

Fruit of the Spirit. Kindness (1st & 2nd Samuel)

There is an argument that is stranger than reason or eloquence, a healing agent just as effective as the best medicine, a tool in reconciliation that goes far beyond diplomacy. It is kindness. Sceptics are persuaded, sufferers comforted and enemies brought to the peace table quicker by sincere kindness than by any other force.

Small wonder then that the Lord Jesus in His wisdom directs the Holy Spirit to nurture kindness in the hearts of His followers. In a life submitted to the Lord's will, along with love, joy, peace, patience and others the Spirit leads us in paths of kindness for the His name's sake.

Often virtue is all the more wonderful when it's found against a backdrop of hardship, strife and human failure. Israel's first King Saul had numerous fine qualities but he was an insecure man whose jealousy finally led him to irrational violence and attempted murder. He died on the battlefield defending Israel but not before resorting in desperation to witchcraft. The nation was still young and frequently at war with threatening neighbours like the Philistines. In the midst of the cruelty and bloodshed and tragedy of those times, greatness was demonstrated not just by courage in battle but by mercy and kindness and honour between friends.

Two young heroes met and became firm friends while still in their teens. One was Jonathan, the king's son and natural heir to the throne. The other was David, the shepherd-boy from Bethlehem, the giant-killer, who, in fulfilment of the Lord's prophecy would in fact become the next king of Israel.

In the early days the two were inseparable, comrades in arms. Jonathan generously gave David some of his own clothes and weapons, making him fit for the royal court. As Saul became violently jealous of David's success and clear God-given leadership qualities the situation became dangerous. Jonathan courageously

spoke up to his father the king in support of David but to no avail. So instead he warned his friend and eventually sent him away for his own safety.

With amazing humility, Jonathan was ready to surrender his right to the throne in deference to the one God has clearly chosen and anointed. He even visited David in exile to encourage him spiritually not to give up hope.

It must have been difficult to balance his loyalty to his father, the king, and his friend David, but everything we read of Jonathan is honourable. He died tragically young, as we might expect supporting his father King Saul in battle defending their people. And from far away David grieved for him, saying their friendship had been deeper and more precious than any relationship he'd enjoyed with women.

The story doesn't quite end there. After a brief, bloody, uncertain period David was made king over all Israel and succeeded in uniting the tribes as one strong nation. In those days a monarch might have been anxious to exterminate any possible competition for the throne as Saul had been. David could have been concerned to establish and protect his own dynasty.

Instead, we find him seeking out anyone from Saul's family still alive, to whom he might show kindness for Jonathan's sake. Mephibosheth was poor, disinherited and disabled. As such he might have been despised, considered particularly sinful and cursed by God, not to mention worthy of suspicion bearing in mind his grandfather had tried to murder David.

David will have none of this. He determines to bless this young man, restores property and prestige to him and makes him a royal courtier with a seat among the princes. A potential enemy, welcomed as a son to the king's table.

Our subject tonight is kindness and we see numerous aspects of it in this beautiful account from the early history of God's people.

Kindness is remembering kindness and mercy shown to us, considering others with gratitude. Kindness is forgiving. Choosing to let go the fact that Saul tried to kill him, focussing instead on Jonathan's loyal generosity, David chooses reconciliation over enmity, freedom and life over grudge or revenge. Kindness is generosity, providing someone with what they need and then going further, pouring out a real blessing to prosper them.

Let's note that kindness will at times require courage. Neither Jonathan's kindness to David or David's kindness to Mephibosheth would have been popular in certain circles. You know people and politics! At times it will take courage to carry through our convictions – even to just show kindness! What if those in need whom God brings our way we find unattractive or offensive in some way? How we need the Spirit's help to show a kindness and mercy greater than we feel capable of in ourselves!

Notice one more thing from the story of David and Jonathan. Kindness is a kingly prerogative. You don't have to be a king to show kindness but a kind monarch will win love and respect from their people. As King, David had great wealth and authority to use as he chose. The more we are given the more generous we should be! He chose here to use it compassionately, honourably and generously.

Very much like the Christ Who would follow centuries later. Jesus was descended from David and was therefore human royalty but as God's Son He is eternal divine majesty, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And yet He chose to share His table with 12 very human, flawed fishermen and tax-collectors, one of whom would betray Him. Next day He gave His life on the cross to provide salvation for the world, even praying forgiveness for His executioners. Like David and Jonathan, Christ took what must have seemed like a dreadful risk to show redeeming kindness to you and me.

So we who trust in Him must go and do likewise, praying that He might fill us with compassion through the Spirit to minister kindness to all in need in His name.

Portraying the Gospel in actions, not just words. Winning people rather than arguments. Instead of making enemies, gaining friends.

To the glory of our Lord, our Saviour, our divine friend.

Amen