

LECTURE 17

Strong in Battle . . . Sensitive in Compassion

For the most part you and I are very comfortable with our God. We've taken to heart the New Testament Scriptures that tell us we can charge boldly into the throne room of the Creator through prayer, call Him "Abba Father," receive forgiveness, acceptance, and grace. He is a God of love. But non-believers are quick to say, "How can a God of love do or allow ... (you fill in the blank)?"

Our pulpits today are so seeker-sensitive, so desirous to draw the crowds with invitations to casual dress, repetitious easy-to-learn choruses, and short services (so as not to inconvenience anyone) and the emphasis on an accepting atmosphere that – heaven forbid – we should be confronted and have sin, called sin. Seldom do we hear a call for repentance and the urgency of fiery preaching of hell and damnation for those who refuse the message of the gospel. The Good News far outweighs the Bad News in our churches today. Fear and awe and reverence for God Almighty is not the popular message of our day. But when we do hear it – the Holy Spirit stirs our soul because we are hearing the whole truth.

Yes, if truth be known, we like our comfortable God. That's why when we study the Old Testament we're often brought up short to see our God display His mighty power through His servants as He annihilates ungodly, idol worshipping pagans who burn their children as

a sacrificial gift to their gods, who practice sodomy, bestiality, and all sorts of loathsome behavior.

In God's sovereignty – and remember He doesn't owe us any explanation – He decreed these people to destruction because they violently and steadfastly impeded or opposed His work over a long period of time. They'd ignored the natural revelations of the true God and eventually their cup of iniquity was full in the Lord's sight.

Remember God's instruction to Israel as they entered the Promised Land? “Drive out all the inhabitants . . . they will be a snare to you.” Did they do that? No! Did they take all the land that God had promised to them? No! Coexistence became the norm.

David became King of Israel in 1025 B.C. He's fought with Saul's army and had his own successful military campaigns. In last week's lesson, ten years had passed. Chapter 7, verse 1 “After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him . . .” and then we had the story of the ark.

Rest from our enemies . . . I thought about that this week. There are a couple of different reactions to certain periods in life:

When life's in turmoil it ↪ either drives us to God (for help), or ↪ we're too busy coping with our distress to be serious about God.

When life is comparatively peaceful ↪ we don't “need” anything, so no need to bother God, or ↪ we're grateful to God and have the desire to do more – to be more involved.

Seldom does our enemy, Satan, give us Christians much rest. Especially as we try to increase our service to the Lord, he's on the attack again. So it's take up our armor of God and do battle once again.

In today's lesson David's been on the throne 15 years. You're already aware that David was fulfilling God's command to take what rightfully belonged to Israel by subduing the peoples of the land. The kingdom would be extended from 6,000 to 60,000 square miles. Let me summarize these battle verses from the paraphrased New Living Bible:

1 Samuel 8:1-18

¹After this, David subdued and humbled the Philistines by conquering Gath, their largest city.

²David also conquered the land of Moab. He made the people lie down on the ground in a row, and he measured them off in groups with a length of rope. He measured off two groups to be executed for every one group to be spared. The Moabites who were spared became David's servants and brought him tribute money.

³David also destroyed the forces of Had-a-de-zer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he marched out to strengthen his control along the Euphrates River.

⁴David captured seventeen hundred charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. Then he crippled all but one hundred of the chariot horses.

⁵When Ara-me-ans from Damascus arrived to help Had-a-de-zer, David killed twenty-two thousand of them.

⁶Then he placed several army garrisons in Damascus, the Ara-me-an capital, and the Ara-me-ans became David's subjects and brought him tribute money. So the LORD gave David victory wherever he went.

⁷David brought the gold shields of Had-a-de-zer's officers to

Jerusalem,

⁸along with a large amount of bronze from Had-a-de-zer's cities of Tebah and Ber-oth-a-i.

⁹When King Toi of Ha-math heard that David had destroyed the army of Had-a-de-zer,

¹⁰he sent his son Joram to congratulate David on his success. Had-a-de-zer and Toi had long been enemies, and there had been many wars between them. Joram presented David with many gifts of silver, gold, and bronze.

¹¹King David dedicated all these gifts to the LORD, along with the silver and gold he had set apart from the other nations he had subdued . . .

¹³So David became very famous. After his return he destroyed eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

¹⁴He placed army garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became David's subjects. This was another example of how the LORD made David victorious wherever he went.

¹⁵David reigned over all Israel and was fair to everyone.

¹⁶Joab . . . was commander of the army. Jehoshaphat . . . was the royal historian.

¹⁷Zadok . . . and A-him-e-lech . . . were the priests. Se-rai-ah was the court secretary.

¹⁸Be-nai-ah . . . was captain of the king's bodyguard. David's sons served as priestly leaders.¹

This then was the peak of conquest for David.

Let's find some relevant application from this week's lesson that will hopefully stick with us. I have a simple 3-point outline:

- 1) A righteous God decreed death for the sinful.
- 2) A merciful God displayed grace for the undeserving.
- 3) A powerful God delivered victory for the courageous.

First, a righteous God decreed death for the sinful. We need to remember these were enemies – both of Israel and of God – for the reasons we’ve already mentioned. Sometimes we lose sight of just how horrible sin is to a holy God and how righteous He is to bring judgment on sin. But just what is sin? Here are four thoughts:

- a. First, sin is missing the mark. It’s an archery term, but there’s more. It’s the inability to hit the target. When we are justified through the blood of Christ (put into a right relationship with God) it means that, “because I have kept on sinning and was unable to stop sinning (there’s inability), but simply believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, He has declared me righteous.” Sin means falling short of the righteousness of God and that means anyone less than perfect.
- b. Secondly, sin is overstepping the boundary and that translates into rebellion. Ever done that? We’ve already seen examples of that when we studied Eli’s sons.
- c. Third, sin is falling instead of standing. We are weak and give in to temptation. We fall to our own lusts and

desires, we're weak in our resolve and commitment. And what's more, we do it over and over again.

- d. Fourth, sin is diminishing that which should be rendered in full. God has commanded us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. But we are by nature cheats. We're always prone to short-changing God for our own pleasures.

A righteous God decreed death for the sinful. Sin is black, ugly, dirty rebellion that makes God sick!! It's a simple analogy, but we must accept the diagnosis and seek the remedy God prescribes. If you think you're not sick, you won't call the doctor. Are you sick??

... stick out your tongue – what condition is it in? Full of praise or criticism? Prayers of thanksgiving or full of gossip?

... listen to your heart – does it quicken to thoughts of selfish pursuits or does it beat with compassion and kindness?

... where are your aches and pains? – Do you suffer the symptoms of anger / jealousy / lying?

... how healthy are your eyes and ears? – What are you watching and listening to?

God's diagnosis is confession and repentance. For the Christian we are promised in 1 John 1:9 that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

For the unbeliever, however, the only answer is to come to Christ; to the

foot of the cross. At one time we've all had the feeling that Paul had as he declared himself to be the chief of sinners. But Ephesians 2:8-9 assures us, "for it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –not by works that no man can boast."

We need God's justification . . . His continuing work of sanctification. We deserve vengeance as He poured it out on the heathen nations who had afflicted His people in today's lesson. Psalm 7:15 says, "they fall into the pit they have made." We know we're sinners and one thing is sure, without ridding ourselves of sin, we will infect everyone around us. That was God's concern for His people and why He decreed death for the sinful.

Sin is the bad news – grace is the good news. That brings me to my second point . . . **a merciful God displayed grace for the undeserving.**

The story of Me-phen-ezer in 2 Samuel 9 is a high point in David's life. Having become undisputed king over all Israel, he took time to reflect on his early life, past days of testing, suffering and rejection. Then came the thought: "Is there anyone left alive of Saul's house I might show kindness to?"

The story of Me-phen-ezer has the classic application for the Christian. It's about grace – unmerited favor. David had experienced grace from God in the way he was chosen to be king, in the victories on

the battlefield, and now wanted to display that grace to another.

Mephibosheth was living in a place called Lo-debar. That means “no pasture land.” It was a place of barrenness . . . a wasteland. He wasn’t looking to be found. In fact, he was probably content in his an-on-nim-ity.

As Ziba, who had served in Saul’s palace in Gibeah, came before David we note that he didn’t mention Jonathan’s son by name, just that he was crippled in both feet. We can feel the fear as the call goes out to come before the king who had the power of life and death.

Alan Redpath in his book *The Making of a Man of God* says, “the condition which grace meets is that of being away, afraid and antagonistic. God always takes the initiative in bringing His blessing to a life. It is not you who take the first step; you are incapable of doing such a thing. It is God who makes overtures to you, it is God who by grace steps down to you where you are, who comes to meet you in your need.”

Donald Barnhouse in his commentary on Romans offers this thought: “Love that goes upward is worship; love that goes outward is affection; love that stoops is grace.”

The story is simple. Mephibosheth was given acceptance, possessions and position. Vs. 7 “Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your

grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.” In addition, the 15 sons and 20 servants of Ziba would work the land for Mephibosheth.

That’s an astounding story. Grace – unmerited favor. God has not only accepted us, He has adopted us as sons – we’re family. We possess promises that seem just too good to be true and have received the privileged position of being “in Christ.” Absolute security! A merciful God displayed grace for the undeserving.

My last point is: **a powerful God delivered victory for the courageous.** 2 Samuel 10 again summarized from the New Living Bible:

¹Some time after this, King Na-hash of the Ammonites died, and his son Han-un became king.

²David said, "I am going to show complete loyalty to Han-un because his father, Na-hash, was always completely loyal to me." So David sent ambassadors to express sympathy to Han-un about his father's death. But when David's ambassadors arrived in the land of Ammon,

³Han-un's advisers said to their master, "Do you really think these men are coming here to honor your father? No! David has sent them to spy out the city so that they can come in and conquer it!"

⁴So Han-un seized David's ambassadors and shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their robes at the buttocks, and sent them back to David in shame.

⁵When David heard what had happened, he sent messengers to tell the men to stay at Jericho until their beards grew out, for they were very embarrassed by their appearance.

⁶Now the people of Ammon realized how seriously they had angered David, so they hired twenty thousand Ara-me-an mercenaries from the lands of Beth-rehob and Zobah, one thousand from the king of Maacah, and twelve thousand from the land of Tob.

⁷When David heard about this, he sent Joab and the entire Israelite army to fight them.

⁸The Ammonite troops drew up their battle lines at the entrance of the city gates, while the . . .other men . . . positioned themselves to fight in the open fields.

⁹When Joab saw that he would have to fight on two fronts, he chose the best troops in his army. He placed them under his personal command and led them out to fight the Ara-me-ans in the fields.

¹⁰He left the rest of the army under the command of his brother Ab-i-sha-i, who was to attack the Ammonites.

¹¹"If the Ara-me-ans are too strong for me, then come over and help me," Joab told his brother. "And if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will come and help you.

¹²Be courageous! Let us fight bravely to save our people and the cities of our God. May the LORD's will be done."

¹³When Joab and his troops attacked, the Ara-me-ans began to run away.

¹⁴And when the Ammonites saw the Ara-me-ans running, they ran from Ab-i-sha-i and retreated into the city. After the battle was over, Joab returned to Jerusalem.

¹⁵The Ara-me-ans now realized that they were no match for Israel. So when they regrouped,

¹⁶they were joined by additional Ara-me-an troops summoned by Had-a-de-zer from the other side of the Euphrates River. These troops arrived at Hel-am under the command of Sho-bach, the commander of all Had-a--dezer's forces.

¹⁷When David heard what was happening, he mobilized all Israel, crossed the Jordan River, and led the army to Hel-am. The Ara-me-ans positioned themselves there in battle formation and then attacked David.

¹⁸But again the Ara-me-ans fled from the Israelites. This time David's forces killed seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen, including Sho-bach, the commander of their army.¹

¹⁹When Had-a-de-zer and his Ara-me-an allies realized they had been defeated by Israel, they surrendered to them and became their subjects. After that, the Ara-me-ans were afraid to help the Ammonites.

Victorious David could now return to palace life, and only occasionally venture out for battle.

2 Samuel 12:26-31.

²⁶Meanwhile, Joab and the Israelite army were successfully ending their siege of Rab-bah, the capital of Ammon.

²⁷Joab sent messengers to tell David, "I have fought against Rab-bah and captured its water supply.

²⁸Now bring the rest of the army and finish the job, so you will get credit for the victory instead of me."

²⁹So David led the rest of his army to Rab-bah and captured it.

³⁰David removed the crown from the king's head, and it was placed on David's own head. The crown was made of gold and set with gems, and it weighed about seventy-five pounds. David took a vast amount of plunder from the city.

³¹He also made slaves of the people of Rab-bah and forced them to labor with saws, picks, and axes, and to work in the brick kilns. That is how he dealt with the people of all the Ammonite cities. Then David and his army returned to Jerusalem.

Another example 2 Samuel 22:15-22.

¹⁵Once again the Philistines were at war with Israel. And when David and his men were in the thick of battle, David became weak and exhausted.

¹⁶Ish-bi-be-nob was a descendant of the giants ; his bronze spearhead weighed more than seven pounds, and he was armed with a new sword. He had cornered David and was about to kill him.

¹⁷But Ab-i-shai . . .came to his rescue and killed the Philistine. After that, David's men declared, "You are not going out to battle again! Why should we risk snuffing out the light of Israel?"

¹⁸After this, there was another battle against the Philistines at Gob. As they fought, Sib-bec-a-i from Hu-shah killed Saph, another descendant of the giants.

¹⁹In still another battle at Gob, El-han-an son of Jair from Bethlehem killed the brother of Goliath of Gath. The handle of his spear was as thick as a weaver's beam!

²⁰In another battle with the Philistines at Gath, a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot--a descendant of the giants--

²¹defied and taunted Israel. But he was killed by Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shim-e-a.

²²These four Philistines were descended from the giants of Gath, but they were killed by David and his warriors.

Ever wonder why David put five smooth stones into his sling in his battle with Goliath? No doubt these four giants, these descendants of Rapha, were kin to Goliath and may very well have been on the hillside as David faced off with Goliath. Five stones . . . five giants. I've even heard it said, "five stone because Goliath had four brothers."

At any rate, David had been sent back to Jerusalem to stay out of harm's way. Back to the palace . . . but (as we'll see next week), not out of danger.

David was the sort of man that Tim Hansel said "would go after Moby Dick with a row boat, a harpoon and a jar of tartar sauce."

Complete confidence in his God and his mission.

But there came a time when David's men said, "Go back to Jerusalem, we can fight the giants." From David's standpoint that could be hard to do. We all like to feel needed . . . to be on the front line. But he'd trained his men well. They were prepared to go into battle and face the giants. Now he had to let go.

Let's think for a moment about those who have prepared us to go out alone without them to face the giants in our own lives. Would you agree that these special people who influence our lives seem to have four characteristics?

First of all, they have the characteristic of consistency. They stay at their task with reliable regularity. There are many in this Bible Study that affect my life that way. It's wonderful to know I can rely on so many of you for support and encouragement as you go about the things you do for us week after week. David's men had to admire his consistent attitude of not harming God's anointed when he had so many opportunities in his encounters with Saul. And his consistent desire to do God's will.

Secondly, these people who impact our lives are authentic. How we appreciate and value integrity in those we look up to. David made mistakes, but his heart was authentic before God and that quality comes through in leadership or in discipling.

Third, there's the trait of unselfishness. Those that impact us the most watch out for themselves the least. They notice our needs and reach out to help, honestly concerned for our welfare.

There is a short book called "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein. It's a simple, fanciful piece about a tree that unselfishly loved a boy.

They played hide n' seek in his younger years. He swung from her branches, climbed all over her, ate her apples, slept in her shade; such happy carefree days. The tree loved those years of the boy's childhood.

But the boy grew and spent less and less time with the tree. On one occasion the young man returned. "Come on, let's play," invited the tree. But the lad was only interested in money. "Take my apples and sell them," said the tree. He did . . . and the tree was happy.

He didn't return for a long time, but the tree smiled when he passed by one day. "Come, play, my friend. Come, play." But the boy – now fully grown – wanted to build a house for himself. "Cut off my branches and build your house," she offered. He did . . . and once again, the tree was happy.

Years dragged by. The tree missed the boy. Suddenly she saw him in the distance. "Come on, let's play." But the man was older and tired of this world. He wanted to get away from it all. "Cut me down. Take my large trunk and make yourself a boat. Then you can sail away," said the tree. And that's exactly what he did . . . and the tree was happy.

Many seasons passed – summers and winters, windy days and lonely nights – and the tree waited. Finally, an old man returned . . . too tired to play, to pursue riches, to build houses or to sail the seas. “I have a pretty good stump left, my friend. Why don’t you just sit down here and rest?” He did and the tree was happy.

How many giving trees have there been in you life? Maybe it’s your spouse, your mother or father, a special friend. For my own life, I have a wonderful giving family and I also see many of you seated here in front of me who give so much – and I thank God for every one of you!

And last, but not least, the people who impact our lives are tireless. They refuse to quit. They have enthusiasm for their labors. They press on regardless of the odds. They encourage, encourage, encourage. Everyone in our lives is an example -- and we are that to others also. We need to be aware of how we impact another’s life and how wonderfully others minister to us. Let’s recognize consistency, authenticity, unselfishness and dedication.

David was a strong leader. We see him in today’s lesson using Joab in a position of authority. Strong leaders can accept past disappointments in performance and move on. We see a compassionate offering of sympathy at the death of Nahash only to have humiliation heaped upon his messengers. The Ammonites became a stench in David’s nostrils and he lost no time in conquering them through the

power of God. He was tender-hearted toward those who had been humiliated and allowed them time to re-grow their beards before returning to Jerusalem. He dedicated the plunder from his battles to the Lord. He was tired from the long battles, but wise enough to listen to the counsel of his men and return to Jerusalem.

We may not be fighting literal giants, but many of us are facing gigantic problems in our lives. We are better prepared than we think we are, not only because we have knowledge of God's Word and Satan's schemes, but we have encouragers behind us, prayer warriors, those who will still give of themselves to come to our aid. There's a time to let go – both for the leader and the follower. Being on your own is not being alone. I'll say that again, Being on your own is not being alone. Together we are the army of God! A powerful God delivers victory for the courageous.

Let's pray:

Thank you, Almighty God, through the power of your Word that you have reminded us of sin and the consequences it can bring – death and for the reminder of the free offer of grace. If anyone here is trying to work to gain your favor, help them understand the concept and reality of grace. Let us be thankful for strong leaders in our lives and most of all for the privilege of being your children. Give us courage and strength to do what we know we must do. We want to please you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.