

The Best Choice  
1 Samuel 20:1-42  
Pastor Dan Erickson  
July 8, 2018

Sometimes the best choices we can make are counterintuitive. That simply means that what really is the best choice may seem not to be.

For example, when preparing for a big test, many students stay up late studying the night before the exam. However, studies show that those who spend less time studying and more time sleeping the previous night actually tend to score higher. Why? Probably because they were more alert and thought more clearly as they took the test. If you want to be productive, getting some sleep is often the best choice.

If we want to save money, it is important to make sure we are not “penny wise, but pound foolish.” That means, if you are using British currency, that the best way to save money, in the long run, is often to buy a high quality, more expensive product because it will not have to be replaced as often. It also means that buying a \$1000 mattress may be a better deal than a \$300 mattress if it saves you from back pain and the medical bills that go along with that.

Friends, today our journey through the book of 1 Samuel brings us to chapter 20:1-42 (page 243). Here we find Jonathan, the son of King Saul, facing an important choice. He ends up making a decision which is very counterintuitive, and yet it is certainly the best choice he could have made.

Let’s pause and pray the Lord would use his word to help us make the best choices – choices that will honor him and bring joy to our lives.

In our last episode, a.k.a. 1 Samuel 19, King Saul has gone to the city, the small city of Ramah to find David and kill him. David is the young man God has chosen to be the new king of Israel. The Lord, however, frustrates Saul’s plan by having the Holy Spirit come upon him. The last we saw Saul, he is lying on the floor praising and praying to God.

As we come to chapter 20, our text today, David flees Ramah and goes back to the city of Gibeah

to his friend Jonathan, Saul’s son, and asks, “Why is your father trying to kill me?” Jonathan responds, “No, that can’t be true. He would have told me if he was going to do that.” But David insists the king wants to kill him, even though he has no intention of harming Saul.

**1 Samuel 20:4 – Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you say, I will do for you.”**

This is a reaffirmation of their deep, non-sexual friendship, which we saw in chapter 18, when they pledged their loyalty to each other.

David and Jonathan then come up with a plan to ascertain Saul’s true intentions. The New Moon Festival was an event which members of the royal court – like David, who served as a musician, were expected to attend. They decide David will not be there. If Saul accepts his absence, that will show that Jonathan is right, and Saul doesn’t intend to do David any harm. Yet, if Saul gets angry, it will reveal that David is correct, and Saul plans to harm him. David then adds.....

**1 Samuel 20:8b – “If I have done anything wrong (in other words, if I have done anything to deserve the king’s wrath), then kill me yourself; why take me to your father?”**

David and Jonathan go out to the countryside to make their plans. In verses 18-23, they come up with a kind of elaborate archery scheme which will signal to David whether it is safe for him to return to the king’s court. In the midst of their planning, Jonathan makes this pledge...

**1 Samuel 20:13 – “If my father intends to bring evil on you, may God punish Jonathan and do so severely if I do not tell you and send you away so you may leave safely. May the LORD be with you, just as he was with my father.”**

Those words indicate that Jonathan is developing a clearer understanding of the big picture. Whatever his father’s intentions, it is

probably not David who will die, but rather the house of Saul. Jonathan says...

**1 Samuel 20:14-15 – If I continue to live, show me kindness (or faithfulness) from the LORD, but if I die, don't ever withdraw your kindness from my household – not even when the LORD cuts off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."**

Jonathan accepts that David, not he, will become the next king.

**1 Samuel 20:17 – Then Jonathan once again pledged to David his love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.**

Again, this wonderful example of deep, godly friendship.

So, it is time for the festival, and everyone in the king's court is there except David.

**1 Samuel 20:26 – Saul did not say anything that day because he thought, "Something unexpected has happened; he must be ceremonially unclean – yes, that's it, he is unclean."**

However, as the festival continues the next day and David is again absent, Saul gets suspicious and asks Jonathan where David is.

**1 Samuel 20:28-29 – Jonathan answered, "David asked for my permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Please let me go because our family is holding a sacrifice in the town.' ... That's why he didn't come to the king's table."**

Incidentally, "Let me go" also means "Let me escape" or "Let me flee" so the real reason for David's absence is given in Jonathan's "less than forthright" answer to his father.

**1 Samuel 20:30 – Then Saul became angry with Jonathan and shouted, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you are siding with Jesse's son to your own shame and to the disgrace of your mother?"** (Some versions read, "your mother's nakedness.")

In the Hebrew which he spoke, Saul's language is getting a bit crude as he expresses his anger. It is ironic that Saul points to a "perverse and rebellious woman" as the root of what he sees as Jonathan's flaws. Yet, if anyone in this drama is "perverse and rebellious," it is Saul.

It is also interesting that throughout this chapter, Saul refers to David as "Jesse's son." I suspect that is Saul's implicit way of reminding Jonathan that David is a commoner, while he (Jonathan) is the son of the king. Saul is implying, "It is you, Jonathan, who should succeed me on the throne, not David." And then, Saul gives an explicit reminder to Jonathan...

**1 Samuel 20:31 – "Every day Jesse's son lives on earth you and your kingship are not secure. Now send for him and bring him to me – he must die!"**

Now, Jonathan has to make a choice. Will he be loyal to his father or his friend? Will he choose to do what he can to secure his own rise to the throne, which would seem to be the natural thing to do? Or is he going to make the counterintuitive choice and continue to ally himself with David?

**1 Samuel 20:32 – Jonathan answered his father back: "Why is David to be killed? What has he done?"**

With those words, Saul knows what Jonathan's choice is.

**1 Samuel 20:33a – Then Saul threw his spear at Jonathan to kill him.**

Twice Saul had hurled a spear at David. Now he tries to kill his own son. The message is clear. If Jonathan is going to side with David, he will get the same treatment as David. Jonathan apparently was still hoping this tension between his father and David was just some type of misunderstanding, but now he knows his father is determined to kill David. He becomes angry.

**1 Samuel 20:34b – ...he was grieved because of his father's shameful behavior toward David.**

His choice is now cemented. Jonathan has chosen loyalty to his friend, David, over loyalty to his father, King Saul.

**1 Samuel 20:35 – In the morning Jonathan went out to the countryside for the appointed meeting with David.**

He shoots arrows and gives directions to his servant, all part of Jonathan letting David know that Saul indeed intends to kill him, and it is not safe to go back to the royal court. And then David and Jonathan have what they knew could be their final face-to-face meeting.

**1 Samuel 20:41 – (David) fell facedown to the ground and payed homage three times (He honors Jonathan as the king’s son). Then he and Jonathan kissed each other and wept with each other, though David wept more.**

Again, these are normal expressions of brotherly affection. Nothing sexual is implied.

**1 Samuel 20:42 – Jonathan then said to David, “Go in the assurance the two of us pledged in the name of the LORD when we said: ‘The LORD will be a witness between you and me and between my offspring and your offspring forever.’” Then David left, and Jonathan went into the city.**

At this point, David and Jonathan do not know whether they will ever see each other again. They do meet on another occasion in 1 Samuel 23.

OK, so what is the Lord saying to us through our text today?

Last week, we focused on how the deep friendship between Jonathan and David provides a good model for us. Yet, as Tim Chester notes in his commentary, this story is even more a model of discipleship.

Yes, Jonathan loves David as a brother. However, even more importantly, he recognizes him as a king. As we noted, that was really not the natural thing to do. Jonathan was a good man. He likely would have been a good king. Yet, in 1 Samuel 13, not only did the Lord reject Saul as king, but the house of Saul. Saul’s

descendants, such as Jonathan, would not reign over Israel.

Instead, in 1 Samuel 14, a new king and new royal line is chosen. In fact, from the house of David would come the Messiah, Messiah with a capital “M,” the Christ, the Lord Jesus, who will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords forever and ever.

And though it is counterintuitive for him to do so, Jonathan chooses to let go of his own claim to the throne and acknowledges David as the new king.

When Jonathan and David pledge their loyalty to one another as friends, Jonathan gave David his robe and armor (18:4). That was essentially Jonathan acknowledging that it was now David who had the right to the throne, not him.

Because Jonathan loved David, he wanted to do that, but it was not easy to do. I am sure a big part of him thought, “Hey, I really should be the king.” But Jonathan makes the counterintuitive choice. It is, however, a good choice. The right choice.

Jonathan is loyal to the king God has chosen. He is not fighting against the Lord. If he would have tried to hang onto the throne, he would have experienced God’s judgment and wrath in a variety of ways. Jonathan can go to bed each night with a clear conscience, knowing he did the right thing. And in the future, David will show kindness toward Jonathan and his family. Even though it maybe didn’t seem like the best choice to acknowledge David as king, it clearly was.

Folks, this is a good analogy and a good model for being a disciple – a believer in and follower of Jesus. To be a disciple, we must relinquish our own claim to be king (or queen) of our lives, acknowledge Jesus as the true King and submit to his authority. In a sense, we have to take off our personal royal robe and place it on Jesus. It is, I think, counterintuitive for us to do that, but it is indeed the best choice.

The first step in being a disciple is choosing to trust in Jesus to save us from our sins. The

gospel, the great news, is that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and rose from the dead guaranteeing our salvation. This is the gospel, the great news, the heart of the Christian message and summed up in...

**John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.**

Sometimes I have heard people say, “Becoming a Christian is so simple, so easy. All you have to do is to believe in Jesus.”

Yes, simple maybe, but I am afraid there is nothing easy about believing in Jesus Christ. Now, I am not referring to “believing about Jesus,” acknowledging that certain facts about him are true. That is part of what faith involves, and sometimes the easiest part. There is plenty of evidence supporting the historical accuracy of what the New Testament tells us about Jesus.

However, believing in Jesus includes having faith in him or trusting in him. Trusting in Jesus to save us means we cannot trust in self to save us. It means acknowledging we cannot save ourselves. It means believing we are sinners in need of a Savior. And friends, that is often not an easy thing to do.

I think of my friend, Jim – that’s Joe’s brother. You have never met him, but you likely know some folks like him. Jim is a good guy. He works hard at his job and has been a pretty good husband and father for over twenty years. He often helps out his neighbors and friends with projects.

Jim believes in God, but really doesn’t think he needs the Jesus stuff he hears people talk about. Oh, he knows he is not perfect, but the idea that he is such a bad sinner he needs a Savior just doesn’t make sense to him. He’s doing OK on his own. And besides, one thing he has learned in life is that there is no one better to trust than yourself. He is not inclined to trust anyone else with his eternal destiny. It is very counterintuitive for Jim to believe in Jesus. It is not an easy thing for him to do at all.

Or I think of my friend, Sally. You don’t know her, but you know some people like her. She is a single mom who has been burned and betrayed by almost everyone in her life.

She has never met her father. Her mother died from alcoholism when Sally was 20 years old. Husband #1 left her for another woman. Husband #2 is in jail. While Jim doesn’t think he needs to trust anyone else, Sally doesn’t believe there is anyone else who can be trusted.

Yes, she hears people talking about God and Jesus, but it seems too good to be true. Sally is afraid to trust anyone but herself. For that reason, it is very counterintuitive for her to believe in Jesus. It is not an easy thing for her to do at all.

Yet, the good news for Jim and Sally and people like them is that God still loves them! Through his Holy Spirit, he often works in these lives and helps people realize that they need to trust someone. The Lord helps them see they are in deep spiritual trouble because of their sin, that they cannot make it on their own, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is someone worthy of their trust.

He is someone who will not let them down. He is someone who always keeps his word. Whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. By his Spirit, God helps people see that though trusting in the Lord Jesus may seem counterintuitive, it is the best choice anyone can ever make.

Friend, let me just say that if you are here this morning and you are not trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, if for whatever reason that just seems counterintuitive, just doesn’t seem like what you should do, you are *very much mistaken*. Trusting in the Lord Jesus is the best choice anyone can make, both for this life and the next.

If you are having a hard time seeing that or if it just seems too good to be true, I would like you to talk to me or to Pastor Mark before you leave today.

OK, the first step in being a disciple of Jesus is to trust him to save us from our sins.

The second step is to trust him enough to follow him. To follow him wherever he leads. Now, often this is counterintuitive.

For example, it means obeying the commands he has given us, even when it seems we would be better off to choose not to do that. It means focusing, not on what is going to be most convenient and comfortable for me, but rather seeking to do the things which are most honoring to God and which will be helpful to people around me.

There are times when it seems to make a lot more sense to kind of cut corners and do things your way, rather than the way God has spelled out in the Bible. Let me give you an example.

Start with my friend, Linda. You don't know her, but she's 38 years old and has never been married. About a year ago, Jeff started working in the same office she does. He is in his early 40's and has been divorced for five years. Linda and Jeff quickly became friends, and pretty soon they were doing lunch together at least a couple times a week.

Jeff is such a nice guy. He is intelligent, a hard worker, funny and kind. When Jeff asked Linda to go out for dinner and a movie one night, she was ecstatic! And sure enough, within a couple of months, Linda and Jeff were spending a lot of time together almost every weekend. It's been wonderful! The only problem for Linda is that Jeff is not a Christian.

Oh, he believes in God. He is not against her going to church, but he just doesn't think it is important. Jeff has a biology degree and claims, as a science-type person, he just can't take the Bible real seriously. And he says the whole idea of Jesus dying for his sins just doesn't make sense.

Friends, Linda faces a big decision. Jeff has started talking about marriage, and she would love to marry him. But, she knows the Bible says that would be wrong.

## **2 Corinthians 6:14a – Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.**

What all that verse means, she is not sure. But she knows it certainly includes this: A Christian should not marry someone who is not a believer in Jesus. That is what the Lord expects.

Linda's friends, even those at her church, say she would be crazy not to marry Jeff. He is such a good guy. And they tell her she needs to be realistic. She is 38 years old. She may not have another opportunity to get married. And besides, there is a good chance Jeff will eventually become a Christian. If they married, she will have plenty of opportunities to witness to him.

So, Linda has to make a decision. Who is she going to trust? The wisdom of her friends? Her own intuition? Or will she make the counterintuitive choice and trust the Lord? Is she going to do what he is asking her to do, believing that she will ultimately experience more joy and will be better off obeying the Lord and not marrying Jeff. Not marrying him unless he becomes a believer in Jesus.

Friends, Linda faces a tough choice. Yet, this is one of the many situations where it is not easy to trust the Lord and obey him.

Sometimes it seems to make a lot more sense to tell a little lie rather than tell the truth. Sometimes it seems to make a lot more sense to keep money for your own expenses rather than give it to missionaries going to another part of the world to tell people about Jesus. Sometimes it seems to make a lot more sense to just stay home on Sunday morning and not go to church because you could just use some time to relax.

Yet, these are the times when we need to be counterintuitive. Instead of making choices which seem to promote our own interests, we need to make choices which honor the Lord and serve others.

And the wonderful truth is, when we focus our lives on doing that, on what honors and serves others, we will ultimately experience more joy

than if we just make choices based on what seem to be our own interests.

There is marginally more joy in this life, infinitely greater joy in the next life when we make that counterintuitive choice of trusting the Lord. I am confident that Jonathan found that to be true 3000 years ago. I am confident we will find that to be true today.