

# AM 2 Samuel 23:8-39 Serving in Discouraging Situations

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Date: 13 August 2023

[0:00] Samuel chapter 23, it's on page 331 of the Bibles, page 331 of the church Bibles, 2 Samuel 23, and we'll read from verse 8 to the end of the chapter.

So these last couple of chapters of 2 Samuel are really summary chapters. They contain different events that occurred at different points in David's life. We have here a list of the men who have served him as his mighty men, as they're called.

David's most loyal soldiers who have served him during his life. And we'll read this section from verse 8 to the end of the chapter.

This is God's word. These are the names of the mighty men whom David had. Joshua, Bash-Ebeth, a Tacmanite.

[1:12] He was chief of the three. He wielded his spear against 800 whom he killed at one time. And next to him among the three mighty men was Eleazar, the son of Dodo of Ahohi.

He was with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle, and the men of Israel withdrew. He rose and struck down the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clung to the sword.

And the Lord brought about a great victory that day, and the men returned after him only to strip the slain. Next to him was Shammah, the son of Agi the Hararite.

The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils, and the men fled from the Philistines. But he took a stand in the midst of the plot, and defended it, and struck down the Philistines.

And the Lord worked a great victory. And three of the thirty chief men went down and came about harvest time to David at the cave of Adullam, when a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim.

[2:18] David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. And David said longingly, Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate.

Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and carried and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it.

He poured it out to the Lord, and said, Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it.

These things the three mighty men did. Now Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruah, was chief of the thirty. And he wielded his spear against three hundred men, and killed them, and won a name besides the three.

He was the most renowned of the thirty, and became their commander, but he did not attain to the three. And Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, was a valiant man, a valiant man of Kabzil, a doer of great deeds.

[3:25] He struck down two arials of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he struck down an Egyptian, a handsome man.

The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff, and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, and won a name beside the three mighty men.

He was renowned among the thirty, but he did not attain to the three. And David set him over his bodyguard. Ashael, the brother of Joab, was one of the thirty.

Elhanan, the son of Dodo of Bethlehem. Shama of Harad. El-Ika of Harad. Helez, the Paltite. Ira, the son of Ikesh of Tekoa.

Abietzer of Anathoth. Mibunai, the Hushethite. Salmon, the Ahohite. Meharrî of Netophah. Heleb, the son of Banna of Netophah.

[ 4 : 29 ] Ittai, the son of Ribbi of Gibeah. Of the people of Benjamin. Benaiah of Pirithon. Hidai of the brooks of Gash. Abi-Albon, the Arbithite.

Az-Mapheth of Bahurim. Eliabba, the Shalbanite, the sons of Jashin. Jonathan, Shama, the Hararite. Ahayim, the son of Sharar, the Hararite.

Eliphelet, the son of Ahashbi of Maccah. Eliam, the son of Ahithophel of Gilo. Hezro of Carmel. Parai, the Arbite.

Egal, the son of Nathan of Zubah. Bani, the Gadite. Zelik, the Ammonite. Nahari, of Beruth. The armour-bearer of Joab, the son of Zeruah.

Ira, the Ithrite. Garab, the Ithrite. Uriah, the Hittite. 37 in all. Amen. A king who points us forward very much to the Lord Jesus.

[ 5 : 33 ] And the psalm that we're going to sing now does the same. Psalm number 72. It will be helpful if you can have 2 Samuel 23 open in front of you.

As we come to look at this section from verse 8 to the end. We're not always good in the church at recognising people's service for God.

Now maybe it's different here but at least let me speak generally. Perhaps someone teaches Sunday school for years. And yet their preparation and work every week are simply taken for granted.

Or someone else cleans the church every week. And the only time anyone ever comments is when they miss a bit. Or someone starts the singing every week.

And someone who's never thanked them for doing it will only comment when they pick a tune that they don't like. Or they pitch a psalm slightly too low or too high.

[ 6 : 45 ] And we could multiply examples. Now what's the natural human reaction to receiving criticism like that? Well the natural human reaction to be criticised while never thanked.

Is to say fine then I'll not do it anymore. If that's all the thanks that I get. And don't we hear that all the time from the world. If we're involved in different committees, different organisations.

Someone does something for a while and then someone criticises them. And then right that's it, I'm not doing it anymore. But of course in the church we're doing what we're doing.

Not for other people. At least not primarily. We are commanded through love, serve one another. We are to serve one another.

But ultimately our service is for God. And as Jesus himself put it, when you've done all that was commanded. Say we are unworthy servants.

[ 7 : 50 ] We have simply done what was our duty. And yet, and yet. All over the Bible.

We do have people who are recognised for their service to God. And that brings us to the first thing we learn from the chapter in front of us this morning.

Our first heading. Which is your service to the King is not overlooked. Your service to the King is not overlooked. All over the Bible we have people who are recognised for their service to God.

Jesus himself said of the woman who anointed him in Matthew 26. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world. What she has done will also be told in memory of her.

Paul writes to the church in Rome and he says, Greet Mary who has worked hard for you. He tells him, greet Rufus chosen in the Lord. Also his mother who has been a mother to me.

[ 8 : 59 ] He writes to Timothy. And he says, may the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus. For he often refreshed me. And was not ashamed of my chains.

Now we might think that when it came to those letters of Paul. That were to be recorded for all time in scripture. That they wouldn't contain personal references to people that we don't know.

And we don't know anything else about other than what Paul highlights them doing. And yet it is as if Paul cannot write to churches without highlighting some of the people who are serving away there.

And the fact that this recognition of individuals and families is here in scripture is surely an example for us.

If God himself points out the faithful service of his people, surely we should too. And if your service to God is wrongly overlooked by God's people.

[ 10 : 09 ] Don't let that consume you. But take comfort that your service is not overlooked by God. Dear Ralph Davis, you may be familiar with the name.

He has a number of helpful, very helpful, very readable commentaries on Samuel 1 and 2 Kings. Other Old Testament books.

He puts it beautifully. He has a comment on this chapter. He says, maybe the reason that the Bible loves lists. Is because God never tires of naming the names of his people.

When we get to a list of names in our Bible readings, maybe we think it's something to be gone through and ticked off.

But every time we come to a list, let it be a reminder that God never tires of naming the names of his people. They're not known to us just as we are not known to most Christians in the world.

[11:15] But known to God. Known to God. This particular list in front of us is a list of David's mighty men, as they're called in verse 8.

Or his chief men, as they're called in verse 13. They're a bit like navy seals. They're David's most trusted warriors.

There's a group of around 30 of them. Probably fluctuated a bit during David's life. Some would have been killed perhaps and others added in. But there's around 30 at one time.

With three in particular singled out as the most trusted three. Just like with Jesus' disciples, you have the 12.

But then you also have Jesus' three closest disciples. Boys and girls, did you know that there's three disciples, disciples particularly that were close to Jesus.

[12:16] They were Peter, James and John. And the comparison here to Jesus is an important one. Because David was God's covenant king.

To fight for David was to fight for God's kingdom in the world. Just like we do today. Though not with sword or spear. But with the armour of God.

The sword of the spirit. And so on. As we fight sin. As we take the gospel out into the world. And Jesus doesn't overlook the work of his servants.

He said to his disciples. Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink. Because you belong to Christ. Will by no means lose his reward.

And in the meantime we are called to serve him faithfully. No matter how long or short it may be. Until we receive that reward.

[13:21] One thing we need to realise about the people who served David in this chapter. Is that for the most part they did so at a time when serving him was far from the easiest option.

The final two chapters of 2 Samuel. As I mentioned earlier. They're summary chapters. Rather than being in chronological order. And verse 13 here.

It talks about the time when David was in the cave of Adullam. So when was that? Well that was way back in 1 Samuel 22.

When Saul was still king. David had been anointed king. By Samuel at that point. He was God's choice for king. But he wasn't yet on the throne.

He wasn't yet publicly recognised. Recognised and acknowledged as king. And are we not in a very similar position today? Jesus is king.

[14:28] But most people don't recognise that. A crucified Messiah doesn't look very impressive. And yet it is now that we're called to serve him.

One day Jesus will split the skies and return. Every eye will see him. But it will be too late to start serving him then.

Rather what will count is whether we served him when his cause wasn't popular. And so I trust that right from the beginning today this sermon will be an encouragement for you to keep serving.

Even when his cause is unpopular. Just as these men served their king when his cause was unpopular. And in the end they were vindicated.

And in the end we will be too. And for the rest of our time this morning I want to highlight from these verses three situations that you could find yourself in where you might need some encouragement to keep going.

[15:36] So having seen firstly that our service to the king is not overlooked. We have three more points. And there's three situations in the chapter where the temptation to throw in the towel could have been overwhelming.

And those three situations are when a particular area of service feels like a waste. Whether a waste of energy, a waste of your gifts or whatever.

Or then when you're serving in an unglamorous situation. And then finally when you're left serving on your own.

Do any of those scenarios feel close to home for anyone? Do you feel like you're wasting or have wasted your energy as you look back?

You say I put so much time and years and effort into that. And what is there to show from it? Do you think that the place that you are now isn't the ideal place to serve God?

[16:42] That there are more ideal places you could be to serve God? Or do you ever think, well I'm glad to serve God but I could just do with a bit more support.

It can be hard to serve God. It can be hard to serve when any one of those three is true. Any one of them brings with them a high potential for discouragement.

But if all three of them are true or seem to be true, it can really be a toxic mix. And so the first of these three situations we want to consider under our second heading this morning.

is that your service to the king is not overlooked even when it feels like a waste. Your service to the king is not overlooked even when it feels like a waste.

Perhaps the most well known of the events recorded in this chapter is in verses 14 to 17. Where David says, oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate.

[17:48] What was behind David's desire? Surely it can't be that they didn't have any water where they were. 1 Samuel 22 tells us that there were 400 men at the cave of Adullam.

And there's no suggestion that lack of water was a problem. Was it just that the water from the well in Bethlehem tasted better? Perhaps.

Some have suggested that what really lay behind David's request was the desire that Bethlehem, the city of his birth, would be taken out of Philistine's hands.

He was longing for the day when that would come about. To be able to go freely to Bethlehem and drink water from its well would mean that Bethlehem had been liberated from the Philistines.

Perhaps it would be a bit like if someone had said during lockdown, I just wish I could go on a drive to Castle Douglas. Or wherever.

[18:56] And it wasn't necessarily that that was the one place in the whole world that you wanted to go. But you just wanted the whole lockdown thing to be over. You wanted freedom to be able to go where you wanted.

And if that is the right interpretation, then three of the chief men over here, David, they take him literally. Maybe it's more of a wish that he says, but they take him literally.

And they go to the Philistine camp, and they get water, and they bring it back to him. And when he realises what they've done, and that they have risked their lives to get this water for him, he won't drink it.

He sees it as blood water, because of what it has cost them, what they have put on the line to get it for them. In fact, some commentators, such as St. Augustine, have seen David's longing for water as a sinful, uncontrolled desire.

And it's only when his men risk their lives to get it for him that he snaps out of it, and he comes to his senses, and dedicates the water to God. But whatever the reason, his people's service is precious to him.

[20:16] That much is clear. As we sang in Psalm 72, speaking prophetically of the Lord Jesus, it says that the blood of his people is precious in his sight.

And it was the same for David. And so what does he do with this precious water? Boys and girls, here are men who have risked their lives to go get David a drink of water, and they give it to him, and what does he do?

He pours it out on the ground. Unbelievable. What ingratitude. Not at all. Not at all.

Rather, he is pouring it out before the Lord. It is not an act of waste, but an act of worship. Someone has said that he doesn't pour it out because it is trash, but because it is treasure.

And when all is said and done, the men who have risked their lives have nothing to show for what they have done as the water lands on the ground, dries up. There is no record that they have ever done anything, and yet a beautiful thing has happened.

[21:33] A beautiful thing has happened. They have risked their lives for their king, and David himself realises that he is not worthy of it. And he pours it out before the Lord as an act of worship.

He pours it out before the only one who is truly worthy of such an act of devotion. And if you think about it, we don't often have much to show for our service to God.

Think about how we spend the Lord's Day, how we devote the day to him. Now, contrast that with a bank holiday. We've had a few extra ones this year.

If you're in a line of work that observes bank holidays, you can get a lot done. You can get a lot done round the house. You get a whole day. And I'm sure that we could get a lot done with a Sunday if we devoted it to ourselves.

Maybe our houses, our gardens might look a bit tidier by the end of it. But what do we have to show after a day of worship and fellowship?

[ 22 : 50 ] Not a lot in tangible terms. Someone might look at it and say that we're doing the equivalent of pouring water out on the ground. But worship is never a waste.

Worship is never a waste. And as we'll be thinking about this evening, we'll be thinking about what God is doing in us as we worship.

So even if we don't have much to show for us, God is working in us and changing us. But even if we are oblivious to that, worship is never a waste.

What about that day at home when you get nothing done? You mothers of young children, not because you're not trying to get stuff done, but because they seem to be conspiring against you.

Maybe you think, I could be doing something so much more productive. Yet at the end of that, apparently on productive day, those little people are still alive.

[ 24 : 00 ] They know they're safe. They've been disciplined when they've stepped out of line.

They've been watching. They've been learning. They've been loved. They've been trained up a little more in the way that they should go.

When what you're doing is for Jesus, whether that is your worship or your own glamorous work for him, the world says, why this waste?

Jesus says, she has done a beautiful thing for me. Serving God when it seems like a waste, it's not a waste. It's precious in his sight.

So keep going, brothers and sisters. But then thirdly, which is the second situation where it might feel easy to get discouraged in your service.

And that's when you're serving in an unglamorous situation. So thirdly this morning, your service to the king is not overlooked even when you're serving in an unglamorous situation.

[ 25 : 05 ] In 1848, there was a failed Irish nationalist uprising led by the young Irishmen. It culminated on the 29th of July in a gunfight which became known as the Battle of Widow McCormick's Cabbage Patch.

Did you learn about it in school? One of the rebels was shot dead by police. Another was fatally wounded. But even though it's a matter of life and death, it's hard not to smile at a battle named after a cabbage patch.

No other country in the world would do that. And you can imagine children talking and saying, well, my great-granddad died in World War II.

And someone else says, well, my great-great-great-great-granddad died in the Battle of Waterloo.

Do you really want to be the one who pipes up and says, well, my great-great-granddad died in the Battle of Widow McCormick's Cabbage Patch?

But we're not all called to serve, we're not all called to take on the enemy on glamorous battlefields which will be talked about for generations to come.

[ 26 : 16 ] As if there is such a thing as a glamorous battlefield anyway. And here in verses 11 and 12, we have a man called Shammah who takes a stand in a plot of ground full of lentils.

I'm sure there are people that we're all looking forward to meeting in heaven. People from the Bible, great missionaries and others from church history.

But has anyone ever said, I can't wait to meet the guy who defended the lentil field? And yet lentil fields need defended because God's people need fed.

Little churches need kept open because God's people need fed. And God calls most of his followers to serve him in unglamorous situations.

When I preached this passage at Instranor, it seemed particularly appropriate to us. Humanly speaking, our town doesn't have a lot going for it.

[ 27 : 25 ] There's nothing outwardly impressive about us as a church either, whether in terms of the building or the people. And for any church, I think it wouldn't take long to look around and find other

churches to compare ourselves to and think, well, we're just a lentil field in comparison.

And most of us are serving God in lentil fields. And the challenge for me and the challenge for you is, are we willing to serve God in a lentil field if that's where he calls us to serve him?

Would we be more committed to our churches if there was a bit more outwardly attractive about them if there were more people our own age? In verse 11 here, everyone else fled.

Everyone else abandoned the lentil field. But Shammah stood his ground. And at times when the enemy is growing in strength and there's nothing particularly attractive about a situation, people will do that.

They'll say, well, I'll just stay home and watch church online. Or, I'll go elsewhere where things are a bit easier. Or, I'll just walk away altogether. But either way, I'm not going to invest my life in a lentil field.

[ 28 : 50 ] But Shammah did. Either he was going to kill the Philistines or the Philistines were going to kill him. But he wasn't moving from that lentil field. Following Jesus is about denying ourselves and taking up the cross.

It's not about picking the easiest option. There is no ideal place to serve God other than the place God sets us down.

So thirdly, this morning, some encouragement for you when you feel you're serving God in a non-glamorous situation. Lentil fields need defended.

The third potentially discouraging situation which is our fourth and final point today is when we're left serving on our own.

When we're left serving on our own. We've just noticed this sort of scenario in passing with Shammah and the lentil field. But particularly, we now want to focus on Eliezer in verse 9.

[ 29 : 53 ] We read there, He was with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle and the men of Israel withdrew. And yet, the next verse goes on to say, He rose and struck down the Philistines until his hand was weary and his hand clung to the sword.

And the Lord brought about a great victory that day and the men returned after him only to strip the slain. Now there are a couple of interesting things about Eliezer that we don't have time to get into this morning.

One is when these events took place because there is an intriguing possibility that verse 9 describes the aftermath of the killing of Goliath by David when the Israelites are chasing the Philistines.

And the suggestion is that Eliezer's unit gave up pursuing but he kept going. The other thing I'm not going to go into this morning is the whole business of his hand clinging to his sword.

But we could look at an example of where that has happened in history either because the blood has congealed and acted like glue or the muscles have seized up and people literally couldn't get swords out of their hands.

[ 31 : 15 ] Spurgeon has a great sermon on it on the man whose hand claved to his sword. So that might be something to go away and look into as well as which Bible character Eliezer not which Bible character which pilgrim's progress character is based on Eliezer.

Eliezer but what I do want us to notice this morning is that Eliezer isn't someone who followed the crowd because they withdrew he didn't.

Everyone else is doing it wasn't an argument with him. Everyone else is running away so what? No one else is taking the responsibilities seriously so what?

God may have given us ten talents or he may have given us one talent but either way on the day of judgment we'll be called to answer for what we did with what God gave us not with what he didn't give us.

Too many Christians spend a lot of time complaining about what other people are doing or not doing with their talents rather than just using their own.

[ 32 : 33 ] Eliezer just gets on with it. And yet serving on your own or at least serving with very little help it does bring its own temptations as well as the general temptation to discouragement there's also the temptation to start blaming others for not playing their part.

There's a temptation as well for bitterness look at me and look at what I'm doing and look at them they could be helping they're not. Perhaps we face the temptation to be despondent about the state of the church whether the church in general or our own congregations but again our responsibility is for ourselves.

Our calling is to be faithful in the place where God has placed us and in the roles that he's given us. it's a lot easier to complain about others than get on with the job that God has given us.

As Spurgeon says in that sermon I mentioned, it's very easy to pick holes in other people's work but it is far more profitable to do better work yourself.

It's very easy to pick holes in other people's work but it is far more profitable to do better work yourself. then he asks, is there a fool in all the world that can't criticise?

[ 34 : 03 ] It's not something to remember if we find ourselves being critical of others. It may be that our criticism is right, it may be that it's well grounded but it is also true that any fool can criticise.

And don't we usually find that high levels of criticism often go together with low levels of service. Spurgeon sums it up, therefore if thou be wise my brother, do not cavale at others but arise thyself and smite the Philistines.

Sometimes we perhaps need to remind ourselves that our responsibilities are not reduced by the laxness of others. There can be the feeling, well if people around me aren't serving God wholeheartedly, there's no point in me doing it.

But is that not to get things back to front? Surely the failure of others should lead us to strive harder not to slacken off. And again I find it hard to improve on Spurgeon so I'll just quote him.

He says, are your fellow Christians worldly? You yourself should become more spiritual and heavenly minded. are they sleepy? Be you the more awake.

[ 35 : 26 ] Are they lax? Be you the more strict. Are they unkind? Be you the more full of love. Set your watch all the more strictly because you see that others are overcome.

And be you doubly diligent where you see that others are negligent. the failures of others are not there to give us ammunition for criticism.

Nor should they lead to us slackening off in our own service for God. Rather they should lead to us being all the more diligent. Remember your service to the king is not overlooked even when you're left serving on your own.

But just as we close this morning a final thing to encourage you to keep going is to remember who you're serving. Remember who you're serving because you're serving a greater king than David. There's one name on this list of men that really sticks out. It sticks in the throat a bit even. It's the very last name on the list.

[ 36 : 41 ] Did you notice it? Uriah the Hittite. Who's he? He's the one that David had killed so that he could steal his wife.

David at times took advantage of those serving him. Perhaps those men who went to Bethlehem to get water for him. Definitely Uriah.

But the Lord Jesus never does that. He is the greatest king. And also unlike David he doesn't actually need us to fight for him. But he calls us to do so.

And he honours us when we answer that call. To give the last word to Matthew Henry. Christ the son of David has his worthies too who like David's are influenced by his example fight his battles against the spiritual enemies of his kingdom and in his strength are more than conquerors.

Sounds a pretty good thing to give your life to. Amen.