

## “24-Carat Friendship”

Mark 5:21-43  
2 Samuel 1:17-27

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In the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Jesse Owens was considered the favorite in the broad jump. The previous year he had set the record of 26' 8 1/4 ". However on his first two attempts he stepped on the foul line. He sat dejected. He looked up and saw the tall, blonde blue-eyed German broad jumper. Owens knew of the Nazis extreme desire to show Aryan superiority especially against a black athlete and was nervous about the coming encounter.

The man introduced himself as Luz Long. "You should be able to qualify with your eyes closed!" he said to Owens. For the next few moments the black son of a sharecropper and the white model of Nazi manhood chatted. Then Long made a suggestion. Since the qualifying distance was only 23 feet, 5 1/2 inches, why not make a mark several inches before the takeoff board and jump from there, just to play it safe?

Owens did and qualified easily. In the finals Owens beat Long and every one else, setting an Olympic record and taking home his second of four golds. The first person to congratulate him was Luz Long- in full view of Adolf Hitler. Owens never again saw Long, who was killed in WWII. He later wrote, "You could melt down all the medals and cups I have and they wouldn't be a plating on the 24-carat friendship I felt for Luz Long."

Friendship.

David and Jonathon had a 24-carat friendship. After David killed Goliath and reported to Saul the text says, "When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathon was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathon loved him as his own soul." Later it says that David loved Jonathon as he loved his own life. They became more than brothers. They even made an eternal covenant with each other saying, "The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendents and your descendents, forever."

What a deep friendship they had?? What makes their relationship even more amazing is that Jonathon's father Saul was attempting to kill David because he believed David to be a threat to his crown. A 24-carat friendship.

In our text today we see the depth of David's grief over his slain friend. David has essentially set a eulogy to song. He eulogizes both Saul and Jonathon, but as the song goes on we see the debt of his love for Jonathon. "Jonathon lies slain upon your high places; I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathon; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women."

We have such a distorted view of love today that it is hard to understand what this love is about, especially because it is between two men. It almost sounds like David is

grieving the death of a lover or a spouse. But let me suggest that we so confuse intimate love with sex that it is hard for us today to have true and deep intimacy in our friendships, our non-sexual relationships.

Perhaps Eugene Peterson's translation is more helpful, "O my dear brother Jonathon, I'm crushed by your death. Your friendship was a miracle-wonder, love far exceeding anything I've known- or ever hope to know."

What David and Jonathon had was true and deep intimacy. Their bond was not unlike that of a marriage. They made a lifetime commitment to each other; they even embraced and kissed each other at one point in the story. Though, there was no wedding ring, they had a 24-carat bond.

In an age where half of all marriages fail, for many of us our friendships are the most stable and enduring relationships in our lives. Perhaps because as a society we have spent so much energy focusing on marriage as the most important relationship that we have lost sight of the significance of friendship. Perhaps also we have as a society neglected those who are not married.

What about divorcees, widows, gay men and women, or those who are simply not called to a marriage relationship. Does the Lord not bless those relationships? Does God only bless the relationship of a man and a woman who decide to get married? I think David and Jonathon give us a clear answer: No. God was definitely blesses friendships.

In the gospel of Luke there is an interesting discussion between Jesus and the Sadducees, who were the traditionalists of the Jewish religion of the day. They pose what they believe is an unanswerable question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and dies childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?"

Jesus said, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection."

In other words, marriage is not an eternal relationship; it is part of this age. We will be like angels and children. Now, we don't know about angelic relationships. But we do know about childhood relationships. There is the relationship with parents and other authority figures, sibling relationships, and friendships.

I would bet that for some of you, the longest relationships you have are with childhood friends. A friendship can be an eternal relationship. In fact, I believe that God

is preparing us for the kind of relationship that David had with Jonathon, a deep, intimate, everlasting, 24-carat relationship.

The relationships that last in our lives are based on friendship. We may leave our jobs and we may never see most of those coworkers again, but if we have developed a friendship, then it will last. We may have plenty of classmates growing up, but when school's over, we will only keep up with our friends. We may have married the person we will feel the most passionate about, but if we do not develop a friendship, then when the passion dies down, it won't last.

Some of you may be familiar with the online friend network Face book. Through Face book have I reconnected with dozens of long lost classmates and coworkers? In some cases we weren't really even friends, but some of them have become friends now. If you see someone's profile that you want to be part of your network you click "Friend Request." They will get a let message that they have been friend requested and they can either click on ignore or accept. It's really a powerful tool for maintaining friendships.

This is the amazing message of the Bible. God chooses us as his friends. He friend requests us. The bond of the friendship, that which holds us together, is our 24-carat savior, Jesus Christ. He is the face of God. And this Bible is God's face book. It's God's profile.

One of the wonderful songs we sang at Vacation Bible School still rings in my ear, "Who am I that you are mindful of me, that you hear me when I call. Is it true that you are thinking of me, how you love me. It's amazing! I am a friend of God...I am a friend of God. I am a friend of God. You call me friend!"

This is the good news, my friends! Through Christ God invites us to be friends. Christ is at the center of our relationship with God. He gives us a face. Because of God's extraordinary love for humanity, he sent his only begotten son that everyone who accepts his friendship may not perish but may have eternal life. Eternal life starts with a friendship with Jesus Christ. But it doesn't end there.

This new life, the one beginning to emerge in this age, leads us to make friends with our neighbors. It opens us up to relationship with others, deep, true, extraordinary, 24-carat friendship. And not just with one person, not even with just a few folks, but with all the children of God that we meet.

We find that through our relationship with Christ, our capacity for intimacy opens up in a powerful way. That fear of rejection, and being hurt begins to fall away. That worry of misunderstanding dissolves. That fear of commitment, of going all in, in relationship with each other begins to fade. Until someday we will be ready, or as ready as we can be for an everlasting life where the distance between you and me, and you and God becomes nill. The veil of our brokenness and sinfulness will be lifted and all that will be left is intimacy. True, deep, abiding, everlasting, 24-carat friendship.

Make friends. Start meeting your eternal Heaven-mates. It starts with a single friendship. God has friend requested you, though Jesus. Don't ignore it. Accept it.