

David and Jonathan Georg Sverdrup

Kvartal-Skrift, 1877, 44-48.

Georg Sverdrup, *Professor Georg Sverdrups samlede skrifter i udvalg*, Andreas Helland, ed. (Minneapolis: Frikirkens Boghandels Forlag, 1910), 1:1-5. Trans. in Andreas Helland, *Georg Sverdrup: The man and His Message* (Minneapolis: The Messenger Press, 1947), 202-207.

“And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold”.¹ The time seems to have come when this word finds its fulfillment. Strangely powerful is the iniquity of selfishness, and it seems as though petty vanity and disuniting envy has become dominant, not only in the politics of this world, but also among those who call themselves by the name of Him who died for His friends. Even in the Church of God there does not seem to blow the mild zephyr that makes the flowers spread fragrance in God's garden, but a cold, wintry blast that causes the most beautiful flowers to wither and the most delicate shoots to die. For this reason we shall draw forth the most delightful picture of the love of friends that we know of, and we shall warm our own hearts with it. For if you took the coldest thing you know of, if you took death's cold embrace in which the human heart ceases to beat and the blood ceases to flow, yet love is as strong as death. And where love's flame is burning, it is of no avail that the winds blow and the waters rush on. For every cold gust of wind shall only bring the flame to burn so much more brightly on the hearth, and many waters cannot quench the love. In tribulation it increases, in the darkness it gives light, in the cold it is so much warmer. The greater the struggle, the greater the courage; the more numerous the obstacles, the more glorious the outcome.

A ruddy young man, fair of eyes and goodly to look at was David, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem. Behind the ewes he walked in the pastures of Judah, over its mountains and through

¹ Matt. 24:12

its valleys he led his flock. His playing and singing could be heard across the green meadows and by the murmuring waterbrooks. His harp he had learned to tune to the roaring rivers and the stillness of the forest, and the praise of the Lord he had learned to sing while he walked in loneliness over the fields where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had pitched their tents with their flocks, in faith and expectation of the fulfilment of the promise of the Lord that the land should be given to them and their children forever. The inheritance of the glorious promise which had been given to the tribe of Judah had become the delight of the shepherd boy, and by it he had become convinced that Goliath of the Philistines need not be feared by the people of God, but that the Lord would give His people victory over all its enemies if they dared to trust in Him.

Then one day the prophet Samuel came down according to the command of the Lord, to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king over His people; for Saul had been rejected from the face of the Lord. And Jesse brought forth his sons, one by one, before the prophet of the Lord. And when the prophet saw Eliab he said: "Surely, Jehovah's anointed is before me." But the Lord, said: "I have rejected him; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart." And Jesse brought forth his seven sons, but none of them was chosen by God. Then David had to come, he who was herding the sheep. And the Lord said to Samuel: "Arise and anoint him, for this is he." And Samuel anointed him, and the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon David from that day forward.

But upon Saul there was an evil spirit. And David was summoned, and his delightful playing was a refreshing solace for the sick man's torn heart, and the evil spirit departed from him because of David's music. But Saul had been rejected by the Lord, and David had been chosen in his stead.

About this time the Philistines came forth against Israel, and Saul fought against them. And Saul had a son whose name was Jonathan, and he was a hero in the war, and victory went

with him against the Philistines, because he also had given his heart to the Lord, and in the name of the God of Israel he slew the enemies of Israel. Among the heroes of Israel Jonathan was the flower, a beautiful ornament for Israel, a joy and delight for the people of God. He was the son of the king, and the people rejoiced in the thought of the day when he was to sit on his father's throne.

Then came the great warrior of the Philistines, the mighty Goliath, and stood forth to engage in a duel. And he mocked the battle-lines of Israel, and he blasphemed against their God, and there was no one who dared to meet him. Fear and terror had gripped the whole army of Israel. But David was not among them; he was at home on the fields of Bethlehem, tending his father's flock. But he, too, wanted to see the Philistine giant and went to the camp. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him; with a sling in his hand and a few smooth stones from the brook in his shepherd's bag he went to meet the giant in the name of God. And against the giant with sword and spear he set the Lord as his shield and protection, and the Philistine fell for the despised shepherd boy of Israel.

Then there was rejoicing in Israel; then the daughters of the people sang the praise of David with gladness. But a black thought from hell stole into Saul's heart, envy seized him and bitter hatred against David, because the Lord had chosen him and given him the strength of faith which was the true royal adornment in Israel. But Jonathan's heart opened itself to the unknown shepherd boy, and his heroic soul rejoiced over the heroic deed. His faith was strengthened by David's courageous faith, he recognized the chosen one of the Lord and loved him. And as waterbrooks that meet in the valley, naturally and quietly glide together and throw themselves to each other's bosom because they cannot do otherwise, thus heart was united with heart, and soul with soul, when Jonathan and David found each other on the day of victory.

Saul's hatred and jealousy brought tribulation and distress upon David from that day on. It was the school of suffering of the Lord in which the chosen king was to be prepared to become the true leader of the people and the country. Chased away from the court of the king, threatened with death, pursued from place to place like a wild animal, he had no longer any home, any place of rest, except in faith in the Lord and in the friendship of Jonathan. Jonathan shielded him against danger, Jonathan warned him against the cruelty of his father, Jonathan went to him in the forest and strengthened his hand with God. Jonathan defended him before his father so that Saul in his rage threw his javelin after his own son.

Was there anything to gain for Jonathan by his faithfulness toward his persecuted friend? On the contrary, it would seem that there was everything to lose. There were many waters that overflowed this love and threatened to quench it, yea, to transform it into the enmity of Saul. On all sides there was a temptation for Jonathan to give up. But in it all he proved faithful.

Saul, his father, had been rejected by the Lord, and David had been chosen in his stead. David was to receive the inheritance of Jonathan. The son was to lose all on account of the sin of his father. Envy and wounded pride might well inject bitterness in Jonathan's heart. But his true friendship became serene by the thought: David is to occupy the first place in the kingdom, and I shall stand by his side.

Jonathan was the delight of Israel; now a shepherd boy was to take precedence over him. He who had been the leader in the wars of Israel was to yield his place to the one who had walked behind the ewes. It seemed a bitter thought, but Jonathan found peace in the assurance that the Lord chooses him to whom He will entrust His people.

Daily the kingdom of Saul was deteriorating; day by day Jonathan had to observe how the loyalty to Saul was giving way to an increasing sympathy for David. David's nobility of

character cast a strong shadow over Saul's unfaithful actions. Jonathan felt how it pierced his heart to see his father overwhelmed with disgrace. Yet, in all these things he was victorious.

And David who was being hunted and persecuted, who was not deemed worthy of having a cave in the land where Saul had his throne, his soul must also have been tempted to hate both father and son. He had reason to fear what Jonathan would do when Saul was dead. He had reason to think that it were better if the whole family of Saul were exterminated, if he was to enjoy peace on the throne of Israel. There was temptation when he saw Jonathan honored and himself despised; there was temptation when he met him alone in the field, alone in the forest. Would it not be natural for him to reason thus: This is the heir; if he is gotten out of the way, then the struggle is over with the death of Saul. But in all these things David was victorious.

Then came the last struggle. The Philistines attacked Israel; Saul and Jonathan went to meet them. Alone went the friend with his blinded father. He fought for the one who had been rejected; as for himself, he had nothing to gain thereby. For the country of David fought 'the son of Saul; for Saul's victory fought the friend of David. But David was not at his side. The din of battle was increasing; the struggle was becoming more intense. Jonathan fell in the uneven contest. But the lamentation of David carried the name of Jonathan down to this very day: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: Very pleasant hast thou been unto me. Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women".²

Why did Jonathan struggle? Why did David suffer? For the hope of Israel which to them was greater than their own honor. May the Lord thus bind hearts together in inviolable friendship and a faith firm as a rock, for the people of the Lord and its hope!

² II Sam. 1:26.