

“David’s Mighty Men”
2 Samuel 23:8-39
(Preached at Trinity, March 22, 2020)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. These verses give record of David’s mighty men. They form the second half of the parallel chiasm. At the end of **Chapter 21** we read of David and four of these mighty men defeating great giants. Now we read the full record of this mighty band of warriors. They numbered 30. They were powerful and mighty, fearless and bold. Their names remind us that God is not unmindful of faithful acts of service and courageous acts of valor as we press towards the kingdom.
2. Those included in the list are interesting.
 - A. Two of these men were Uriah and Eliam, the father of Bathsheba—Uriah and Eliam – **Verses 34 & 39**. (which made David’s actions even more reprehensible).
 - B. We should also note that Joab is not mentioned in the list, reminding us that God is also not unmindful of those whose focus is more on selfish ambition than upon humble service.
 - C. These 30 men comprised David’s elite guard. They were absolutely faithful and loyal to David. They were mighty men of valor who would not hesitate to lay down their life in defense of David.
3. The mighty deeds of these men were amazing. Some doubt such stories of valor, but we see them as reminders of God’s mighty power.
 - A. God is able to raise up men and equip them in mighty ways. The text reminds us of the source of their might.

2 Samuel 23:10 NAU - "He arose and struck the Philistines until his hand was weary and clung to the sword, and the LORD brought about a great victory that day"

2 Sam 23:12 - "But he took his stand in the midst of the plot, defended it and struck the Philistines; and the LORD brought about a great victory."

Psalms 124:1-3 KJV - "If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say; ² If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: ³ Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:"
 - B. This was also the source of David’s power.

2 Samuel 5:10 NAU - "David became greater and greater, for the LORD God of hosts was with him."
 - C. It also displays God’s power in turn the hearts of people towards Christ.

Psalms 110:3 - "Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power"
 - D. We can see the power of David’s leadership skills to gather so many able men around himself who loved him and were willing to die for him. And we cannot dismiss the power of God who turned their hearts towards David in such a remarkable way.

5. These verses are divided into four sections:
 - Verses 8-12 – Three identified by name.
 - Verses 13-17 – Three described but left anonymous
 - Verses 18-23 – Two leaders designated
 - Verses 24-39 – The rest are listed
6. I believe their memories are spared as an encouragement to us as we engage our spiritual warfare and the endless battles in this life.

- I. **Verses 8-12** – Three are identified by name – often simply referred to as “The Three”
 - A. Their valiant deeds are recorded in perpetuity
 1. The chief: Josheb-basshebeth, also called Adino the Eznite personally killed 800 men in a single battle. This is the only account we have of the battle but it would have been impressive to observe.
 2. Eleazar is said to have fought the Philistines in a battle that presumably lasted many hours. The army of Israel was forced to retreat and Eleazar found himself alone, yet he stood firm and continued to fight. His hand became weary but refused to release his sword.
William Blaikie tells a similar story from the Battle of Waterloo: “A Highland sergeant at Waterloo had done such execution with his basket-handled sword, and so much blood had coagulated around his hand, that it had to be released by a blacksmith, so firmly were they glued together.”¹
 3. The third was Shammah, the son Agee who defended a plot of lentils from falling into the hands of the Philistines. While the rest of Israel fled from before the Philistines, Shammah stood his ground and struck down the Philistines.
 4. Each of these three mighty men stood firm against overwhelming odds. But they were not mere acts of human strength or human courage. God was standing on their behalf.
 - B. God’s people have always been expected to march forth with courage.
 1. When Joab led the army of Israel against the Arameans he charged them to be courageous.
2 Samuel 10:9-12 NAU - "Now when Joab saw that the battle was set against him in front and in the rear, he selected from all the choice men of Israel, and arrayed *them* against the Arameans. ¹⁰ But the remainder of the people he placed in the hand of Abishai his brother, and he arrayed *them* against the sons of Ammon. ¹¹ He said, "If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the sons of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will come to help you. ¹² "Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight."

¹ William Garden Blaikie, *Expository Lectures on the Book of 2 Samuel*. (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), page 346.

2. God charged Joshua as he led Israel into Canaan:
Joshua 1:5-7 NAU - "No man will *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. ⁶ "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go."
3. We are still commanded to march forth with courage and valor.
1 Corinthians 16:13 NAU - " Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong."
4. Sadly, our generation is marked by weakness, softness –
 The opposite of courage and strength
 - a. You can hear it when difficulty comes – complaints and whining. Everyone today expects life to be free from difficulty. More and more are expecting the government to provide.
 - b. 150 years ago they had no electricity, no AC, no TV Limited pain relievers, no antibiotics, no cars or airplanes, no telephones, no supermarkets – lots of hard work. Most worked 6 days a week resting on the Sabbath. No one expected an easy life
 - c. Our own church has changed. A bulletin from 1950 shows our evening worship service began at 7:30 pm which means they would have been past 9:00 ending the Sabbath's activities. At some point evening worship was changed to 6:15 and we've recently changed it to 5:30. Many modern churches have disposed of evening worship altogether.
4. Unfortunately, many Christians today have been influenced by our hedonistic society. We lust for pleasure – the good life. They see the church more as a playground than a place to equip for hard labor.
5. Christianity has never been described in this manner
 Matthew Henry writes: "Religion tends to make men, not cowardly, but truly valiant. The righteous is bold as a lion. The true Christian is the true hero."²
6. But while we are to stand forth with courage and valor, our strength is not our own.
2 Chronicles 20:14-15 NAU - "Then in the midst of the assembly the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, the Levite of the sons of Asaph; ¹⁵ and he said, "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's."

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 38.

- II. **Verses 13-17** – Three more described but left anonymous – they are referred to only as “The Three Mighty Men.” Or **Verse 13** – “three of the thirty chief men.”
- A. We find here unreserved loyalty and courage
1. We must not overlook that the three most mighty and courageous remain nameless. They are not nameless in the eyes of God.
 2. The context was yet another war with the Philistines, possibly in the days before David was king.
The garrison of Philistines were camped out at Bethlehem while David and his men were hiding in the cave of Adullam.
Three of David’s mighty men overheard David pondering out loud of his great desire to drink of the well of Bethlehem – **Verse 15**.
 3. David’s words were merely wishful thinking of earlier days. He was thinking of his hometown, perhaps remembering the simpler days of his youth. But his men took him seriously. Whether they took him literally or not, they wanted to express their love and loyalty to David. They entered into the stronghold of the Philistines and drew the water for David.
 4. David’s actions surprise us. We are prone to see it as a graceless act of ingratitude. He poured their sacrificial gift upon the ground.
 5. David’s action was not ingratitude. He was overwhelmed by their act of personal sacrifice. They were willing to shed their own blood for David. This water represented their blood and was far too valuable for him to drink. Instead, he poured it out as an offering to God.
2 Samuel 23:17 NAU - "Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this. *Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?*" Therefore he would not drink it."
 6. Rather than an insult, David’s action showed his men the immense value of their sacrifice.
- B. We must never fail to appreciate the selfless service of our brothers and sisters
1. Many times a brother or sister expends great energy and often sacrifice in their care of us.
 2. These selfless acts must not go unappreciated
- III. **Verses 18-23** – Two leaders designated
- A. Our attention is turned to two of David’s generals
1. Abishai, the brother of Joab. He is referred to as the chief of the thirty. We are told he killed three hundred with is spear. He was a man of courage, a man of action.
 - A. We first read of him when David entered the camp of Saul while he was sleeping.
1 Samuel 26:8 NAU - "Then Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time."
 - B. He also had certain words regarding Shimei who cursed David:
2 Samuel 16:9 NAU - "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head."

2. Benaiah – He was the son and grandson of valiant men. It shows us the value of Godly parents. He had been trained on the importance of bravery. We are told that when he was attacked by an Egyptian giant he disarmed him and killed him with his own spear.
David appointed him as captain over his bodyguards.
- B. Again, we find the importance of courage and valor
 1. We find one more important trait with these men.
Regarding Abishai we read, **V.19** "He was most honored of the thirty, therefore he became their commander; however, he did not attain to the three."
Regarding Benaiah: **V.23** - "He was honored among the thirty, but he did not attain to the three."
 2. They were not considered as mighty as “the three.” Yet, this did not affect their loyalty, faithfulness, or selfless service. Too often individuals will not serve unless they can have the place of preeminence. We should not dismiss the importance of humble service.
- C. Verses 24-39 – The rest are listed
 1. Like Abishai and Benaiah they didn’t need to have the place of preeminence. But each served their king faithfully.
It was a mixed group, from different tribes and different nations.
 2. Most we know nothing about except they are included in this list of faithful, loyal men. They were men of valor and men who would not turn back in battle.
 3. Asahel was said to be as swift-footed as a gazelle. He was killed by Abner soon after David became king. He lost his life because he refused to turn back from pursuing Abner.
2 Samuel 2:22-23 NAU - "Abner repeated again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?" ²³ However, he refused to turn aside"
 4. This must be our character. We must not turn aside until our battle is through.

Conclusion:

1. The year was 1941. The Nazi war-machine was sweeping across Europe. Winston Churchill had attended high school at Harrow and was asked to come speak to the boys. After a lengthy introduction Churchill rose to speak. His words were brief and to the point – they are words that had a lasting impact upon those boys and upon generations since.
“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense.”
2. These must be words kept in our heart as we continue to battle as good soldiers of Christ. Our tireless prayer must continue to be, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”