

"DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN"

**I. Introduction**

- A. It is often the case that the greatest sports teams have some of that sport's greatest stars on them.
1. This was certainly true of last year's World Series champions, the Chicago Cubs.
  2. When you looked at their starting lineup, their rotation of starting pitchers, and their bullpen, it looked like the roster of an All-Star team.
  3. I am proud that my team, the Cleveland Indians, was able to hang in there with the Cubs until the tenth inning of game seven in the World Series.
  4. But the All-Stars prevailed, and now the Indians have replaced the Cubs as the team that has gone the most years without winning a championship.
- B. In the verses that we have just read, we see that David's kingdom was filled with a band of All-Star warriors, known as David's mighty men.
1. This passage mirrors the one back in chapter 21 that related various heroic deeds.
  2. This reflects the sandwich-like structure of the epilogue in chapters 21-24 of the books of Samuel.
  3. These chapters give us a summary picture of what David's kingdom was like.
  4. It is not surprising that a description of a great kingdom would make mention of the great warriors who fought for that kingdom.

5. But when we look closely at what these verses have to say, and when we consider them in their larger biblical context, we see that there is something very unique about this kingdom.
6. Even in this account that focuses so much on human greatness, the ultimate focus is still upon the great God who rules over this kingdom.

## II. Great Victories

- A. The first part of our text tells us about the three men who were at the top of the list of David's mighty men.
  1. These men were the elite of the elite, like Delta Force or SEAL Team Six.
  2. The writer emphasizes their military prowess by telling us about three instances in which each of them showed remarkable valor and won a great victory in the face of overwhelming odds.
  3. Josheb-basshebeth killed eight hundred men in a single battle.
  4. Eleazar fought against the Philistines with such vigor that his hand froze to his sword.
  5. And when the Philistines tried to attack Israel's food supply by destroying a field of lentils, Shammah stood his ground and defended that field even when the other soldiers had fled.
  6. These were valiant exploits.
  7. It doesn't take much imagination to see how each of these stories could be made into an exciting movie.
  8. When we hear about these sorts of feats, our hearts swell with admiration for those who accomplish them.
  9. These men were heroes.

- B. We like heroes.
1. There is nothing wrong with admiring people who do great things, but we do need to be careful that we do not make idols of such people.
  2. This can be a problem in some biographies, especially Christian biographies.
  3. Sometimes the biographer presents his subject in such a manner that the focus rests entirely on the person's greatness.
  4. The writer of Samuel does not do this in his description of David's mighty men.
  5. If you look at verses 10 and 12, you will see that the credit for these victories is given to the Lord.
  6. Two times we are told that "the LORD brought about a great victory".
  7. These victories were not due to human valor alone.
  8. They were brought about by the Lord.
  9. God granted these victories, working through the courage and skill that he gave to these men.
  10. We need to remember that all the glory goes to God, not to the instruments through whom he works.
- C. One thing to consider as we reflect upon the heroic deeds of these three men is the allure of the extraordinary.
1. There can be a danger in aspiring for greatness.
  2. If we focus on trying to do something great, we may be inclined to relegate the more mundane aspects of life to the periphery.

3. I appreciate how this point is made in a story told by the columnist George Will in his enjoyable book *Men at Work: The Craft of Baseball*.
4. Will writes, "There is a Jewish parable about Moshe, a humble shoemaker who, after dying, finds himself about to meet his Maker. He begins to utter self-deprecating laments and excuses for his failure to have made more of himself in life. Whereupon he is warned: 'When you are in His presence He will not ask you why you were not Moses or King David or one of the Prophets. He will ask you why you were not Moshe the shoemaker.'" [159]
5. We need to be careful that our zeal to do great things does not cause us to neglect the duties to which we are called in the station in which the Lord has placed us in life.
6. We need to remember that it is much more common for the Lord to accomplish his purposes through things that are ordinary than through things that are extraordinary.

### III. Great Devotion

- A. In the next part of our text, we see the great devotion that was displayed by three of David's other mighty men on one particular occasion.
  1. The Philistines had captured Bethlehem, the city of David's birth.
  2. David and his men were holed up in the cave of Adullam, which was twelve and a half miles away from Bethlehem.
  3. As David considered his next steps in this situation, he thought back to the days of his childhood and said, "Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!"
  4. He didn't really mean this.
  5. He wasn't saying this because he was dying of thirst.

6. It was just a passing thought, just a memory of pleasanter days.
  7. But unbeknownst to David, three of his men overheard him and decided to take his wish as their command.
  8. They fought their way into Bethlehem, drew some water from that well, and then fought their way back out, a twenty-five mile round trip.
- B. These men risked their lives to get David a drink of water.
1. They were utterly devoted to their king.
  2. His nostalgic wish was taken with the utmost seriousness by them.
  3. Imagine the praise and thanks that they expected to receive from David when they handed him that water.
  4. Imagine their shock when they saw David take it and pour it out on the ground.
- C. David was not being ungrateful in doing this.
1. On the contrary, he was honoring these men.
  2. He was saying that he was not worthy of such devotion.
  3. Other kings would have taken that water and drunk it.
  4. Other kings would have deemed themselves to be fitting recipients of such loyal and courageous love.
  5. But not David.
  6. He knew that this water was obtained at the cost of these men's blood.

7. They willingly risked their necks simply to do one little thing to please their king.
  8. David poured out that water as an act of worship.
  9. He was saying that the Lord alone is worthy of such loyalty and such sacrificial service.
- D. We should remember that our God deserves this degree of devotion from us.
1. In light of the mercies that he has extended to us in Christ, we are called to offer our whole bodies as living sacrifices to him.
  2. The example of the three men who risked their necks to get David some water reminds us that we are to be zealous to perform God's will even in its smallest parts.
  3. We should be eager to do everything that is pleasing to God, regardless of what it costs us.

#### IV. Great Renown

- A. This brings us to the last part of our passage, where the emphasis is upon the great renown of David's mighty men.
1. This point is emphasized by the repetition of the phrase "won a name" at two points in this section.
  2. The writer briefly tells us about an occasion when Abishai, the brother of Joab, fought bravely against three hundred men.
  3. Then we learn about several of the heroic exploits of a man named Benaiah.
  4. He struck down two "ariels" of Moab, a term that probably means "heroes."

5. He struck down a lion in a pit during the time of year when snow had fallen, a detail that indicates that this would have been an especially hungry lion.
  6. And he struck down an imposing Egyptian who was armed with a spear when the only weapon that Benaiah had was a staff.
- B. The passage then concludes with a list of the names of the other men who were counted among David's mighty men.
1. This is like an honor roll of David's greatest fighters.
  2. But we should remember that it was not merely the valor of these men that won them renown.
  3. It was the kingdom for which they fought that was the important thing.
  4. Other kingdoms have had great heroes too, but those heroes faded away with those kingdoms.
  5. This is not the case with those who fight the good fight as members of the kingdom of God.
  6. The cataloging of the names of David's mighty men assures us that God knows the names of those who are faithful to him.
  7. He will never forget our names.
  8. In the words of Matthew Henry, "all good soldiers of Jesus Christ have their names better preserved than even these worthies have; for they are written in heaven. This honor have all the saints." [Henry]
  9. Our Lord Jesus said as much in the book of Revelation when he assured the saints in Sardis that "The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life." (Rev. 3:5)

- C. The last thing that stands out about this honor roll of David's mighty men is the final name that appears on the list: Uriah the Hittite.
1. Uriah was loyal to David.
  2. He was so loyal that he refused to sleep with his own wife while his fellow soldiers were out on the field of battle, even though David had called him home and encouraged him to go be with his wife.
  3. David did that in an attempt to cover up his sin with Uriah's wife, and when that attempt failed he gave orders to have Uriah killed in battle.
  4. The mention of Uriah at the end of this list introduces a dissonant note into a passage that is otherwise so exuberant and inspiring.
  5. The writer did not do this by accident.
  6. He is reminding us that, no matter how great David's kingdom was, it was still grievously affected by the sin that dwells in every human heart.

## V. Conclusion

- A. The Bible does not put its human heroes up on a pedestal.
- B. It shows us their failures because it wants us to see the ruin that sin brings into our lives.
- C. As John Newton explains, "the histories of Aaron, David, Solomon, and Peter, are left on record to teach us what evil is latent in the hearts of the best men, and what they are capable of doing if left but a little to themselves." [*Letters of John Newton*, 111]
- D. It is only when we see this that we will begin to see ourselves for the wretched people that we really are.



- E. And it is only when that truth is fixed in our minds that we will cling to Jesus as the only one through whom we can find deliverance from this body of death.