

Facing Two Fronts

Text: II Samuel 10:12: “Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good.”

We have two heroes in our story: Joab, David’s General of the Army and Abishai, one of David’s mighty men who later saved David’s life when attacked by the giant Ishbibenob. As we read of David’s brothers, we don’t see an incredible admiration of David’s brothers toward their younger sibling, especially as voiced by

David’s oldest brother in I Samuel 17:28: “And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab’s anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.” If you remember when Samuel, the prophet came to anoint the once and future king, the first son Jesse set before Samuel was Eliab. Immediately, I Samuel 16:7 records, “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” I’m not sure Eliab ever got over being passed up by his younger and less physically endowed brother David. There seems to be one sibling that saw what God saw in the heart of David and that was David’s sister, Zeruah. You will not find three men more dedicated to David than her three sons. The Bible says in II Samuel 2:18 and 19, “And there were three sons of Zeruah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe. And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner.” The house of Saul had fallen and Saul’s General of the Army, Abner was on the run and the pursuing nephew of David, Asahel, outran him. Asahel would not give up, although it cost him his life. There seems to be this undying loyalty (and sometimes to a fault) of the sons of Zeruah to family. In revenge, Joab took the life of Abner for taking his brother, Asahel’s life.

Of these three famous nephews of King David, two remained: Joab and Abishai. David sent a group of men on a mission of mercy to the new king, Hanun after the death of the king of the children of Ammon. The suspicious king added insult to injury by public disgrace to these ambassadors of good will, which resulted in war. The Ammonites, recognizing they were in trouble, hired the Syrians to come help them fight the Israelites. Enter our heroes: Joab and Abishai.

On one front were the Syrians and on the opposite front were the Ammonites. Sandwiched between were Joab and Abishai. II Samuel 10:9-11: “When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians: And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon. And he

said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee.” It was at this time the greatest command that Joab ever gave was given: “Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good” (II Samuel 10:12). The Syrians fled before Joab and the Ammonites fled before Abishai. Then the way was clear for David to lead the troops into the final battle that broke up the confederacy of the Syrians and the Ammonites.

The turning point came in the tenacious attitude of Joab. I believe we can find great admonition in this greatest command that Joab ever gave. Let’s break it down.

I. ACT BRAVELY BY FAITH.

“Be of good courage, and let us play the men...” (II Samuel 10:12a).

The follow up statement after the clear command to be courageous is, “play the men.” In C. S. Lewis’ book, *Mere Christianity* in the chapter, “Let’s Pretend,” we find these words, “What is the good of pretending to be what you are not? Well, even on the human level, you know, there are two kinds of pretending. There is a bad kind, where the pretence is there instead of the real thing; as when a man pretends he is going to help you instead of really helping you. But there is also a good kind, where the pretence leads up to the real thing. When you are not feeling particularly friendly but know you ought to be, the best thing you can do, very often, is to put on a friendly manner and behave as if you were a nicer person than you actually are. And in a few minutes, as we have all noticed, you will be really feeling friendlier than you were. Very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already. That is why children’s games are so important. They are always pretending to be grownups—playing soldiers, playing shop. But all the time, they are hardening their muscles and sharpening their wits so that the pretence of being grown-up helps them to grow up in earnest.”

I dare say the words of Joab were on the mind of Hugh Latimer when he was being burned at the stake in England with his fellow minister of the Word of God, Nicholas Ridley. Tied in tandem, just before they were burned at the stake for the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ and this wonderful faith once delivered, Latimer said to his friend, “Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.”

Being brave is acting on faith what you know you should do, with or without the accompanying feelings of good fortune. Hebrews 11:8: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

II. UNDERSTAND WHAT IS AT STAKE.

“...For our people, and for the cities of our God...” (II Samuel 10:12b).

One of the great motivations of fighting for what is right, is not only understanding that you are in the right, but understanding what will be lost if you

do not win. In those days when a country defeated another country, the culture, the customs and the faith is transferred from the victors to the vanquished. In this case, had the heathen defeated David and Israel, idolatry and immorality would have reigned. Even in modern history when atheistic communism takes over a culture they fail ecumenically and socially. Even in America as prayer and Bible reading was removed from the public school, our culture has taken a nosedive morally. More than ever, we need to fear God, pray the price and lift up the standard of holiness for our people and this land that the Pilgrims kneeled down at Plymouth Rock to bless.

III. LEAVE THE RESULTS UP TO GOD.

“...And the LORD do that which seemeth him good” (II Samuel 10:12c).

Like Joab and Abishai, we are facing two fronts. One front is our lack of dedication and the other is that we take for granted things will remain the same without our being proactive in our faith.

One of my favorite Bible characters is Eleazar, another one of David's mighty men. II Samuel 23:10 says, “He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil.” We, too, need to hold to the “Sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17) in these last days before the return of the Lord. We need to own the faith and hold it dear, recalling the words of our Lord in Luke 18:8b, “...Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” I Corinthians 13:13: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” Have faith, have hope and love fervently. I Peter 1:22: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”

There is a sad turn of events that takes place after the great victory in which our two heroes initiated. The beginning verse of the next chapter states, “And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem” (II Samuel 11:1). David was not proactive. The chapter ends with these words, “...But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (II Samuel 11:27c). The immoral and evil deeds done by David did great harm. The prophet Nathan told David, “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die” (II Samuel 12:14).

When Joab and Abishai did right, the results were victorious. When David did wrong, the results were catastrophic. The Word of God is full of these two lessons.

-Pastor Pope-