

NO ORDINARY BREAD, BUT CONSECRATED BREAD

1 Samuel 20:1-22:23 (Key verse 21:6)

So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away

In today's passage, David cries out to Jonathan, *"What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to kill me?"*. Saul has gone extremely hateful towards David, and David did not understand. David had served Saul so well with distinction; he has brought a lot of success for king Saul, yet why is the king so hell-bent at killing him? So, David spends all his time fleeing from Saul; always in fear and not knowing what to do to save his life. However, in this time of great distress, David asked for ordinary bread, but was given consecrated bread which was unlawful for him to eat. It is quite interesting how David was given this special bread. We'll learn, then, how God cared for and helped David in this time of trouble, confusion and danger. This is the heart of God to all of us; the God who is a Father to all of His creations, loving and providing for us in His special, best and intimate way. I pray our hearts be touched by God who helped David in an extraordinary way.

JONATHAN LOVE SAVES DAVID'S LIFE

Today's passage begins with David and his friend Jonathan. Their friendship was quite amazing. David was not sure how the king Saul thinks of him. He was worried and scared for his life to go back to the king's service. So he devised a plan to know what was in the mind of king Saul about him. Look at verse 1 Sa 20:5-7 ***So David said, "Look, tomorrow is the New Moon feast, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. 6 If your father misses me at all, tell him, 'David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.' 7 If he says, 'Very well,' then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me.*** It seemed like a good plan. But, there was a problem. Who would report to him how the king responded to his absence at the feast? Whose word will he trust for his life to communicate how Saul responded? It was Jonathan. Jonathan is the son of king Saul. He is a prince, and the next in line to be king as his right. However, David's presence could have threatened his kingship. But something amazing happened. Jonathan swore an oath between him and David in the presence of God. In this oath, Jonathan vowed to help David and protect him from the rage of his father king Saul. So, look at 1 Sa 20:12-13 ***Then Jonathan said to David, "I swear by the LORD, the God of Israel, that I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favourably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? 13 But if my father intends to harm you, may the LORD deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father.*** Someone can ask the question, *"why is Jonathan so willing to help David?"* The answer is this; Jonathan feared God. Fearing God meant that he is prepared and willing to help David, beyond his humanistic and selfish reasons, but simply out of reverence and fear of God.

Jonathan risked it all while trying to save David. He risked his life, peace and wellbeing. His father was so angry why Jonathan was helping David. He hurled insults and even a spear in attempt to kill Jonathan. I am sure the relationship between Jonathan and his father might have been negatively affected. Perhaps his father would no longer trust him or even cut off some benefits to him. Life could have been easier to just side with his father and hate David. However, we get to understand what it means to love someone with the fear of God. It means being able to see God in them, despite their weaknesses, what they lack, despite what they are able to do for you in return of the favour. This is what it means to love; to love unconditionally driven by the fear of God who is in them. It is so easy to love someone and help them if they are wealthy or some sort of a celebrity. It is so easy to go all out for someone who seems deserving. It is also difficult to love someone from whom you'll get nothing out. How can you help someone and love someone who is weak, someone who is troubled? It would be easier to simply let them go and not involve yourself in their affairs, one would think. It would be easier to ignore them and focus on your own life, protect your own interests than actually risking them all. But, Jonathan loved David so much that he even swore an oath in the presence of God, because he feared God that much. He saw the God in them, and out of love and reverence for God, love and help David. This is an example of how we should all love one another, and even our neighbours even if they are strangers to us. It is the love of God that has no limit; the love of God that has no conditions nor discrimination. It is the love of God that simply says *"I love you simply because you have been created in the image of God"*. May God touch our hearts to have the love of God among one another, to love each other with the love of Jonathan towards David. Amen!

Let us go back to the passage and see what happened David's plan with Jonathan to know what was in the heart of king Saul regarding David. It came to pass that the New Moon feast was held. And when king Saul noticed that David in not present, he was so enraged!

Look at 1 Sa 20:30–31 **Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? 31 As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die!"** Jonathan however defended David, and tried to save his life from the hands of his evil and senseless father Saul. Look at 1 Sa 20:32 **"Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father.** 1 Sa 20:35–38 **35 In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, 36 and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. 37 When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?" 38 Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master.** In this way, shooting the arrow further for the small boy to go fetch it, and in a loud voice; "isn't the arrow beyond you? Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" David was able to hear Jonathan, and from his hiding place, knew that king Saul is hellbent at killing him. It was not safe for David to return back to the king's service, but rather to flee and run away from Saul.

Can we imagine what would have happened to David if he didn't have the sincere and trustworthy love of Jonathan? He would have walked right into the hands of the beast Saul, and be pinned to the wall with a spear through his lungs. God saved David through the love of Jonathan. In this time of great distress and danger, God worked so mightily through the love of Jonathan. This is the heart of God towards the distressed David. It was the hope of God that David feels and know how much he is dearly loved by God even in these trying times, through the amazing love of Jonathan. For this reason, we are encouraged to bring peace in one another's hearts as we love each other with the love of God. We are encouraged to bring relief, and to show how much God cares and loves our brethren. Even more, as we love with the faith of Jonathan, we are able to experience how much God so loves us personally. There is always someone in need of the love of God. There is that one sister and brother who is distressed, confused and even doubting the love of God. However, when we show that love as Jonathan did, we are able to save them, and most importantly help them to feel and know the love that their Father God has for them. I pray that God touch our hearts and reveal in our heart how much He so loves us. Amen!

NO ORDINARY BREAD, BUT CONSECRATED BREAD

This brings us to today's message and key verse. David delivered his emotional goodbyes to Jonathan and then fled from Saul. They both cried, feeling each other's pains and also being comforted by the love they have for one another in these difficult times. David wept the most understandably so, and then left and continued on his way to flee from Saul who wanted to kill him. David went to Nob to Ahimelek the priest. Look at 1 Sa 21:1 **David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"** David came alone, and Ahimelek could sense that there is something wrong. He could see that David was in some sort of distress. He was concerned and wanted to know. So he asked David, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?". David, not thinking straight, and very troubled mentally, made up a story why he was alone. He actually lied to the priest. He said 1 Sa 21:2 **"The king sent me on a mission and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place.**

David had a request. Look at 1 Sa 21:3 **Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.** He was most probably hungry and had not eaten in days. He missed out on a delicious feast from the New Moon feast at Saul's table. He had been in distress, and his body was weakened. He needed food, he needed to eat something, some bread. Perhaps he also needed spiritual direction in these times of great distress in his life. So, he came to the priest Ahimelek for bread and spiritual guidance. However, there was a bit of a problem. David asked for ordinary bread, but there was no ordinary bread, but consecrated bread. Look at 1 Sa 21:4 **But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.**

What do we know about this consecrated bread? This bread is also known as The Bread of the Presence, because it was set before the presence of the Lord in the Holy Place of the tabernacle/temple. It was bread devoted to God. This is how it was prepared according to Leviticus 24:5-9. **5 "Take the finest flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah t for each loaf. 6 Arrange them in two stacks, six in each stack, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. 7 By each stack put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be a food offering presented to the LORD.** The bread was to be replaced regularly and set before the Lord every Sabbath, week after week. **8 This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant.** Now, there were clear and strict restrictions regarding who can eat this consecrated bread. **9 It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in the sanctuary area, because it is a most holy part of their perpetual share of the food offerings presented to the LORD."** This bread can only be eaten by priests. Jesus even said it. (Mt 12:3–4). **3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?"**

4 He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. It was unlawful for David to eat this consecrated bread. He was not a priest, nor a Levite. He was just an Ephraimite. Now this explains why there was a serious concern for David being given this bread.

However, Ahimelek the priest gave David this consecrated bread. As a priest who understood the laws of God, and who wanted to honour the Name of the Lord, it would have been better to not give him the bread, and simply dismiss his request, *“sorry, this bread is only for us priests. It is not lawful to give it to you”*. But, he gave him this special bread devoted to God. Why? In these times of great distress in David's life, Ahimelek gave David this consecrated bread to eat so that David might know the heart of God. A lot has happened to David so far. Even more, David would face many uncertain battles and challenges in the near future. King Saul is breathing down his neck, looking for to kill him. He is in the wilderness, hungry and scared for his life. He is without hope, and direction. Who can save him from these perilous times? What can give him great peace in his heart? It is the Lord God, and knowing His thoughts; His heart! And this is the heart of God towards; that David is so much loved by God. It is very easy to doubt the love of God especially in times where one is troubled. However, being given the consecrated bread meant to David that he is very dear to Lord. It is quite easy to die on the inside when in challenges. However, David could be free from those paralysing thoughts when eating this consecrated bread. The love of God; how much He cares for him and how much He so special to Him is revealed through the giving and eating of this special consecrated bread.

To a simple and ignorant eye; one might ask, *“what is the fuss about this bread? It is just bread mos. It is not like it fell from the heavens; as if when you eat it you'll never go hungry”*? I'd rebuke that person in this light; it is the bread that is devoted to God. Of course, God is not a man that He needs food or bread to eat. The bread is for us. This is a teaching for all of us to know how God loves us all; how God is thinking about us. He so much thinks well about us that He is able to break all the restrictions and religious boundaries to show us how much He loves us. Can we imagine what was going in the mind of David when he was eating the consecrated bread, the bread devoted to God, the bread only eaten not by commoners but only the priests/Levites? I am sure he would realise, and exclaim *“Surely, I am a child of God, surely He loves me so”*! Do you know about the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21-28? This woman was a gentile, and Jesus as we know a Jew. There was a great divide between these two nations as the Jews thought they need to keep their spiritual cleanliness and be cut off from anyone who is not a Jew. However, this gentile woman came to Jesus with a serious request, just like David coming to the priest. Her daughter was demon possessed, and suffering terribly. Jesus, wanted to test her faith in His great wisdom, used this segregation of the two nations. He told her ***“I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel”***. He didn't stop there, but got very personal with the woman, and said to her ***“it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs”***. Looking beyond what might seem to be offensive words from Jesus, what do we see? We see once more, the heart of God towards all the people; they are all His children. Jesus said, ***“it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs”***. This means that David was being taught that he should not fear, but rest in the peace and confidence that comes in knowing that he is a child of God, so dearly loved that he is given the consecrated bread reserved specially for him. The Lord cares for David, and will provide and protect David from his adversaries and whatever difficulties he might encounter.

In conclusion: it is for this reason, therefore to consecrate ourselves. How so? Let us meditate on this word on this word until we understand and believe that we are indeed children of God; He is our Father and He loves us so dearly that He gives the best from Himself for our wellbeing. Ahimelek gave David the special bread of the Presence on condition that he is himself consecrated; that is being kept away from women. This was for David to really think more about himself as God's chosen, God's beloved, but not in a mortal and fleshly manner. May the Holy Spirit touch our hearts to know and experience this love of God. God so loved the world that He also gave His Son Jesus in our place, and to save us from sin. What is it that you hold dearly to yourself, and call it 'consecrated'? we are encouraged today to use it, and give it away to bring peace to one brother or sister, and that they too can experience the great love of God through our possessions. May the Holy Spirit help all of us to believe and expect the best help from the Lord God; our special help from our Father God. Amen!