was absent from the feast. The king's reaction would reveal his attitude toward David - whether he would be merciful or a murderer.

1 Samuel 20:25 Now the king sat on his seat, as at other times, on a seat by the wall. And Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty.

Abner was Saul's commander-in-chief. David, an important military leader and national figure, had a seat at the table and was expected to attend.

I can't help but chuckle at the reference to Saul sitting "by the wall." It's like a Sicilian who never sits with his back exposed to a potential 'hit' from a rival family! Saul lived in a constant state of paranoia.

1 Samuel 20:26 Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him; he is unclean, surely he is unclean."

By "unclean" he meant ceremonially unclean according to the Jewish law. Perhaps David had come into contact with blood or a dead body and needed to fulfill the requirements of the law before he could legally feast.

Funny how a guy so backslidden still thought about the subtleties of God's law. Legalism hardens the heart.

1 Samuel 20:27 And it happened the next day, the second day of the month, that David's place was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to eat, either yesterday or today?"

1 Samuel 20:28 So Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked permission of me to go to Bethlehem."

1 Samuel 20:29 And he said, 'Please let me go, for our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be there. And now, if I have found favor in your eyes, please let me get away and see my brothers.' Therefore he has not come to the king's table."

I feel obligated to point out that this was a lie. David had pressured his friend to participate in this ruse on his behalf. The Bible doesn't gloss-over the faults of its characters. It reports them for us to marvel at the grace of God in His dealings with us.

1 Samuel 20:30 Then Saul's anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"

1 Samuel 20:31 For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die."

This happened publicly, at a feast with many notable guests. We know Saul failed miserably as a king. Now we get a little insight into the kind of husband and father he was. Saul slandered Jonathan's mom, his own wife, with a very gross insult. He was trying to say that Jonathan must have taken after his mother, that he must have gotten his rebellious spirit from her.

How interesting that the only person in rebellion was Saul. He was rebelling against God. He projected his own sin on to others - something that occurs with great frequency among people.

Her "nakedness" probably refers to her giving birth to Jonathan, the king's heir. Saul was insinuating that by siding with David, Jonathan was despising his birthright and therefore bringing shame upon his mother.

1 Samuel 20:32 And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be killed? What has he done?"

1 Samuel 20:33 Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David.

1 Samuel 20:34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully.

Worried though he seemed about Jonathan becoming the next king, he was willing to kill him in a fit of rage.

Once again we see Saul as perhaps the worst spear thrower of all time. Interesting how he always ‘missed the mark.’ *So did his life!* Saul was in sin, and the word for “sin” means *to miss the mark*.

There is a sweet insight into Jonathan’s character. The text says “he was grieved” but not for himself. He was grieved “for David, because his father had treated [David] shamefully.”

Maybe that is the main lesson, the major realization, regarding submitting to God’s delegated authority as child-like subjects in His kingdom. **Life is not about us! It’s about God.** So if I’m Jonathan, I am grieved not for myself but for David because he was God’s choice to be king. Jonathan truly did seek first the kingdom of God.

With that kind of heart, it’s no wonder he continued to submit to Saul as both his father and his king. He didn’t go along with anything illegal or immoral or unbiblical. But within those boundaries he remained a loyal son and subject as unto the Lord. He looked past Saul to the One who had delegated earthly authority to Saul.

To the extent Jonathan will take his stand with his father, with his king, and be killed along with his dad and brothers in a fierce battle with the Philistines.

Let’s face it, it’s easy to submit to someone in authority if they are kind, if we agree with them, if they are a good leader. It only becomes an issue when they are more Saul-like. We are not to submit to anything illegal or immoral or unbiblical, but within those boundaries we receive the kingdom of God as children by submitting to those He has permitted to have authority over us. Even when their rule is terrible.

By submitting to them we are submitting to Him and are receiving the kingdom like little children who trust and obey.

#2 You Are Like A Child In The Kingdom Of God
When You Submit To God's Direct Authority
(v35-42)

In these closing verses we'll keep encountering Jonathan's little "lad." As David waited to see where the arrows would land, he knew that their flight would decide his own plight. It's a great meditation on the will of God. If you are obedient and submitted, you wait upon Him to set your direction. You follow, as it were, the arrows of His leading.

God wanted to show David something more about His leading. He wanted to show David he could have the attitude of a little child while following the arrows of His leading. Though from an earthly perspective his life was about to get very tough, from a heavenly perspective his Father was taking him out into a new field to shag arrows as part of their fellowship and David's training.

1 Samuel 20:35 And so it was, in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad was with him.

1 Samuel 20:36 Then he said to his lad, "Now run, find the arrows which I shoot." As the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.

1 Samuel 20:37 When the lad had come to the place where the arrow was which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried out after the lad and said, "Is not the arrow beyond you?"

1 Samuel 20:38 And Jonathan cried out after the lad, "Make haste, hurry, do not delay!" So Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows and came back to his master.

- To the little lad it was a morning of shagging arrows in fellowship with Israel's great archer. It was a time of learning about the bow.
- To David, this was the signal he was going to be a fugitive in the kingdom of Israel. It was about learning how to bow to the rule of God over his life.

God was showing David that His direction, represented by the arrow, could nevertheless be received in a child-like manner. I can almost 'hear' the Holy Spirit whispering to David, "That's you! You are God's child and the path you are on will require a child-like trust in your Father."

When some 'arrow' of God's authority directs you onto a path not of your own choosing, your attitude can nonetheless be like a little child.

1 Samuel 20:39 But the lad did not know anything. Only Jonathan and David knew of the matter.

The little lad had no idea he was involved shaping events that would direct the flow of human history. Likewise we never know who or what we might be influencing as we go through our lives. When we are called upon to submit to some authority, directed by God to do so, we can trust it's for a reason or reasons that have eternal consequences to everyone involved. You don't need to know outcomes as a child in God's kingdom, only obedience. In my heart I say to God, "Show me the outcome and I will obey." He answers, "Obey and I will bring about My outcome."

1 Samuel 20:40 Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad, and said to him, "Go, carry them to the city."

I'm guessing that, because of the seriousness of the situation, Jonathan didn't shoot as many arrows as he normally would in a practice session. The little lad's morning was cut short. Nevertheless he dutifully obeyed.

You never know, do you, what is going to happen when you are out in the field with the Lord directing you? I think we always assume that things will go well, that we will experience great blessing, that we will further the kingdom of God numerically.

God has a way of changing things up on us.

- Just when we get started He's liable to say, "We're done. Let's move on."
- Or, when we would like to be done and move on, He says, "I have yet much for you to do here in this field, difficult though it may be."

1 Samuel 20:41 As soon as the lad had gone, David arose from a place toward the south, fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times. And they kissed one another; and they wept together, but David more so.

1 Samuel 20:42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'May the Lord be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.'" So he arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city.

These two friends would only see each other one more time in this life. Each went God's way for them, submitting to His direct authority:

- David followed God's direction to become a fugitive for the next several years, a guy who lived in caves hiding from King Saul.
- Jonathan followed God's direction to remain a loyal son and subject to his mad father and king.

I'm sure they would rather have gone off together with their families and established a business making figurines that could be sold in *Hallmark Stores!* But that's not what a believer does who understands the concept of being like a child in the kingdom of God.

What is the kingdom of God? There is a literal, physical kingdom of God coming to the earth. It will follow on the heels of the future seven-year Great Tribulation. It will last for one thousand years and is thus sometimes called the Millennium.

While we are waiting for Jesus to return from Heaven to establish the literal kingdom of God on the earth, the kingdom is God's rule recognized in our hearts and operating in our lives, effecting our behavior. It is our submitting to Him as King.

Jesus said that the kingdom must be "received as a little child." Children don't work to earn their way into your family. They are born into it. Just so, you cannot by works enter into the kingdom of God. You must be born into it, born-again by receiving Jesus Christ as the Substitute and Sacrifice for your sins.

Have you been born-again? *You can be!*

Once a child of God by virtue of the second birth, you are to continue to approach life like a little child in terms of trusting and obeying your heavenly Father.

You can measure your child-likeness by looking at how well you are submitting to both His **delegated** and His **direct** authority in your life.

