

Extraordinary People

2Samuel 23:8-39

I can't say that I am much for award shows, but I know enough to know there are a lot of them.

For fun I googled, "How many award shows are there?"

Google's answer was, "There's no single number for "award shows," as there are countless awards across various categories and industries."

When google doesn't have the answer it has to be a lot.

There are award shows for actors, movies, athletes, and musicians.

Millions of dollars gets put into telling people how fantastic they are.

It's not my thing, but I have watched the occasional one over the years.

The last time I watched some of the Oscars, Billy Crystal was hosting and to be honest I thought he was the most entertaining part of the show.

Back in those days things were a little less political and the actors and actresses talked more about movies and acting then they did about the latest agenda item that we should all be offended at.

One thing that stood out to me in the acceptance speeches back in those days was that they most often began with the words 'I want to thank...'

They would thank the people that voted for them, the movie directors/producers, the studio, maybe a husband or wife, mom or dad, maybe a teacher(s), or someone else important to them.

I'm not sure if it is still that way, but I do know that anyone who achieves anything in this world has someone to thank.

People who say, "Nobody ever gave me anything, I worked all by myself and achieved all these great things" have blinded themselves to reality.

It is good to work hard, it is good to strive for excellence, and it can be good to accomplish great things, but we should never do those things apart from giving thanks to others.

[Our text for this morning reminds me of that. The main focus of the book of 2Samuel has been on a man named David. He was the man God chose to sit on Israel's throne for about forty years. Over those years he had seen great success and great trial. He had seen the LORD's blessing and the LORD's discipline and through all the ups and downs he remained king. One of the reasons he stayed on the throne all those years was because of the extraordinary people that God has placed around him. In our passage this morning **2Samuel 23:8-39** the writer gives us a list of these mighty men. If David were giving a speech and he was going to thank some people who made his time on the throne possible these guys would surely be included. What the scripture says about these men shows us some valuable lessons about people empowered by the LORD to do exceptional things. The first lesson that is plain from this passage is that...]

Point #1 – Truly extraordinary people are revealed in trying times. (Verses 8-12)

In times where God's people face great peril He often raises up exceptional servants for the good of those He loves.

In verses 8-12 we are introduced to three men. These were the greatest warriors in the nation of Israel at the time, maybe ever.

The first is described in **verse 8**.

Josheb-basshebeth means 'dwelling in rest', he is called the 'chief of the three' which may indicate he was the commander of the three or the greatest among the three or both.

The only thing we are told about him is that he fought against 800 men at one time and prevailed.

It is easy to see how he can 'dwell in rest' when he can take on 800 enemies and win.

If you are thinking to yourself, "that is impossible" I would agree with you.

This man was clearly empowered by the LORD in this battle to do what is beyond human capacity. That is true for everyone named here.

That is the main thing that makes them extraordinary.

Next, we meet a man named Eleazar. His name means 'God has helped'.

The event that is mentioned in verses 9-10 likely happened early on in David's reign.

The Philistines, who were persistent enemies of God's people, were seeking to have control over Israel and sought to do so by force when David resisted them.

When his fellow soldiers were in retreat we read this about Eleazar in **verse 10**.

He stood his ground and God enabled him beyond the limits of his strength to endure and prevail.

That is a great picture of faith, to persist when your strength is gone trusting in the LORD to sustain you.

Another man named Shammah is revealed in verses 11-12.

Shammah means desolation, devastation, or deserted.

Though he was left alone by his fellow soldiers he defended the land promised by God and the LORD gave Him the victory.

Each of these men did what seemed impossible and what must be considered extraordinary.

It takes faith and courage beyond what I can appreciate to stand against such odds and that is exactly what makes them noteworthy.

It is the enemies that come against Josheb, it is the Philistines coming against Eleazar and Shammah that reveal the quality of their trust in God as well as their valour and skill as warriors.

If there is no trying time then these exceptional men would not be distinguish from the rest.

[How many of you remember September 11th, 2001? How many of you saw what happened as it happened on the news? One of the things I will always remember about watching that is the police, firefighters, and other first responders running into the twin towers when everyone else was running away. I remember thinking, “Wow those are exceptional people!”]

Terrible and dangerous circumstances have a way of highlighting uncommon people. That is true throughout the history of the church.

Think about Noah building a boat in the midst of complete godlessness.

Moses going to the king of Egypt to free the Israelites from slavery.

David and Goliath.

Jeremiah preaching before a godless king.

Paul preaching to people trying to kill him in the Temple.

Tyndale translating the bible with the threat of death before him.

Luther defying all the power of the papacy to proclaim salvation by grace alone in Christ alone.

William Carey travelling to India.

Hudson Taylor to China and that is just to name a few.

[Why do we remember these people? Why do we rightly consider them extraordinary? Because God did amazing things through them as they faced hardship and trial. It was that hardship and trial that revealed them as exceptional people used by the LORD. Brothers and sisters, we should not live in fear of trying times for God is always at work in them. Jesus will build his church and we can rest in that no matter how bleak things may appear. That brings us to a second lesson from this passage that we can see in the attitude of David’s mighty men. They show us that...]

Point #2 – Truly extraordinary people have a heart to serve. (Verses 13-17)

The greatest of God’s servants will always be those who are willing to put themselves aside out of love for their King.

Verses 13-14 set the scene for us.

This event may predate David's rule as king, this may have happened when the king before David, a man named Saul, was threatening David's life.

He is with his men in 'the cave of Adullam' it says in verse 13.

Adullam means 'Justice of the people' which speaks to the kind of king that God wants to rule over His people.

While there the Philistines again are threatening and they even have control of David's hometown of Bethlehem.

Now look with me at what it says in **verse 15**.

There is a bit of varied opinion on what David says here.

It seems pretty clear from the way things are worded that there is no desperate need for water.

Matthew Henry considers it to be a 'foolish desire' on David's part.

Others suggest it is a way of expressing his desire to have his hometown free from ungodly occupiers.

Others think it is just nostalgic expression recalling his younger years, sort of a 'there is no place like home' sort of statement.

My own opinion is that it is likely a mix of wanting freedom for Bethlehem and a bit of fond memories from his childhood.

Whatever the case may be this is what happens as a result of what he said (**Verses 16-17**).

Commentator Ronald Youngblood points out that it is twelve miles from Adullam to Bethlehem.

The words, "broke through the camp of the Philistines" in verse 16 suggest there was some fighting involved in getting to the well.

Can you imagine that? They walk/run 24 miles round trip, likely having to fight some battles along the way or at the very least were in enemy territory for most of that trip simply to retrieve a drink of water for the king of God's choosing.

That is a lot of trouble for a drink of water.

Why did they do it? I don't think it is because they felt they had something to prove, they no doubt had already proved themselves time and again.

The simplest answer is they had hearts to serve David.

Admittedly, what David does in response is a bit confusing at first.

He refuses to drink it and pours it out instead.

Can you imagine going 24 miles, risking your life, and the guy doesn't drink the water?

I think among my first reactions would be anger and feeling insulted.

I think I would feel that way because my knee jerk reaction would be to make it about me.

David's intention here is not to insult these guys, but rather it is to honour them.

David is doing something much more substantial than pouring the water on the ground like it doesn't matter to him, look at what it says!

It says, "He poured it out to the LORD!"

This is what is called a "drink offering" in the Old Testament.

He equates the water with the lives of the men who brought it.

He is saying the water is so valuable that it cannot just be consumed like one would normally drink it, but it must be offered to the LORD.

By using this water in a sacred act of worship he makes it clear that what they have done out of a heart to serve him is precious in his sight.

That is exactly the attitude that King Jesus has towards His people.

On more than one occasion the LORD's closest disciple fought with each other over who would be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom.

They all wanted to be extraordinary.

What did Jesus say? He says in Mark 9:35, "*If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.*"

We know that such service is precious in Jesus' sight because He promises great and eternal reward for the one who sacrifices and serves for His glory.

[Being an effective leader, evangelist, pastor, theologian, elder, board member, or leader of any kind is a good thing to aspire to, but it doesn't mean anything if we are not willing to wash someone's feet. You can accomplish great things by the world's standards but without a desire to serve the King of kings it won't amount to anything in eternity. That brings us to this third lesson about truly extraordinary people. This one may be harder to hear for us because of how our society has trained us to think so I want to encourage us all to listen carefully. The lesson is that...]

Point #3 – Truly extraordinary people are rare. (Verses 18-23)

According to Biblegateway.com there are about 3400 people individually named in the Bible. If we calculate that as a percent of all the people who have ever lived on the earth it is an extremely small fraction of one percent and a good chunk of the people named in the bible are not all that great when it comes to serving the LORD.

Besides the three super elite mighty men in the service of the king, there was also a group of thirty exceptional men as well.

Within that group of thirty two men are highlighted in verses 18-23.

David's nephew Abishai is mentioned in **verses 18-19.**

This man comes up a few times through the book of Samuel.

He proves impulsive at times, but on the whole is used by the LORD to the benefit of David and his kingdom.

To say that he was exceptional is an understatement.

Taking on 300 people whether all at once or in smaller groups is off the charts.

He was the best of the thirty, but it says “he did not attain to the three”.

In verses 20-22 we hear something similar.

Benaiah’s name means “Yahweh has built” which in another reminder that the LORD is the One who had made all these guys stand out in the first place.

He went up against the two best of the Moabites, a lion, and an Egyptian, who according to a parallel passage was 7 ½ feet tall armed with a spear and this man defeated him with a simple staff.

Impressive by any standard, but listen to **verse 23**.

Abishai and Benaiah are way better than average by far, but they are not in the same league as the three.

The abilities that are in view in these verses stand out precisely because only a handful of people possess them.

[When I was in my late teens and early twenties I played pick up hockey with some guys from the church that I attended. Most of us were average to mediocre, but there were some standout guys. One guy was a top house leaguer, another guy was a AAA caliber player, and another guy was drafted to the NHL but never played. The first two were good but the third guy could skate around anybody and score whenever he wanted, but put him on the ice in the NHL and he would look a whole lot less exceptional. Did you know that there are 550000 registered hockey players in Canada, fewer than 700 people play in the NHL and many of them are not from Canada. Why? Because being extraordinary is rare.]

Throughout the history of the world there have been billions of people who have belonged to God.

In all those people, how many could you name?

Even those recorded for us in the Bible would be a tough list to memorize.

I know our society tries to feed people the idea that everyone is extraordinary and everybody deserves a gold star and a medal.

If we stop and think about for a minute we will see that can’t possibly be true.

Ask yourself, “If everyone is extraordinary is anybody extraordinary?”

[This group of roughly 37 men were head and shoulders above the average Israelite, and among them Abishai and Benaiah stood out, and even they could not get to the level of Josheb, Eleazar, and Shammah. The fact that this text makes the rareness of being extraordinary clear, I believe, is a real gift to us. The point of this sermon is ‘NOT’ everybody be extraordinary. Oh there is some lessons worthy of imitation. We ought to pray for faithfulness in trying times, we ought to have a desire to serve our King and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we ought to strive to do our best, but the reality is those of us here this morning are average saints. Don’t walk away this morning without this last lesson at the forefront of your mind. Please take this to heart, that...]

Point #4 – Truly extraordinary people point us to the LORD. (Verses 24-39)

Reading a text like this we can make the mistake of thinking our service to the LORD is unimportant because we are ordinary people. We can also make the mistake of expecting to be extraordinary and feeling like a failure or struggling with big disappoint because we are just regular folks. Instead we ought to see is that...

What we have in verses 24-39 is just a list of names.

At most we learn the name of a father, hometown, or a tribe that they belong to, but that is it.

A few of the names we find elsewhere in Scripture which gives us a bit more information about their lives, but the vast majority of the men mentioned are just names on the page.

On top of that most of the names on the list sound strange to our ears.

They are hard to pronounce and they are hard to remember.

This is one of those passages we might skip over in our Bible reading or ask, “Why is this included in the Bible?”

While it would be great to have a mind powerful enough to memorize all these names, most of us don’t have that.

God certainly didn’t put lists like this in the Bible for us to fight over them and come up with bizarre theology based on unverifiable speculation.

Why is it there then? It is there to point us to God’s relentless work of redemption in the history of the world.

I looked up the meaning of every single name on this list. Many of them have a meaning that call our attention to the LORD.

They point us to God’s provision, protection, faithfulness, and salvation.

They come from different places and some of them come from outside the nation of Israel which means they left behind their homes and false religion to serve the One True God.

Some of them died in their service to the king and all we have is their name.

In a book that is largely focused on King David, this list of names comes near the end to remind us that David is not the primary focus.

If it were not for the LORD raising up this group of warriors who stay faithful to David even in the darkest of moments, David's rule would never have endured.

That is what we are supposed to see here.

We are supposed to see that God is the hero of this story.

A seminary professor of mine used to say all the time, "There is only One hero in the Bible and it's God."

I think that is exactly right!

If we look at these extraordinary men and in so doing learn to despise the ordinary we are missing the point entirely.

The truth is God has given us all we need to serve Him where we are.

2Peter 1:3 says, His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence"

It may be that the LORD would call you to be exceptional in the history of the church, but if like the vast majority of Christians in the history of the church we live and die and are forgotten let us not despise the high calling He has placed on us to live for the One Who died to give us eternal life.

I absolutely love the connection Matthew Henry makes in this text.

He connects the names recorded in this passage to Revelation 20 and 21 which refers to a book.

The book is called "The Book of Life" and everyone whose name is written in that book will live and reign with Christ upon the New Earth forever.

Listen, if you belong to Jesus through repentance and faith your name is in that Book and it will never be erased nor will it ever be forgotten.

That is because we have an amazing God.

Truly extraordinary people remind us of that fact. They are raised up by God usually in trying time for His glory and our good.

They have a heart to serve, a quality every Christian should imitate.

They are rare which should not be a point of discouragement, but rather a reminder that we should all look to the LORD Who has done, is doing, and will do extraordinary things for His people.

