

2 Samuel 8, Great David is not great enough

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Date: 16 June 2024

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[0:00] So let's read God's word together, 2 Samuel chapter 8 on page 311. In the course of time, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them. And he took Methag Amah from the control of the Philistines.

David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death and the third length was allowed to live. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought him tribute.

Moreover, David defeated Hadadezer, son of Rahob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his monument at the river Euphrates. David captured a thousand of his chariots, 7,000 charioteers and 20,000 foot soldiers.

He hamstringed all but a hundred of the chariot horses. When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer, king of Zobah, David struck down 22,000 of them.

He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.

[1:10] David took the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. From Tiber and Berethi, towns that belonged to Hadadezer, king David took a great quantity of bronze.

When Tau, king of Hamath, heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, he sent his son Joram to king David to greet him and congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer, who had been at war with Tau.

Joram brought with him articles of silver, of gold and of bronze. King David dedicated these articles to the Lord as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued, Edom and Moab, the Ammonites and the Philistines and Amalek.

He also dedicated the plunder taken from Hadadezer, son of Rahob, king of Zobah. And David became famous after he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

He put garrisons throughout Edom and all the Edomites became subject to David. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.

[2:16] David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people. Joab, son of Zariah, was over the army. Jehoshaphat, the son of Haliad, was recorder.

Zadok, son of Hittub and Ahimelech, son of Abathah, were priests. Zariah was secretary. Benaiah, son of Jehoshaphat, was over the Kerathites and the Pelathites.

And David's sons were priests. Well, keep that passage open in front of you and we're going to try and work our way through it together. But if I can, before we look at it in detail, I want to try and persuade you from 2 Samuel chapter 8 this morning, that even if you had everything that you wanted in life, even if everything had worked out for you just as you wanted it to, I want to try and persuade you this morning from 2 Samuel chapter 8 that that would still not be enough.

Not be enough for you. Not because I'm suggesting that you're greedy or not easily self-satisfied.

That might be true, but that's not my point. My point is that there is a destructive force inside each of us, which without resolution will ruin whatever success we have.

Now, as ever, the Bible's conviction, God's conviction, is the best way for you to learn that truth, this truth that even if we had whatever it was that we wanted, it would not be enough for us because there's a destructive force inside of us which will destroy it.

[3:43] The Bible's conviction is the best way to teach you that lesson is not just by a propositional statement. Now, you open the Bible and it doesn't say, you know, you read it and it goes, you will destroy yourself if you have everything that you want and you don't resolve this problem.

It doesn't say that, does it? The Bible's way of teaching us these things is by telling us stories, true stories, to persuade us of these truths. It wants us to see this in reality and thinks that's the best way for us to learn it.

It's to witness it in the story of someone else's life. And that's what's going on here in 2 Samuel chapter 8. So 2 Samuel 8, to come to it now, we get an overview of the early years of David's reign. If you remember in previous chapters, Saul has been killed, David has been made king, he's moved to Jerusalem, he has united the kingdom and he is ruling over it under these astonishing promises of God, which we got in chapter 7.

And then comes chapter 8, really in a sense as a summary of all the early years of King David. It starts with the words, in the course of time. And actually the chapter itself covers a number of years. [4 : 48] It's an overview of what follows. It took years and years to unfold, especially given some of the distances involved. Now amongst all the difficult names and places in the reading, what you might have spotted was that the writer's favourite word here is defeated.

David defeated the Philistines, he defeated Moab, he defeated Hadadezer, whose name comes several times. It's such a big deal in fact that he gets mentioned by someone else as well. Someone else comes to David because he's so excited that Hadadezer has been defeated. The other favourite word is subdued. David subdued the nations around him. The Lord gave him victory wherever he went and he defeated them.

So let me just show you these three big things from the story. Notice that everywhere is conquered. Everywhere is conquered. If you plot the places that David calls out on a map, you notice that he wins on every point of the compass.

The Philistines in the east, Moab in the west, Zobor in the north, Edom in the south. Literally, the idea is that David is winning on every front. Every border is secured.

[5 : 51] David is making the place secure. The next theme is that everyone is conquered. The Philistines in verse 1 have been the famous enemy of God's people up until this point.

And after this, they don't really feature that much. Instead, in verse 18, we find the Philistines called the Kerethites and the Pelethites, who are now employed as mercenaries to protect the king. The thought, I think, is that mercenary soldiers who fight for money make good bodyguards for the king because they have no interest in overthrowing him. Moab is a longstanding enemy too, and David defeats them.

He lays them out on the ground, if you remember that from the reading. He lays them out on the ground and he kills two-thirds of them, but displays mercy to a third, which sounds brutal to us. But the point in the reading is that actually David is being merciful here by not killing all of them.

And that would have been a surprise to the original listeners. Likewise, we said King Hadadezer had obviously been a big deal, hadn't he? If you look at verse 3, he was going up the river Euphrates to restore his monument, some kind of ceremonial power display.

[6 : 54] He was rich and well-armed with horses and chariots and with gold shields in his commander's hands in verse 7. But David did what no one else had managed to do, which is defeat him.

He killed his soldiers, he took his cities and his money. Such big news is the defeat of King Hadadezer that Tao, king of Hamath, sends his son Joram to give David silver, gold and bronze in verse 10.

Presumably, Tao is so pleased to have Hadadezer off his back, but also is conscious that David might turn on him as well, so he paid him off. The Edomites are the last group to be mentioned in verses 13 and 14.

These guys too had been long-standing enemies of God's people, but David defeated them and left soldiers there to run the place and collect taxes. The writer summarises it, doesn't he, twice in verse 6 and at the end of verse 14 with the phrase, and the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. Everyone is conquered. Finally, though, everything is organised. I think it would be easy to pass over verses 15 to 18 at the end of the chapter, but it's important, isn't it? David is not only winning everywhere and everyone, he's also getting everything sorted.

[8 : 06] He's leading in a clear way. That's the point in verses 15 to 18 where David administers justice and equity, fairness for all his people.

He appoints recorders, literally, I think the word there is rememberers, people who would remember the events that had happened and remind people of them, and he appoints priests and secretaries

too with the aim of teaching the people and organising the nation.

Beniah, who is one of David's hard men, we're told elsewhere, he'd killed a lion in a pit in the snow. He runs the squads of hired soldiers that were mentioned earlier, and David's sons are priests, probably in a sort of supporting role, because they are not Levites.

Guys, there are plenty of seats over here. Come grab a seat, it's all right. No, no, no, don't worry. Don't worry, you haven't missed anything. There you go.

So David is winning everywhere, everyone and everything. David is literally triumphing everywhere. Now, you're meant to hear that and go, wow, David is an amazing king.

[9 : 16] David is as successful as a king could ever be. In the world of kings, David is a winner. He is winning every battle, accumulating millions and millions of pounds worth of gold, silver and bronze.

And he's thoughtful too. He gives his money towards the future building of the temple. He gives his people justice and fairness. There is not a better time to be an Israelite than to live in chapter 8 of 2 Samuel.

These are the glory days for David. Now, we find it difficult to relate to the story, don't we? David is very much a man of his time, lining up people on the ground and killing two thirds of them is not the way that we roll today.

At least I hope not. And the truth is, I think you and I should be grateful that we don't live in the brutal world of David. It is generally speaking easier to be alive here and now than it was there and then.

But the point as we read it is that not we get all twisted up about the morality of it. Was David right or wrong to do this? Well, the point is to see that God is at work here in the history of this Bronze Age, Iron Age battle.

[10 : 21] In this kingdom, in this world of kill or be killed, God is still at work. Not to kind of pin his stamp of approval on the methods of war, but rather to bring about his eternal purposes, purposes which he promised in chapter 7.

Now, that means that what we're to see here is David smashes through all these other kings and wins victories like this. This is really the sort of 1000 BC version of winning at life.

Winning at life. This is like being the most popular kid at school. This is like smashing your GCSE results, killing it on the basketball court. This is like walking home with a group of devoted friends. It is perhaps like having the job that you always wanted, the home that you've always dreamed of, the family life that you've been praying for and working for, the health that you long for. It is having a successful business or being the best driving instructor in the city or being a respected doctor or the best TA in the school.

It is working from home, but actually getting the job done and the washing and the cleaning and going for coffee with your friends all on the same day. It is the church equivalent of having a renovated building, a full bank account, a highly motivated and extremely capable membership.

[11 : 33] It is being in time and on point as a music group. Because here in chapter eight, David is the winner. He's winning at life. David would be on the cover of Time magazine in the top Times Rich List.

He's as generous as Bill Gates. He's as powerful as Jess Bezos. He's as ripped as Anthony Joshua. He's as organized as Martin money-saving expert. David is the winner because the Lord gives him victory wherever he went.

Everywhere, everyone, everything. Now, in a way, that's the end of chapter eight and we could leave it there. God gives David victory everywhere, everyone, everything.

But there is a big surprise in 2 Samuel chapter eight. In the sort of big sweep of 2 Samuel, here is the big shock of 2 Samuel chapter eight in the sweep of the book.

It's this. Look how short it is. It's only 18 verses in the whole book. You know, if this is the fulfillment of the promises of God in chapter seven, if this is the glorious life, if this is David winning, if this is the high point of the kingdom, if these are the glory days, why are they so short?

[12 : 42] Why does the writer of 2 Samuel leave this behind so quickly to spend so much time telling us next everything that goes wrong? Because you'll see in 2 Samuel that you find David committing murder and adultery.

You'll find one of his sons raping one of his daughters, followed by more murder, even a coup. See, if you stand back from the story and think about it in a moment, you know, imagine if 2 Samuel was

the story of your life, right?

Imagine the writer was writing the account of your life and he came to show you what he'd come up with. Have a look, have a read of your story. I've written it down for you. Come and have a look at what I've written.

And there's like a brief mention of how you got great GCSE and A-level results. There's a short line about a university career. There's a little bit about how you managed to afford your dream home and get your dream car and five children.

You know, there's a picture of you, you know, dripping in gold and having your photo taken and all that sort of stuff. But then there are 12 chapters on your weakness, a really detailed expose of your lifelong battle with lust in all its private shamefulfulness.

[13:52] Then there are the gory details of family conflict, which you tried really hard to keep behind closed doors. There are chapters and chapters on that. What do you say to the writer? What do you say?

Hang on a minute. Could you spend a little bit more time on my success? Yes. Well, you'd conclude, wouldn't you, that the writer thought something of you. That the writer thought this person, for all the great things that happened in their life, this person is not the Messiah.

They're not the Messiah. And that's what the writer of 2 Samuel is telling you about David. For all the great things in David's life, for all the ways that he won at life in chapter eight, the main point here is, listen, David's not the Messiah.

He's not the Messiah. See, the surprising thought in chapter eight is that David is building a kingdom with a sword. Yeah? That's what you used to build kingdoms in those days. You might not use that today.

You might use politics or economics or technology, but he used a sword. That's what he had. And he builds a kingdom with a sword. And chapter eight is the best kind of kingdom that you can build with a sword, where you win everywhere, where you're blessed by God, but it's all that you can do.

[15:04] You notice that? It's all that you can do because it's followed by 12 chapters of utter chaos and carnage. Listen up, this is what's really going on. It's vital that we see this together this morning.

What we need to see is that the sword of David, for all its power, cannot defeat the great enemy that David faces at every turn. The great enemy that David faces at every turn turns out not to be the Philistines, not even Hadadeus' thousand charioteers.

The enemy that David faces at every turn is his sin. That's what he faces. In other words, there is inside of David a destructive force that is so strong that it doesn't matter whether he has everything he's ever dreamed of, everything that human strength can achieve.

Still, the sin which is internal to him and not external from him will in the end destroy what he's made. So much so that in David's life story, his success with the sword is a footnote to the carnage of his internal failings.

And I want to suggest to you this morning that if that's true for David, it's true for you and me as well. And we feel it, don't we? We live in a period of extraordinary technological success, don't we?

[16:25] We live in an age where people actually don't need to die of hunger anymore, where we can move around the globe in search of freedom and work. We live in a time where we can get an education, where we can communicate with the world, where you can have the answer to any question just by typing it into a little square thing on the palm of your hand.

And yet still, despite all of that, we still struggle with selfishness, lust, greed, anger. And it means we live in a world full of cynicism and brutality, where no one is sure what's true anymore, and where war and wickedness spoil all the things that we achieve.

You see, for all of our success, we have found, haven't we, that there is no app to out-tech sin, is there? We can't out-science sin. There's no cure for it.

Do you notice, within a few months, we had a vaccine for COVID, but it turns out that all the other things that were going on in the background during the COVID pandemic, we weren't able to vaccinate against at all, were we?

Even personally, for all our learning, we can't seem to educate ourselves out of wrong thinking or unkind actions. We can't rip out unwanted thoughts or selfish desire.

[17:44] Even if we are winning at life, defeat to our sin is only ever around the corner. So that in the very story of our lives, the chapter eight of our lives is always only very, very short because that's all a sword can do.

This is where we started this morning, isn't it? It doesn't matter if you have everything you ever wanted. It doesn't matter if you're living the chapter eight of your life this morning. It doesn't matter if all of your dreams about jobs, homes, children, and retirement are coming true.

You need to understand that there is a force inside of you that is so destructive. You know in your honest moments, it will ruin everything that you have. And that is your sin.

And if that's not dealt with, it doesn't matter what you have. Now, don't get muddled here. Maybe some of you are asking the question, wait a minute, Steve, is David a Christian here? Is David in the right here?

Of course he is, right? The Lord is giving him victory. He's generously providing for the building of the temple and ruling in a way which displays a surprising justice and mercy. Besides, David showed us last week, didn't he, what it looks like to have saving faith in the promises of God.

[18:53] That's not the point. The point is whether you're a believer in the Lord Jesus or you're not. Whether you've been a Christian for 50 years or you're a hard-nosed atheist this morning, the truth that you need to understand, and it is plain before all of us, is that a sword is never enough.

It's never enough. Even if God gives you the sword, a great job is never enough, even if God gives it to you. A great ministry is not enough, even if God gives it to you. That's what we've got to see.

Because the truth is we need something bigger and stronger than just a sword. Let me try and illustrate it just to kind of plant it in our minds. Imagine someone gives you a bicycle, okay?

They give you a bicycle, but the problem is there's a broken chain on the bicycle, right? And so it doesn't matter. You pedal and you just go nowhere because the chain has snapped on this bicycle. So it doesn't matter the fact that you love the bicycle, you think the bicycle's really cool, you put a new bell on the bicycle, you kind of bling it up, you paint it black because that kind of looks stealthy and cool. And so you think, oh, this is a great looking bike.

[19:57] It's got great suspension on it. You put some new handlebars on it so that you're riding your bike like Nick Arcus, he rides bikes with handlebars really wide like that. So it looks really cool, right? So it looks amazing, this bike.

But the point is, it will always be disappointing to try and ride it, won't it? Because the chain is snapped. Unless you address that, the bicycle will always, always let you down.

It doesn't matter how good it looks. And in a sense, that's 2 Samuel chapter eight. You can smash Hadadezer in battle. You can win in the north, the south, the east and the west. But if you do nothing about the sin in your heart, it will all very quickly unravel because the truth is David and you and I need more than a sword.

If we're going to realize the great promises of God in 2 Samuel chapter seven, if we're going to have a kingdom that lasts, we're going to need something stronger than a sword. What is it? What's stronger than, what can build a kingdom stronger than a kingdom that you can build with a sword? Let me tell you, Jesus' cross. That's what's stronger than a sword. So you just think about it. Do a compare and contrast through 2 Samuel chapter eight with me. Let's have a think about what David's sword builds in 2 Samuel eight.

[21:04] And let's have a think about what the cross of Jesus Christ builds. You know, David's sword defeats enemies on every side, doesn't it? It secures the borders. It establishes the nation. It's amazing. Jesus' cross defeats all spiritual enemies.

Indwelling sin, the devil and his lies, death and hell are smashed at the cross. As on the cross, Jesus takes on himself the sins of his people, sheds his own blood to take the penalty our sin deserves and robs the devil of his captivating power over our lives and frees us from the sentence of hell.

Works in us by his spirit to transform us from one degree of glory to another so that little by little, step by step, we are becoming the people the cross has made us to be. Yet David's sword wins over enemies.

The cross of Jesus Christ defeats all enemies, including our sin. David's sword secures the finances to build the most impressive temple ever seen, the finest building that has ever been built in history.

Jesus' cross builds a temple with people. People washed clean of sin, robed in white, beautifully prepared. The great reality that the temple David funded was pointing to so that when Jesus returns in victory, we don't get whisked off to heaven for a bodiless existence for the rest of eternity, but rather through the victory of the cross, we spend eternity in the sacred presence of the God who made us, remade by his power and his glory for all eternity.

[22 : 35] David's sword brought justice and equity to his people. That's great, isn't it? What a great kingdom to live in like that. Jesus' cross brings grace and mercy to his people so that incredibly, we're not treated as our sins deserve, but shown kindness and mercy and grace, not cheap mercy, but mercy and grace that costs Jesus dearly as he hangs in our place on the cross, delivering justice for sin, but mercy to sinners, that we might be forgiven and fitted for the kingdom he's preparing for his people.

Now, this is the point. As exciting as it would have been to live in 2 Samuel chapter eight in the kingdom that David's sword built or whatever the 2024 equivalent of that kind of kingdom is, living in what is built by the cross is always better.

It's always better. It's better for now and it's better eternally because it doesn't matter if you're winning at life. What you really need is not the victory of the sword, but the victory of the cross. That's what you need. So let me just finish with three sort of thoughts on how we might apply this to ourselves this morning. First one is this. Don't get too excited by victories.

Don't get too excited by victories. I think 2 Samuel eight is a solitary lesson, isn't it? Not to get too carried away when things are going well and we seem to be winning at life. The truth is that new job that you might have got is only ever a new job.

[23 : 56] That new home that you long for is only a new home. The new qualification is only just a qualification. The successful grandchild is only a successful grandchild.

The holiday is only a holiday. The comfortable cruise is only a comfortable cruise. The clear test results at the hospital is only a clear test result for now. Now that's not to rob the joy of any of those things.

Actually, the best way to enjoy the good things in this life is to see that they're temporary and to see that they're short. That's the best way to enjoy the good things that we're given, to enjoy them as temporary gifts that they are on our way to glory.

So don't get too carried away or too excited by victories. Secondly, don't get too despondent at failures. The truth is that all of what we build will come crashing down. I know a number of you in this room have retired from your careers or whatever it was that you did before.

And the sort of sound truth is that as you retire, you watch somebody else ruin what you spent years building. Maybe your kids are about to leave home or have just left home or are leaving home.

[25 : 03] Well, they'll undo all the lessons that you taught them. They'll no longer fold their clothes neatly in the drawer. They'll just shove them in there, won't they? There'll come a time when you'll not be able to remember your A-level results.

You won't remember the names of the people who were on your course at university. Or it might be even more tragic than that. You might never be winning in life. You might lose the job. You might lose your health. You might fail your exams. But don't despair because the truth is Christ by the cross is building something both deeper in its victory and longer lasting in its success.

And he's inviting us to join it. Come to this unshakable kingdom. That leaves us, I think, with this last thought, which is the main thought, isn't it? That if our successes will not be enough for us, then we are silly to live for them.

Because really what we need is to live for the kingdom that's to come. Live for the kingdom that's to come. That chapter that we looked at, or that verse that we looked at with the children earlier in the book of Hebrews, compares living in the Old Testament age to living in the New Testament age. He says in the Old Testament age, what you did is you came to a copy of the realities. Not the realities themselves. You came to a copy of the temple. A copy of God's presence. And you came by the blood of animals that could never really take away your sin.

[26 : 18] And he says that was a scary thing to do. It's a scary thing to go to the temple in the Old Testament, right? Because you knew your sin and you knew you didn't deserve to be there. Now in the New Testament, he says, you don't come to the copy.

You come to the reality. What is real? You come to the real presence of God. To the real temple of his presence. And you come not by the blood of animals, but by the blood of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that you can come right into the very presence of God. And you come into an unshakable kingdom. The realities themselves. And yet we still need to come with awe and with fear.

Because God still is a consuming fire. But he says you need to understand that all of this is very shaky. All of this is very solid. And so live your life looking to and trusting in the solid realities of what Christ has done.

Let me read that verse to you again from Hebrews chapter 12. Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We're not building it. Yeah, we're not building it with our successes or our technology.

[27 : 22] We're receiving it from God by grace through the Lord Jesus Christ and the victory of his cross. And since we are receiving it, let us be thankful. See, what's the point in living for the shaky kingdom of this world?

When we can live for the unshakable kingdom of Christ. And how do we do that? Well, we're marked with thankfulness. Thank you, Lord, that you're giving me something that will never pass away.

Thank you, Lord, that I have the opportunity to live this short life for something that means something. Thank you, Lord. And in reverence and awe. Lord, I don't do this flippantly.

I don't come to you trusting in my own righteousness or goodness. I don't come pretending that actually what I've got in the Lord Jesus is something that doesn't really matter. I come in reverence and awe of you because you still are a consuming fire.

Well, let's pray as we close that God might help us to live like that for his praise and glory. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, how we pray now that you might help us to live for your praise and glory.

[28 : 33] Forgive us, Lord, that so often our time and our energies and our thoughts are tied up in getting wins in this short world.

And not in thankfulness for what you have done for us in the Lord Jesus. Thank you that the cross of Christ is more powerful than the sword of David. All of the victories of our own lives.

Thank you that Christ's cross is building something that lasts forever. And that we get to be part of that through faith in him. So we pray, please, that you might be at work in us to grow our trust and our confidence in Christ.

In his name we pray. Amen.