

Bimonthly Encouragement to Sudanese Christian Workers

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No. 7 July 2010. **Being a Christian with tribal and family loyalties.**

I have recently been reading a book called “Looking for a Leader”.¹ In my own devotions I like to work through every Bible book in turn, reading the Scripture passage, noting my own ideas from it, before comparing them with a chapter of the commentary. I mark the date in the Bible index when I do this. This is my third time of having my personal time with God this way.

In 1 Samuel 13:2-3 and 14:1-46 Jonathan is seen fighting and defeating the Philistines. The people could see God was with Jonathan, giving him victories. Jonathan was a man of faith, 14:6. He was also the son of King Saul. Humanly speaking, Jonathan would inherit the kingdom when his father died. This was the tradition and custom. It was right and proper. Everyone would reasonably expect that to happen.

But God had other plans in mind! To follow God Jonathan must go against national and family traditions. In 1 Samuel 15 we read the Lord rejects Saul as king, “because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions”, verses 10, 23, and 16:1. Jonathan would NOT take his throne.

In 1 Samuel 16 God helps Samuel the prophet to anoint His chosen king. We are reminded in this story that “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”, verse 7. We already know that “the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart”, 13:14. Now we discover this man is David, the youngest son of Jesse, 16:11-13. And because it is David – by definition, it is NOT Jonathan! GOD breaks family and national traditions to ensure His man is in the right place at the right time. The right man for any position is always God’s man, and not necessarily the expected man.

It may be expected that Jonathan would be angry that his right to be king had been taken away. A natural human reaction would have been for him to resent David and make him a despised personal enemy. Yet the Bible tells us that Jonathan “became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself”, 18:1.²

Jonathan and David make a brotherly pact, 1 Samuel 18:1-4. Giving away his robes and weapons was symbolic of “all that could have been his on the

¹ John Woodhouse 1 Samuel Looking for a Leader (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway books) 2008.

² Please be aware that some try to twist this verse into supporting homosexual relationships. This is not possible, especially as verse 16 uses the same words saying, “all Israel loved David”! Beware false teachers, 2 Peter 2:1-3.

throne”.³ The two men wait for God’s time to bring into reality the promised kingdom of David. For Jonathan that meant going more and more into disobedience to his human father, and to the expectations of his royal household, 19:1-8; 20:1-42. His own life was put at risk by his actions. He was always prepared to die, 14:43. He risked his own life again and again for the sake of his friend David, 20:30-34. Notice (for our own encouragement) that God preserves him for as long as he plans to use him. Jonathan eventually dies in battle, 31:2.

David’s moving lament for his friend can be read in 2 Samuel 1:19-27. It may well have been first sung at an event like Sudanese tribal gatherings to mourn the death of family members and friends over several days.⁴ Nothing bad is said even of his enemy, Saul.

Jonathan is “a model of loyalty to truth and friendship, as well as ... peacemaking which is the role of the sons of God”.⁵ Perhaps he can inspire us to stand for Jesus Christ, where necessary against tribal or family traditions and even culture?

As Christians we are all given the priority of standing up for the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul was never “ashamed of the gospel”, Romans 1:16. To him the cross was the power of God – even if it was foolishness and a stumbling block to other people, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23-24. His handwritten prayer was this:

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”, Galatians 6:11,14.

Verses 12-13 show that Paul was not interested in outward appearances. He followed the advice of God in his heart – his heart which was crucified to worldly temptations and alive only to Christian discipleship. Since being born again he was a Christian first, Acts 9:1-22. He was a Christian before his family, before his tribe, before his earlier education and experience. Before his previous religion, before anyone or anything else Paul was a Christian.

Jonathan chose to give over his rights and help make David king. Jesus Christ chose to live and to die by the way of the cross. They both knew the seed (of their old lives) must die in order to bear much fruit for God and his kingdom, John 12:23-26. Who is seen to be the king and ruler of your life?

What is God calling us to do in this time of decision for our country of Sudan? I pray God will raise up men and women of gracious faith – people who will stand firmly but gently on the side of Jesus Christ. People who will attract others to our faith. People who will be selfless, because to them, as well as to us, Jesus Christ is everything.

Pastor Colin Salter. (Please share these thoughts with others and refer them to my website for more study resources!).

³ African Bible Commentary (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers) 2006, 1 Samuel by Gbile Akanni.

⁴ African Bible Commentary (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers) 2006, 1 Samuel by Gbile Akanni.

⁵ The Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press), 1998 edition, p.808.