

The Lord Brings Great Victory

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 00] to look at this evening. So let me pray, and then we'll get stuck into it. Father God, we thank you so much for your word, the Bible.

We thank you that you speak to us through it. And we pray, Lord, tonight that you'd open our hearts and our eyes to see, to hear, and to know you.

Pray that you'd transform us. And we pray that you'd help us to fixate our eyes upon Jesus. Help us to know what it means to live for you and to love you all our days with what we hear from the scriptures.

So we commit this time into your hands and pray for you sustained blessing upon us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Now, everyone loves stories. Stories captivate us, don't they?

And I think it's especially true when we look back at historical figures. I mean, especially when we think about people who've achieved great things. Just think about it. Mary Curie, her breakthrough in radiology.

[1 : 04] Rosa Parks, standing up to racism in the United States. The reformer, Martin Luther, standing up for the Bible as the authoritative word of God. William Wilberforce in his quest to abolish slavery.

More recently, we've got the ongoing stories of our military in protecting our country. The millions who've lost their lives just over the last hundred years in doing so. These stories, true stories, impact us and we rightly think highly of what they do and want to honour their efforts, their achievements, if you like.

But the reason we like to do that, it's kind of more than just what these people did, isn't it? Because it's the character of the individuals and their life, what they had to go through that strikes a chord with us.

The achievement and the character, they're not disconnected. They sort of come together. It's the self-sacrifice of a World War I soldier, the perseverance of Mary Curie, the courage of Rosa Parks that makes the achievement all the more impressive.

And I suppose it's because we intrinsically know that these character traits are good things. Self-sacrifice, perseverance, courage, they're good. That's why when kids are in school, they're educated about how Rosa Parks' actions triggered a whole movement against racism, we celebrate that it's tremendous.

[2 : 24] But at the same time we say, look how courageous she was. What a woman. What moral fibre. You want to be like her? She's an excellent role model. This passage is so relevant for our lives today because here we get something similar when we look at the acts and the character of these mighty men of God's King David.

But there's a significant difference with how the Bible talks about these types of things compared with how the world talks about character and achievement. This chapter is part of a summary section from chapters 21 to 24 of 2 Samuel.

And on first read, all the events within these sort of four chapters, including this one, they can seem slightly odd in their place, in a bit hodgepodge. It's not in chronological sequence with the rest of the book.

That's because these four chapters, they sort of serve and have a special function in the book. They serve as snapshots of David's kingdom, snapshots of the kingdom of God, how it runs and how it manifests itself.

And so these mighty men of David, their character, their achievements, and how the Lord is at work through them is a snapshot of the kingdom of God, how it runs, and how it manifests itself.

[3 : 36] And so whilst the Old Testament context is different to today, there are big things for us to think about, about the kingdom of God, how it runs, and how it manifests itself.

And so we're going to be looking at that in three points. The Lord brings great victory, the Lord brings great victory through his mighty people, and the Lord honors his mighty people.

But before we jump into the text itself, it's worth noting that sometimes we might look at sections of the Bible that are a little bit like this, lists and sort of brief descriptions of the event that might seem out of kilt with the rest.

And there's two ways that you can sort of deal with it. One is to look at each short incident or each character individually and elaborate on the significance of the inclusion of each event or the individual.

I mean, we could do a whole sermon on the fact that Uriah the Hittite is mentioned right at the end of the list. The man who David had killed after he cheated on his wife Bathsheba, you could make a great deal about that.

[4 : 41] And it's not to say that it is, it's very significant that he's included and that he's there. And that's maybe something you want to do, maybe in your own time, we can look at the characters individually.

But alternatively, which is what we're going to do, is look at the big ideas that tie the events and these characters together. What do they teach us about the kingdom of God, how it runs, and how it manifests itself?

And so, firstly, what we learn about the kingdom of God, how it runs and how it manifests itself, is this. The Lord brings great victory. The Lord brings great victory. Whilst the acts of these mighty men, they're very impressive, the strength of character is astounding.

And we think, what amazing blokes these guys must have been. And we'll have a little bit, a look at that a little bit later. It's worth sort of fronting from the off, it is the Lord who brings the great victory.

It is the Lord who brings the great victory. Just look with me, verse 10. Verse 10 it says, the Lord brought about a great victory that day. And verse 12, and the Lord brought about a great victory.

[5 : 54] The victory is brought by the Lord and belongs to the Lord. The Lord is victorious, he reigns and he rules, and it is he who brings a great victory.

And it acts as a little prod to us. If we're tempted to idolise these men, maybe when this book was written, if they were tempted to overly venerate these men, this is a prod.

As fantastic as these achievements are, it wouldn't have been possible without the Lord. He brought the victory. And there's nothing new here. We know that.

It's not new information. It's not new for David. The Lord worked great victory for him as well. You might remember when we looked earlier in the series, in chapter 8, verse 6, it reads, and the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went.

And chapter 8, verse 14, it says, and the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. It repeats that line. It's more than likely that David's men were involved in those victories mentions.

[6 : 56] David's victory was a gift from the Lord. He gave it. And here, the language is very similar. It is the Lord who brings the victory. The Lord brings victory, King, yes, through the mighty men, but the Lord takes precedence.

Without him, it would not happen. They are utterly dependent on the Lord to be victorious. This is what life in the kingdom of God is like, how it runs and how it manifests itself.

God's kingdom has always operated in this way and will always operate in this manner. The history, if you think about the, the history of God's kingdom, it is littered with victories, none more so than when Jesus was raised back to life.

The Lord brought victory over sin, the world, and the devil. When the church was established throughout the book of Acts, the Lord worked the victory. And think about it today.

When you became a Christian, it was the Lord who worked a great victory in your life. When we see brothers and sisters in Christ doing wonderful things for God, the honour is due to the Lord.

[8 : 01] The praise and thanks is his. He is the one working the great victory. This is what things are like in the kingdom of God. This is how it runs and how it manifests itself.

And so, we just need to be aware that we don't think we're the answer, that our efforts, although used by God, are the primary catalyst for spiritual success, that it's our skill that wins the day.

Rather, the victory belongs and is worked out by the Lord, our God. So, secondly, what else do we learn about the kingdom of God, how it runs and how it manifests itself?

It's this. The Lord works great victory through his mighty people. The Lord works great victory through his mighty people. I'm sure many of us may have been aware this weekend that it's the Glastonbury Festival.

And whatever we think about music festivals, we can't deny the vast amount of musical talent that there is. And we're very blessed here to have fantastic musicians to lead us in song praise every week.

[9 : 03] And if you think about a musician, let's take a pianist, for example. We all know the instrument a pianist plays is a piano, we all know that.

But a piano, it has to have certain features, certain characteristics that make it a piano. It has keys, it has strings in the back, it has pedals. That's what makes it a piano.

It's piano-like. If it doesn't have those things, it's not a piano. It has to have all the characteristics of a piano to be played by a pianist. So the melody or tune can be played.

Now we've already spoken about God's victory. And we could say the melody of God's kingdom is victory. He wins. But the instruments he uses to bring his great victory are his people.

But for him to work through them, they must have the characteristics and the features of his people. They must look like his people.

[10 : 04] They must have those characteristics and David's mighty men have got them. The melody of victory comes through his instruments. In Old Testament language we get this term mighty men.

New Testament language, these blogs, they're disciples, aren't they? They're disciples. The character of these men, it shouldn't be new because it's exactly what Jesus asks of us.

And so we're going to have a quick brief look at three things about these Old Testament disciples, if you like, these mighty men. The first thing is loyalty and perseverance.

Loyalty and perseverance. Verses 8 to 12, we get a special group of three. It's almost like the king's most inner sort of trusted group. You've got Joshua, Bathshebet, verse 8, we'll call him JB.

He kills 800 at one time. That requires perseverance, doesn't it? Must have been exhausting. And then both Eliezer, verse 9, and Shammah, in verse 11, what do they do?

[11 : 07] They stay fighting when all the other men of Israel, they run away. They run away. Shammah, he stands protecting the lentil fields when all the rest of the men have gone.

It's outstanding loyalty, outstanding perseverance to fight for their king when the ships are down. Fighting for your king requires perseverance. Fighting for your king requires loyalty.

As disciples today, we must persevere. We must be loyal. We might experience, maybe we have seen others giving up on faith in Christ and running away from it all.

Maybe there's even times when we've wanted to give up and thought, is this really worth it? If this is you and people maybe at work or in your family, they sort of think that there's something wrong with you for just being here because you have faith in Jesus, let me tell you, don't give up on Christ. Persevere, fight for him, be loyal because we'll hear and see his victorious melody come through us. Second thing, what we see about these men, these men, they love their king, don't they?

[12 : 20] They love their king. Verses 13 to 17, we get another group of three, they're working together, we don't actually hear their names at all. But what they do is equally as astonishing.

Just look with me in verse 15, David, in the middle of a battle, I'm guessing he's like tired, he sort of says this sort of passing remark. He says, oh, that someone would get me a drink from the well near the gate of Bethlehem.

But it doesn't, when you read that, it's not, I don't think it comes across like he's totally serious, like he expects it. But I don't think these three unnamed men, they don't seem to catch the tone with which David speaks, because they go and do it.

Break through the Philistine lines, get to the well near the gate of Bethlehem, and carry back a cup of water. David's astonished, and he won't drink it. He pulls it out before the Lord as an act of worship.

It's almost like he's saying, I'm not worthy of this type of sacrifice. How much must these mighty men absolutely love their king?

[13 : 31] How much? To go to such great lengths just to get him a glass of water behind enemy lines? I mean, it almost seems a little bit outrageous, a bit over the top, doesn't it?

They're driven purely by absolute devotion and love for David. It's sacrificial love. In action. Let's just ask ourselves, is over-the-top love for your king a bad thing?

Is over-the-top love for your king a bad thing? As disciples, we're called, aren't we, in the great commandment, love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength. Love him. Their actions, they do look totally over-topped, but that's wonderful. David knows it and he worships God because of it.

Have we ever been motivated just by sheer love for our king, just out of love for Jesus, to be over-the-top for him? There's all sorts of ways we could do that, and people do, don't they? [14:39] with our wallets, our time, our energy, giving up things, being totally over-the-top for Jesus, and it looks, it looks mad to the world.

Are we ready to go beyond what looks sensible and rational to the world just out of love for Jesus? Let's do that. We'll hear and see the Lord's victorious melody through us.

Okay, last one is courage. Courage. In verses 18 to 23, we get these two more blokes, Abishai and Benaiah. It says they do great deeds, they do great exploits, they take great risks.

I mean, we take Benaiah for example, verse 20, described as a valiant fighter. That means he's bold, he's courageous. I mean, he takes on a lion and another man with his bare hands.

And in one sense, I suppose, they just copy their king. They emulate him. Just remember, if you remember David's life, David fights Goliath when he was a boy and kills a lion.

[15:47] We read about that in 1 Samuel 17 in the same chapter. His men, they copy their king. They take risks for him. Great things, great victories happen. It's the same for us, isn't it, as disciples?

We're to emulate our king. There's no more courageous man than Jesus Christ, and yet we're to emulate him. Mark 8, what does Jesus say? Take up your cross and follow me.

Christ has a lot of courage to do that, taking up your cross, sacrificing our own desires. It takes courage. It takes courage to fight against sin that you've loved for years.

It takes courage to get rid of that for Christ. It takes courage to pray, to talk to our friends about Christ, to talk to our friends about Jesus. It takes courage.

It might mean sacrificing our reputation. It might mean looking foolish for Jesus. These are the instruments the Lord uses to bring great victory.

[16:48] And I'd go as far as say, if we're not disciple-like, the Lord's melody of victory, it'll still be heard, but he'll just use someone else who does persevere, who does love him, and who is courageous.

What might Jesus do through us as a church? What might he do through you? There is no end to how Jesus can use us to bring about a great victory.

No end to reach Glasgow, to reach Scotland, and actually for world mission to reach globally, to reach people for Christ. There is no end to how you can be used by the Lord to play out his victorious melody.

But we need to be disciple-like. Persevere, love your king, be courageous. Third point, the Lord honours his mighty men.

The Lord honours his mighty men. One obvious way that people are honoured in our shores is in the Queen's New Year's honours list, isn't it?

[17:55] And don't get me wrong, if we were to go through that list every year, there's some who think, yes, totally deserve the acclaim, but the others who you're not so sure about, it's always a bit of a mixed bag.

But what I always find remarkable are the people who get honoured, who never sought the limelight. The nurses, the care workers, the pillars of the community, never doing it for themselves, never expecting to be recognised by the Queen.

Anyway, from verses 24 to the end, we get this big, long list of names. David's mighty men who served their king, and the majority of them will never know exactly what they did on the battlefield, will never know how they fought for their king.

But we know because they're included that they did fight for him, and they must have been impressive in how they did it. And we do get the impression, when we think about the examples we've just spoken about of the efforts that come before, that they didn't do it for their own name to be made famous.

They fought for David and were all for him. They were loyal, persevered, demonstrated sacrificial love and courage, not for themselves but for the kingdom. It's actually just more than an impression, is it?

[19 : 12] Because they demonstrate a principle that Jesus states, you know, when Jesus, he states it in the Gospels, there's this consistent sort of line that says, the last shall be first, and the first last.

last. These blokes, they're willing to be last to lose their lives and their very names are remembered and included in God's inspired word in the scriptures.

This list we get at the end, it's like a roll call of honour. The last shall be first and the first last. This is what we learn about the kingdom of God, how it runs and how it manifests itself.

If you think of John the Baptist, he demonstrated the same attitude. Remember John the Baptist in John 3, he's talking about, when talking about Jesus, he, he, he says, he, that's Jesus, must become greater and I must become less.

And yet, of John the Baptist, Jesus says, among those born of women there is no one greater than John. John is bestowed with honour from Jesus, but he himself was ready to become less, to become last, so that the glory was given to Christ.

[20 : 22] And I just wonder, we all love to be praised. Even those things we do that go unseen, we would love to be praised for them, patted on the back.

I know in my heart I find this deeply challenging, because I sometimes think, how do I want to be known by others? And in my worst moments, it's so that people do pat me on the back and praise me.

And I just thought, I'm just going to share a personal story. I shared this with a few people this week. Last week, I was at my granddad's funeral, and when I carried him in the church, it felt heavy, and there was lots of grief, sorrow, lots of tears.

But when I carried him out of the church, it was totally different. I was filled with praise, and it felt an honour to carry such a godly man of faith. But with that going around my head this week, my granddad's life that honoured Christ, and looking at this passage, thinking about these lives that honour their king, and in return, receive honour from God, it did make me think, and has done all week, what do I want my life to be about?

Because now we're talking about these mighty men, their earthly life has finished, but they're remembered, honoured, for how they served their king. Their names are in the scriptures. I'd love people to say, not just about me, but about us, and about this church, wouldn't we love people to say, man, do they love Jesus at that church.

[21 : 47] They really love their king. They're not self-seeking or after anything, they just love Jesus, they'd do anything for him. They're so loyal.

They live out lives that demonstrate that. Isn't that what we want our lives to be about? That our lives wouldn't be about us, but would shine a light onto our God, our king, to be serving our king like these men served David.

That's where real honour comes from. That's where real honour comes from. And so, as we finish off this evening, what have we learned about the kingdom of God?

How it runs and how it manifests itself? Firstly, we thought, didn't we, we thought about it's the Lord who works, who brings the victory. He reigns, he rules, he's in charge, and all the victory belongs and comes from him.

We can't think that it's down to us. But then we thought about the character of these mighty men, these Old Testament disciples, their courageous discipleship, serving their king, which the Lord uses to bring about his victorious melody.

[23 : 01] And how might we be instruments for the Lord? How might Jesus use us? And then we finish by thinking about the honour the Lord gives to his people, but those who humble themselves to serve their king, willing to finish last, will receive great honour.

Wouldn't it be great to know those people like that? Wouldn't that be a great thing? Our names won't get a mention in the scriptures. In 200 years from now, who's going to remember what we did on earth?

Unless we're the next Rosa Parks or Marie Curie, the next Billy Graham or Charles Spurgeon, nobody will remember who we are. But our names will be written down. Revelation 21 tells us that they'll be written down in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Let me pray. Living God, we praise you for your goodness to us.

And we thank you, Lord God, that you have the victory, that it belongs to you. We thank you for your kingdom and we thank you that you use your people.

[24 : 12] We thank you that you use us. And we ask, Lord God, that you make us disciples. Lord, we pray that you give us perseverance, help us to be loyal.

Help us to be over the top for you, just out of love. Help us to be courageous and to take risks. And so we thank you and we pray that we'd be willing to be last, Lord.

we thank you that you do honour your people. We thank you for these mighty men and the way they served you. So we just commit our lives into your hands. We pray for our hearts to be changed and that you might do great things through your church.

We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen.