

## **Servants of the King**

2Samuel 10:1-19

### *When I first started as a pastor I did a lot of funerals.*

In the first year and a half I did somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty.

Only one or two were for people who regularly attended, the rest were for people who had some kind of loose connection from the past, but had not darkened the door in many years.

On occasion the fact that people didn't know me and I didn't know them led to some interesting moments.

Most of those funerals took place over at the funeral home and I have always made a habit of arriving at the home about 30 minutes before the service begins.

I do that in case there are any last minute changes and it puts the funeral director at ease to know the minister is in the building so they can go over things and be confident the service will start on time.

### *Being there early often means I am hanging around at the back of the room for a few minutes.*

In that first year I was a bit younger, I always wore a suit to funerals, I was not a family member, and after meeting with the funeral director I would be standing at the back of the room.

I can totally see how someone who had never met me would confuse me with a staff member at the funeral home.

One time as I was waiting for the service to begin someone comes up to me and says, "Hey, get some more chairs setup over there we are almost out!" He then turned on his heel and walked away.

I'll tell you my sinful heart was generating all kinds of responses.

My first thought was, "Get your own chairs dude, I don't even work here."

But very quickly my heart was convicted.

I knew the right thing to do was to humble myself, be a servant and go get the chairs which I did.

### *No one noticed, that guy never came back to say thank you, and in the grand scheme of things that whole event didn't amount to anything, but I am thankful for the reminder of the importance of having the attitude of a servant.*

Jesus said, "...whoever would be great among you must be your servant,<sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (Mk. 10:43-44 ESV)

If you belong to Jesus this morning, if you have any love for Him in your heart today, then you must see yourself as a servant.

Christians are servants of the greatest King Who lives and reigns over all things forever.

[What does that look like? Our text this morning in **2Samuel 10:1-19** has some lessons for us about being servants of the King. In these verses King David sends some of his servants on a mission and what happens sets off a chain of events that shows us some of what it meant for those men to have David as their master. Their experience has a good deal in common with what our experience of being servants of Christ can be like and so there are some incredibly valuable lessons for us here. How amazing would it be to hear from Jesus those amazing words, “Well done good and faithful servant” when we meet Him? If we want that then we need what these verses have for us today. Lesson one is this....]

### **Point #1 – Servants are called to represent their king. (Verses 1-2)**

When a king sends his people out for a task they are to act on his behalf under his authority.

#### Verses 1-2 set the scene for us.

The Ammonites are cousins to the Israelites through Abraham’s nephew Lot, but the relationship between them has a history of being rocky at times.

They had likely been enemies more often than friends but David and Nahash had been on good terms.

The phrase “deal loyally” translates the Hebrew word we see multiple times in chapter 9, it is the word ‘hesed’.

It means ‘covenant faithfulness’. It is an expression of love based on a solemn promise.

The commentators that I read on this passage believe that Nahash showed this ‘loyalty’ to David when he was running for his life from King Saul perhaps giving him help or shelter in a time of need.

When Nahash dies David wants to show this same kind of ‘kindness/loyalty’ to Hanun whose name ironically means ‘gracious’.

For reasons not stated in the text David does not go to the new king personally, but sends his servants to offer his condolences.

We are told at the end of the verse two that the servants go to ‘the land of the Ammonites’.

They go to do the task for which they were sent. To ‘console’ the new king ‘concerning his father’. They act as David’s representatives.

That is what a servant is supposed to do.

[I have had the privilege of working with some good companies over the years. One thing I've noticed about good companies is that their owners want their employees to do the job a certain way so as to ensure the best possible job on a consistent basis. They get that their employees are representing the company and they want them to act like they would if they were there.]

This is how we ought to see ourselves as Christians, as servants of King Jesus.

The message that we have in the gospel is His message and we are called to deliver it, not change it.

As His servants we are called to do all that we can to reflect His goodness and faithfulness to the world.

Is that how we see ourselves as we live day to day?

I wonder how much of our day would change if we consistently thought of ourselves as representing the LORD.

I suspect we would choose our words more carefully and our tone of voice might be different.

I suspect our priorities would change. I suspect we might care more about people and less about things.

[Now I know that is a task that is beyond us. I know that we fail on a daily basis and that anything good that comes out of a desire to serve the LORD is all because of His grace. We are without question imperfect servants but we are nevertheless servants. Do we see ourselves that way? If we do, then we will be better prepared to hear this second lesson from our text. This is a difficult one but it is one that Jesus talked about a fair bit and something that we see time and again in the history of the church. The lesson is that...]

### **Point #2 – Servants sometimes suffer humiliation for their king. (Verses 3-4)**

Those who reject or oppose a king will often show that in the way they treat the king's servants.

*David's servants come to the new king of the Ammonites, likely to the capital city, and bring the king's message of kindness and condolences to Hanun, and their message is received in unbelief. (Verse 3)*

It is not at all surprising that the 'princes'/chief advisors to the king would respond this way.

Even though the Ammonites had descended from Lot, they did not embrace Abraham's faith, but instead they put their trust in false gods.

So the conflict between the two nations through the years is about more than land and resources it is about two opposing worldviews.

They have no reason to trust David's word because they do not know the covenant keeping God of Israel.

They are also well aware of David's recent military victories and are likely thinking why wouldn't he continue on to conquer us as well.

Hanun is convinced by their argument and does this in **verse 4.**

*Instead of merely sending them away, the servants of David are utterly humiliated.*

Most commentators think their beards are shaved vertically which creates an interesting picture.

Carl Keil suggests that in that culture the beard was thought of as a 'man's greatest ornament.'

By shaving half everyone is able to clearly see what has been lost and that they had no power to stop it.

He goes further though and cuts off their clothes at the belt line and 'sends them away.'

Can you imagine being paraded in front of a city like that and then having to walk for days to get back home?

Even if they had money to buy some new clothes, they were in enemy territory with no one to help them.

This is a journey of utter humiliation and the reason they have to walk it is because they are King David's servants.

[Have you ever heard the term "Don't shoot the messenger"? I'm guessing the reason why that is a saying is because a lot of messengers got shot over the years. That is because when people reject the master they will reject the servant too.]

Jesus told us to expect that as His followers.

Think of the message He has given His servants to deliver.

It is a message of God's kindness to the world. A message of being reconciled to God because Jesus died for the sake of sinners.

It is message of God's kindness and yet many want nothing to do with it.

Christians through the centuries have been mocked, ridiculed, and persecuted in all kinds of ways.

Jesus said, “If the world hates you keep in mind that it hated me first.”

[The default nature of human beings is to hate God and His rule and that often gets translated into hating His servants. The gospels record for us in multiple places Jesus talking about how hard it is to be His disciple and one of the challenges to being a Christian can be enduring humiliation. Of course that raises the question, “Is there anything good about being a servant of the LORD?” Why should we be willing to endure humiliation for His sake? The next three lessons from our text all have something to say about that. How David treat his humiliated servants here shows us something important. It shows us that...]

### **Point #3 – A good king comforts his servants. (Verse 5)**

Good kings care when their faithful subjects are treated poorly for their sake.

#### Let’s look together at how David responds to his servants in *verse 5*.

The fact that David has to ‘send to meet them’ means that they did not return to him in Jerusalem.

How could they appear in the royal court with half a beard and with half of their clothes?

It is totally understandable that they were as it says here ‘greatly ashamed.’

It is important to see here that there is nothing in the text that would indicate that David is ashamed of his servants, but he is empathetic towards their own feeling of humiliation.

It is hard to discern whether these servants were already at Jericho or David has sent them there.

Either way it is telling that they end up there.

#### It was close to the Jordan River so they are safe inside the borders of Israel.

The city had yet to be rebuilt so its population was likely fairly small.

If we put those two things together it is reasonable to conclude that this place is chosen because they are safe inside the borders of Israel, but are also somewhat protected from having their shame on display before a whole bunch of people.

While their clothes could have been fixed fairly quickly, their beards would take time and I believe the picture here is that of David protecting them, showing them compassion, covering over their shame, so that they can be welcomed back into his court with their humiliation removed.

[Have you ever been publically humiliated? I can think of a couple of occasions in school where that happened. Do you know what makes a big difference in times like that? A good

friend who still wants to eat lunch with you. Someone to come alongside of you and give you some hope that the embarrassment is only temporary.]

That is what David is doing for his servants here and I am convinced that is what Jesus does for us.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, “*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.<sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

Whatever must be endured for King Jesus, it is worth it because the cost is temporary and the treasure is eternal.

[Jesus is the best of Kings and He comforts His people in all things. Our great hope as believers is not that we will be strong enough, smart enough, successful enough, or faithful enough to endure every trial that comes our way. Our hope as Christians is that Almighty God keeps His people for the sake of His Son Jesus through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. That leads us into the next lesson from our text. The situation doesn't end here with the shaving of beards and cutting of clothes. When king Hanun does that to David's servants he is not only humiliating these servants he is also making himself David's enemy and what we see next shows us that...]

#### **Point #4 – When a king has enemies his servants need courage. (Verses 6-14)**

The level of trust a subject has in his/her king is most clearly displayed when there is trouble that needs to be faced.

*Having mistreated those sent according to David's kindness this is what the Ammonites do according to verse 6.*

They presume that David is going to attack them because of what happened.

It's clear that Hanun did not think through his actions very carefully because it says here he had to hire the 'Syrians' to help.

David started this whole interaction with kindness and his kindness is met with aggression.

According to verse 7 it is not until the Ammonites gather an army of Syrians that David responds with the military.

From David's perspective it is logical to conclude that they are going to attack and he wisely takes the opportunity to keep the battle outside of Israel which is the best way to keep his people safe.

He sends Joab with the army and the ‘mighty men’ to deal with those who made themselves enemies of God’s people.

Verses 7-10 describe the scene.

The Ammonites setup their battle line at the gate of their city and the Syrians setup their forces in ‘open country’ and when Joab arrives with Israel’s army they end up being caught in the middle between the two armies.

I’m not a military expert, but that seems like a bad situation for Israel’s army.

He quickly divides his forces between himself and his brother Abishai and says this in **verses 11-12.**

The thought of surrender in the face of the enemies of God’s people doesn’t cross Joab’s mind.

Instead he finds courage by entrusting his life and the lives of his soldiers to the LORD.

[There are so many examples of this in church history. Think of Peter standing before the Sanhedrin saying, “We must obey God rather than men.” Or Paul getting flogged, stoned, shipwrecked, and imprisoned and still preaching the gospel. A woman name Perpetua who faced the beasts in a Roman arena with her fellow Christians. A man like William Tyndale who gave up his life to translate the bible rather than yield to those who wanted to keep God’s word from people.]

It is easy to surrender, but it takes courage to stand against the enemies of the King.

I’m sorry to say that the enemies of the cross of Christ are great in number today.

I’m happy to report that God is still on His throne and the Holy Spirit is still strengthening the spines of His people.

[The courage of Joab, Abishai, the mighty men, and the whole army is rewarded with victory according to verses 13-14. The Syrians flee and the Ammonites retreat into their city. In what I believe is an act of grace Joab, rather than destroying the Ammonites, returns to Jerusalem. You might think that would make these enemies of Israel rethink what they are doing. It doesn’t and that shows us one more lesson. A lesson that I believe is critically important for us as believers living in a world which seems increasingly hostile to the LORD. The lesson we need to know is that...]

**Point #5 – Though enemies persist for a time God’s King will prevail. (Verses 15-19)**

The enemies of the kingdom of heaven will continue until the time of Christ’s coming, but the final victory will belong to the LORD.

Verses 15-16 here are fascinating, listen.

The response to being defeated by the Israelites is to double down and go again.

We saw Hadadezer back in chapter eight. His name is made up of two words, one being Hadad which is the name of a false god, and the other being 'ezer' which means help or helper.

He was a powerful and influential king, likely the greatest of the all the Syrian rulers and he is coming to help.

He brought people from far and wide and he brought his greatest general Shobach whose name means 'expansion'.

They come to a place called Helam which means 'stronghold' and all of this together gives the impression that they are bringing all the strength they have to fight against the Israelites.

This is David's response in **verses 17-19**.

This time David goes to the battlefield personally.

Again it says that the 'Syrians fled before Israel.'

Shobach the great general is defeated and mortally wounded.

Hadadezer is no help at all and so the Syrians relent and become subject to Israel.

This is a clear and decisive victory for the king of God's choosing.

The enemies of Israel becoming subject to David points us to a greater King and a greater victory.

You may recall the occasion in Matthew 16 where Jesus asks His disciples the question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter speaks up and says, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God."

Christ is a title meaning 'anointed one'. It was the title given to the One God has chosen to sit on David's throne forever.

When Peter calls Jesus 'the Christ' he is saying that Jesus is the King of God's choosing.

Jesus responds to Peter by blessing him for his correct response and says, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

For years I thought of that verse upside down.

I thought of it as the church being assaulted by the forces of hell and not being overtaken by them.



Someone pointed out to me that gates don't move. Jesus is actually saying that He will attack the kingdom of darkness and it will not be able to withstand His assault.

Listen, Satan and all the forces of evil in the spiritual realm are not going to surrender.

They will persist, but King Jesus will prevail!

You might ask, "How do you know Jesus will win? It doesn't really look like that at the moment."

We know He will win because He has already won. He defeated the power of sin and death, by dying in our place and by rising from the dead on the third day.

By comparison the battle that is left to fight is no big deal.

*The only question we have left to answer is whose side are we on?*

Will we be servants of the King or not?

If servants then let's keep in mind that we are called to represent Him in this world.

Let's not be surprised or overly discouraged if we have to endure some humiliation for His sake.

Any cost that must be paid is worth it because He is a good King able to comfort His people.

Let us pray for courage because we will surely need it at times and finally let us remember that Jesus wins!

Because that is true we can say with great confidence that there is no better king to serve than King Jesus.