

Title: War again and again
Text: 2 Samuel 21.15-22
Theme: The reality of spiritual conflict
Series: 2 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: God ensures an amazing and surprising victory

The Bible is the most amazingly detailed historical document in the world. It is also the oldest. Our study of 1 and 2 Samuel is an insightful account that took place 3,000 years ago. Archeology continues to discover artifacts and sites that unsurprisingly coincide with these accounts. Those who want to dismiss the Bible as being a bunch of myths, legends and fabrications cannot do that on the basis of the historical evidence. There is simply too much. Here are some examples from the Bible Archaeology Report Organization as they relate just to David:

- 1) Ancient Slingshots – These simple weapons consisted of two straps that were attached to a wider pouch at the middle. Several were discovered completely intact in the tomb of Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamun (King Tut).
- 2) The Gath Ostrakon – Is a pottery sherd that was unearthed near the site of the Philistine city of Gath. This 2005 discovery was dated to the time of David and had inscribed on it, two names in Proto-Canaanite that are very similar to the name Goliath.
- 3) Hebron – Excavations at this ancient site of David’s first capital city have uncovered sections of the Middle Bronze II city wall. They also found 5 jar handles that were designated “to the king” that had the name of Hebron inscribed on them.
- 4) David’s wife and Absalom’s mother was from the ancient kingdom of Geshur. The massive stone gates of the capital city that date back to that time have been unearthed.
- 5) David’s Palace in Jerusalem has been found. This discovery 2005-2007 is rather new.
- 6) The famous Mesha Stele or Moabite Stone is made up of 57 fragments and they tell the story of Moab’s rebellion (2 Kings 3) and speaks of breaking from the control of the house of David.
- 7) The Tel Dan Stele was discovered in 1993 where archaeologists unearthed a fragment of a monument that celebrates a victory over the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom Judah and contains a reference to the House of David.

Now, how many people have looked at the evidence for the historicity of the Bible and then pleaded with God to forgive them for their unbelief, repented of their sin, and trusted in Christ? Probably no one. Genuine faith is not a matter of historical evidence. If that were the case, everyone would believe. The problem is not the evidence for the Bible, the problem is the message of the Bible. People don’t want to hear it. They just don’t want to surrender their lives to their Creator. But there are those who do. They are not the majority. They tend not to be the

famous and influential. The plan of God has for the most part been shouldered by ordinary people faithfully following God. There are times when in the ordinary events of a faith-driven life, God puts people into extraordinary circumstances where he demonstrates his power through others. Such is the case with our text. In this concluding section of 2 Samuel and the reign of David, we are given some summary accounts. This one tells us of some of the heroics that helped in part to shape David's reign.

Read Text:

1. **The fight never ends until glory.** (15-22)

Did you notice that in v.15, 18, 19 and 20 that the author uses the phrase, war again, or again war. It doesn't end, does it? Our battle is not against flesh and blood. But we are engaged in spiritual conflict and we should expect conflict and opposition. Do not let that surprise you. Do you remember 1 Peter 4.12? *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."* Trials and conflicts are the normal Christian life and this account in the OT is a preview of that.

The Philistines were not content to live in their land peacefully with Israel as their neighbor. They believe that they are better and stronger than Israel and therefore, Israel should serve them. In short, they hate the people of God. The people of Israel were never known for their intimidating stature, nor their overwhelming size. While the national anthem is being played by the band at the high school football field I look and compare the size of the players on the respective teams and the size of the teams. If one team appears to be on a diet of tofu and Brussel sprouts and the other ribs and potatoes, it is not hard to predict who is going to win, especially if the larger team physically is also much larger numerically. This was often the case with the Philistines and Israel. They were a military machine. They bred boys to be warriors and had a line of giants that they trained for battle. These were their rock stars and it wasn't hard to see why. These Gaston types inspired confidence.

By contrast, Israel was a nation that was known to be of smaller stature and size. God did not pick them as his people because they were powerful and impressive and told them so (Deut. 7.7). They were slaves. They were powerless. They were conquered. Their deliverance from Egypt was due only to the power of God. But God chose to love them (Deut. 7.8). He made a covenant with them that formed them as a people and he gave them a land to call their own. But they would have to defend it. The fact that they were chosen by God was a temptation to them to be arrogant. Whenever that happened, it would be the occasion for their downfall. And the fact that they were chosen by God was almost always the reason why other nations hated them. Antisemitism has been part of our world for thousands of years and will always be until Christ returns. Why do you think that is? The answer is simple: the doctrine of election. It arouses an enormous amount of resentment, and this was the case then with the Philistines hating and consistently attacking Israel, as it is today. Genuine believers are very resented and viewed as a threat, no matter how nice and charitable they may be. Your faith is always going to be under fire. You will never attain to a spiritual level of nirvana where you float over mere

mortals and gloat that you possess the keys to an amazing life where you are untouched by conflict, sickness, discouragement or sin. Nope. It is war again. And we are all in it, every day.

This is not a sign of weak faith or failure. It is a reflection of our reality. I think most of you are familiar with auto-immune diseases. This is a condition where your immune system mistakenly declares war on a part of you that is healthy. Your body is rebelling against itself. That is what sin has done to creation. Creation itself is at war with itself. We live with disease and death and that is not what God wanted for us. But, as believers, we live as rebels to the rebellion. We live as ones who have been redeemed and as a result, we march to the beat of a different drum than this world does. The more that we are like Christ, the more out of step we are. We are in this world but not of it.

A. We don't believe like this world.

Our core convictions are quite different. We do not believe that we evolved from something that evolved from whatever, that no one can explain. We believe that we were created by our Sovereign and personal Creator God. Therefore, we do not believe that we are the masters of our own lives and make up our own rules. We live under the Lordship of Christ and we love it. We are bought and paid for. We belong to our God. We are loved and known. We are his and he is ours. As a result,

B. We don't behave like this world.

We do not live with an underlying sense of dread and angst that constantly is looking for ways to drown out that voice by addictions and diversions. We follow a God who makes and keeps promises, who is righteous, just and merciful. Therefore, our lives are marked by a freedom to face reality, deal with difficulties, make and keep commitments, and have personal convictions that mark our lives as being moral, fair, generous and loving. We have joy, peace, contentment and rest. We don't have to have the newest, biggest, or have the last word. We don't have to win arguments and be the center of the world. Our King rose again from the dead and we are in Him. We're fine, we really are.

C. We don't talk like this world.

We can laugh the laugh of faith, but we don't laugh at and joke about sin because we know too well the devastation that it brings and the price Christ paid for our redemption. The fact that our language does not smell like a sewer, nor is marked by a constant drone of complaining is rooted in the simple fact that we trust in God.

But having different beliefs, values, behaviors and vocabularies is generally viewed as a threat. Without trying, the life of a consistent believer is a source of conviction and therefore is the target for ridicule. We simply do not belong to this world order, and for that we are considered to be a threat. It was Christians who started the public school system in this country. It is Christians who have been the heavy lifters of orphan care throughout the world. It is Christians

who have attempted to address hunger, poverty and have built hospitals and responded to tragedies. It is not just Christians, that is for sure, but for 2,000 years, this has been our calling card. It is tempting to think that if we just do enough good things like this, that the world will finally embrace our message. That is not what are told to expect. Do not think that this world will ever like us. What we do, we do in order to make Christ known. Not to get people to like us. Therefore, as a believer, living with the wind of the world in our face think of every stage of life as another stage of conflict (like a video game). We make it through level 10 of the life of faith in order to face the challenges of level 11. The wind of the world will always been in our face, but the breath of God is at our back. Meanwhile,

D. The strategy of the enemy is basically the same.

Ishbi-benob was a big dude. His spear could do some serious damage and he possessed a new sword that was forged by the famed blacksmiths of the Philistines. Facing an enemy who is bigger than you, whose weapons are more impressive than yours appear to be, who threatens you and taunts is all designed to destroy you with fear before the actual battle takes place. That has been Satan's tactics all along. But our enemy is on a leash.

In Christian's journey, as told in Pilgrim's Progress, Christian approaches the Porter's House, but the way that led to the house was narrow and Christian saw two lions that were on either side of the path. He thought that "nothing but death was before him. But the Porter at the Lodge, whose name is Watchful, perceiving that Christian made a halt, as if he would go back, cried unto him, ... 'Fear not the lions, for they are chained, and are placed there for trial of faith.'" Christian then, trembling with fear, proceeded and he heard the lions roar, but they did him no harm. Beloved, the fight never ends until glory, but then it will end, forever. Press on and we can because

2. We have a King who fights for his people. (15-16)

Superhero movies and epic tales like the Lord of the Rings capture our hearts with scenes of devotion over mere power. The bad guys have power, but the good guys have love and are willing to lay down their lives for others. We are drawn into these stories, like King Theoden leading the 6,000 riders of Rohirrim directly into the tens of thousands of orcs and dying for the rescue of Minas Tirith. Why did Tolkien envision it like that? Why are we so moved by that? Leaders like this challenge us to be better. They awaken us to a vision of living for a cause that is bigger than ourselves. But fundamentally, that's what a king is supposed to do. There is a phrase in our military that captures this. It says, "Leaders eat last." It comes from this biblical ideal that good leaders sacrifice themselves for the sake of their own, while most of the world has witnessed leaders sacrifice their own for their own benefits.

"David went down together with his servants." Here the king did not lead from behind. He, along with his servants "they" fought against the Philistines. He was in the battle. His soldiers could look to their right or left and see their king fighting in a sense with them, but in a greater sense, for them. This was their king. He was willing to die in order that they might live and live

in freedom and live without fear. In God's plan to send us a redeemer, he chose the nation of Israel to be the people through whom that redeemer would come and he chose the tribe of Judah and the line of David because there were many times when David displayed what a good king actually looked like. We long for leaders like this. I wish we had more examples of this.

In our country, we use this expression, "inside the beltway." The beltway refers to Interstate 495 that goes around Washington D.C. It seems that elected officials get to D.C. "inside the beltway" where they become intoxicated with their own prominence and forget to care well and represent well, their constituents back home. This is not a new problem. Jesus said that "*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them... But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.*" (Luke 22.25-26) By going with his men into battle, David went down together with his servants. He was willing to sacrifice his life and in so doing, he pointed ahead to the Son of David and the Son of Man, who, though he was God, would humble himself and become one of us, and not just one of us, but, as our king, he would choose to lay aside that splendor and become our servant. Jesus humbled himself and chose to die so that we could be forgiven and live with him, reflect him and enjoy him forever. Good kings are not common, and even good kings die. We have a king who died for us, who rose again for us, and whose reign will never end. We are blessed. We have a king who not only fights for his people, but secured a victory that can never be lost. We have to have a king like that because we face an enemy that we, on our own, cannot defeat.

David points to Christ. David certainly is not Christ. So, yes, he fought for his people but in this account, David was not as young and strong as he once was. And David grew weary. And Ishbi-benob thought he had a good chance to kill the famed king of Israel, and the text sounds as if, he may have. However, Abishai, David's nephew came to his aid and attacked the Philistine giant and killed him. After that scare, David's men swore to David that he could no longer go with them to battle. He did not need to prove anything anymore. So, on the one hand, David reminds us that we need a king who will fight for us, but he also reminds us that...

3. **We need to be a people who defend one another.** (17-22)

- Loyalty and love were driven by faith (lamp of Israel)
- These guys were better than the disciples were (initially)
- We love him because he loved us first
- We need him more than he needs us. (17)