

God's Power to Deliver

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[0 : 00] Let me start by saying it's hard to believe in victory when the odds are stacked against you, isn't it? Perhaps the classic example, in my time at least, is Stephen Bradbury. Do you remember him?

No one in the world believed that he would win, himself included, because the odds were stacked against him. It was a miracle that he got there in the first place, he had injuries and so on. And then he did. So remember this on the next slide. And now it's only one man across the line for gold. It'll be over in 90 seconds. Matthew Turcotte takes the lead. He was advanced out of the semifinal.

And there's the young Korean skater sliding on the inside. Sometimes you don't even know where he is. He's so small he just slips in there. All right, now Ono hanging back in four. They're trying to pass on the inside.

And Ono, here's the bell. One lap for gold. He's reaching back for one more deer. Trying to hold off lead. They bump! They bump! Oh! A total leap out!

[1 : 07] And Bradbury wins! Stephen Bradbury of Australia across the line! No matter how many times you've seen it, it still brings goosebumps, isn't it?

No one would have believed Bradbury would have won. As I said, the odds are stacked against him, even to the point where, I don't know if you notice, but the commentators don't even mention his name until he's crossing the line.

They ignore him, such the odds that were against him. And as Christians, we can sometimes find it hard to believe God's promises of victory, I guess, when the odds are stacked against us.

I mean, when we feel overwhelmed by the pressures and problems of life, whether it's at work or at home or with health, it's hard to believe God's promise like this on the next slide.

You know, that we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us. Or that we can approach God's throne of grace and receive help in our time of need.

[2 : 10] When the odds of life are stacked against us, it can be hard to believe those promises, that God will keep us in the faith and preserve us through it. Or we can also feel outnumbered by the world, particularly with the growing, it's almost like a superpower of secularism now.

It's hard to believe God's promises. Secularism, by the way, is the movement to remove God and his truth from society. And it is growing.

So, for example, just last week on the next slide, the New South Wales Green Senator, Lee Rhiannon, moved a motion to scrap the so-called archaic Lord's Prayer from the Senate. Claiming that we should include all religions, when really that's code for getting rid of Christian religion.

Or on the next slide, last month, university students in Queensland were apparently marked down for using banned words such as mankind and workmanship. They were supposed to use gender-inclusive language like they.

In response, the universities claimed that they did not actually, in fact, issue a ban. They just issued guidelines for the students to follow. So, either way, it's another example of removing biblical truth from our society.

[3 : 24] And in the face of this growing superpower of secularism, which seems to rule our Western world at the moment, we can feel, quite frankly, outnumbered and overwhelmed.

Such that it is hard to believe God's promises in Christ, like this on the next slide. That he will build his church, no matter what. And that we, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, so at the last day, we who have followed Christ will also sit on thrones.

That is, we will one day rule the world with Christ. In fact, in the face of secularism, God's promises and his word, in general, can be so hard to believe that some churches and even some Christians

just don't believe.

And so, instead of speaking the truth in love, they have watered down the truth and called it love. For example, some no longer speak of sin and judgment.

I remember a bishop telling some people at Ridley that come Easter time, just talk about God's love, don't mention sin and judgment. It's half the gospel gone. Or others have abandoned the biblical view of marriage and still others, even the view of gender.

[4 : 35] Unless we think that's just Christians out there, three weeks ago, I think it was three weeks ago, we had someone, or I had someone from our church, say to me after the service that they didn't believe in the bit of scripture we read that day because it's out of touch with society.

And so, last week, the issue was trusting God's promises despite appearances. This week, it's trusting God's promises despite the odds. Whether we're feeling overwhelmed by life's pressures and problems or outnumbered by the growing superpower of secularism.

And whether we feel this or not, we'll be encouraged today to keep trusting God's promises and God's word. For as we'll see, God is the one who has the power to deliver his promises, no matter what, despite the odds.

But our passage today begins with the superpower of Abram's world at the time. So, at point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles. I'll just read verse one to introduce the first lot of kings. At that time, when Amraphel was king of Shinar, Ariok, king of Elessa, and Ketolaïoma, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goyim, these kings went out to war.

And so, we've met this first group of kings here. And they're actually from the far east. So, to try and make it a bit more real for you, on the next slide is a map of the Middle East. So, hopefully you can see on the far right, Ketolaïoma from Elam.

[6 : 00] He's in Iran, modern-day Iran. A bit further north of that is Amraphel in Shinar or Babylon. And that's modern-day Iraq. We're not sure exactly where the two other kings were, but probably not too far away.

Because this group of four worked together as a group, a coalition of kings. And Ketolaïoma seems to be the leader. Because in verse four and five, our author only names him.

And so, it looks like Ketolai is the superpower of the Middle East for at least 12 years during Abram's time. But then these five kings, over in Canaan, around the Dead Sea, and we're going back, yep, they rebel against Ketolaïoma.

And so, we read in verse two, you just keep it there, Paul, that's okay. We read in verse two, that these kings from the far east went to war against Berah, king of Sodom, Beresha, king of Gomorrah, Shinnab, king of Admar, Shemeber, king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zoar. All these latter kings joined forces in the valley of Sidim, that is, the Dead Sea Valley. For 12 years, they had been subject to Ketolaïoma, the superpower. But in the 13th year, they had enough.

[7 : 18] They rebelled. And so, 12 years being subject to this guy, and then they say in the 13th year, that's it. And so, what happens is, Ketolaïoma travels from the far east, and he's coming across to Canaan to sort these rebels out.

But before we find out who wins this battle in the Sidim Valley, our author wants us to know just how great a superpower this Ketolaïoma really is.

And so, he lists all these other people that he conquers along the way. So, have a look at verse five. It says, When we read all these names, we're tempted just to gloss over them.

You know, our eyes kind of fade back into the back of our heads, because we don't know where they are, do we? Or perhaps we listen to see how many names the preacher misses up on. I bailed out on a couple of them there, I must confess.

But we do this because we don't know where they are. And yet, even if we don't know where they are, we can still read this on our own at home, and still get something from it. Because we can read just how many names there are, and realize, Wow, this Ketolaïoma must be a pretty big superpower to take out all these people.

[9 : 02] And if we do some research, we'll see this even more clearly. For example, the Rephites and the Emites are mentioned later in the Bible. So, in the next slide, we find out that they're giants.

So, Deuteronomy chapter three, this is later on. Og, king of Bashan, was the last of the Rephites. And notice how big he was. His bed was decorated with iron, and was more than nine cubits. That's four meters long. And four cubits, 1.8 meters wide. Now, Og was probably the last of the Rephites, because Ketolaïoma probably wiped out many of his ancestors back in Genesis.

But the point is, these Rephites were huge. They were giants. I mean, even his name, Og, sounds like a giant's name, doesn't it? And just to put it into perspective, on the next slide is a picture of an Og-sized person next to a normal-sized person.

They're giants. And then on the next slide, in Deuteronomy chapter two, we're told that the Rephites were also known as the Emites. In other words, in our passage today, it's just different names for the same group of people to start with.

[10:06] And they were all giants. And what does Ketolaioma do? He wipes them out, like that. He's a pretty big superpower, isn't he? But more than that, he keeps going.

So on the back of your outlines is a map. And hopefully you can follow the line. So Ketolaioma starts at Damascus at the top. And you follow the line down. He takes out the giants, known as the Rephites, in Astaroth.

So this is below Dan. And then the giants, known as the Emites, in Ham. Do you see Ham on the back of your outlines, your map? And then he took out the Zuzites as well.

We're not exactly sure where that place is. In other words, he took out his biggest competition, literally his biggest competition first, which is a smart move. And then we're told he went all the way down to the hill country of Si'i, down the bottom of your map.

And then he went left or west, across to El Paran. And then he turned back, we're told, in verse seven, he turned back to Kadesh, conquering all the Amalekites living in that area.

[11:06] And then finally, he draws up battle lines in the valley of Sidim, just below the Dead Sea, to take on these rebellious kings. In other words, Ketaleioma is a powerful force, isn't he?

But not just powerful, he's also clever. Because if you look at the line there, either on your map or on the screen, the kings around Zor, or the Sidim Valley, they are.

Notice what he does around them. He cuts off any chance for reinforcements from the east, any chance of reinforcements from the south, and even some from the southwest. He takes out any opportunity they have to call for help.

And so Ketaleioma is not just a brute force, he's a clever king. I wonder on the next slide if you can guess who this man is. Does anyone know? Napoleon. Yeah, Napoleon Bonaparte.

He was famous for being short, but he was also famous for being one of the greatest military leaders the world has ever known. A brilliant strategist. And Ketaleioma is like the ancient Napoleon.

[12:10] We don't know if he was short or not, but he was a great military leader. And so it is no surprise to hear that when he finally gets to the rebellious Dead Sea kings, he wipes them out with ease.

In fact, so easy is it that the author doesn't even bother telling us about the fight. Have a look at verse 8 where the author brings us back to the Sidim Valley.

So verse 8, Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admar, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is Zohar, marched out and drew up their battle lines in the valley of Sidim against Ketaleioma, king of Elam, Tidal, king of Goyim, Amraphel, king of Shinar, and Ariok, king of Alessa.

Four kings against five. Now the valley of Sidim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, notice, battles already happened, some of the men fell into them and the rest of them fled to the hills.

The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food, then they went away. They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions since he was living in Sodom.

[13:18] See, Ketal is victorious again with ease, isn't he? So much so, our author doesn't even bother saying he's won, he just talks about the others who flee. But then our author finally tells us what all this has to do with Abram and us.

From verse 12, he says, Abram's nephew Lot was also taken. And this is a real problem because Lot was one of God's people through whom God had blessed, rather God had blessed through Abram.

God had blessed Lot through Abram. After all, that's why Lot's possessions increased as well as Abram's. again, because God promised to bless others like Lot through Abram.

Now, remember from chapter 12 on the next slide, this is one of God's promises. He says, I will make your name great and then he says, you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

You see? God promised to bless others like Lot through Abram. But here, Lot is taken captive and so he's not really blessed, is he? And it looks like God's promise to bless is now outnumbered by the superpower Kedoleoma until that is verse 13.

[14:34] See verse 13? A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now, Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Ashkol and Edner, all of whom were allied with Abram.

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 train men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

Now, the trees of Mamre are near Hebron. So on the next side is a map. Again, Hebron, you can see, is where the purple line starts. So presumably, Kedoleoma went the way he came on the right-hand side of the Jordan River taking with him the plunder from Sodom and Gomorrah, we were told, and he heads up the right side, whereas Abram chases after him on the left side of the Jordan and they meet up the top in the city of Dan, about 200 kilometers from Abram's home.

And when Abram and his men get there, no doubt they're exhausted, traveling all day and part of the night, and yet, verse 15, during the night, Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobart, north of Damascus.

He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. Now, you've got to not miss how extraordinary this victory is.

[16:03] The author has spent so much time setting up how big a superpower Ketor Leoma is and yet Abram takes him out with 318 men and a few family friends.

It's an extraordinary victory against seemingly impossible odds. And not only do they take out this superpower, then these 318 men, you know, scare off the superpower and chase them past Damascus right at the top, another 100 kilometers or so.

There's another battle in ancient history about another 300 group of men against impossible odds. It was the 300 Spartans who took on the Persian superpowers made famous by this movie, 300, with Gerard Butler and his sculpted six-pack of abs, much like my one-pack.

Now, I'm certainly not recommending this movie, by the way, but the point here is that another ancient battle took place with impossible odds.

And a spoiler alert, this 300 lot lost. But here is Abram with another group of 318 men and a few neighbors against another superpower and yet he wins.

[17:18] How? He rescues Lot, the possessions, the women, all the other people and brings them back. How is Abram able to do this? Well, because God delivers.

Point three, verse 17. Abram returned from defeating Kedileoma and the kings allied with him. The king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Sheva, that is the king's valley.

Then another king, Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was also priest of God Most High and he blessed Abram saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth and praise be to God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand.

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And so here Abram is on his way home and he's met by two other kings in the appropriately named King's Valley.

One of these kings, Melchizedek, offers Abram food and wine rather than water because it was a celebration banquet for his victory. He even blesses Abram and yet, despite giving him wine and blessing, Melchizedek then attributes the victory to God Most High.

[18:34] He says, God has blessed Abram and God has delivered his enemies into Abram's hand. In other words, it's God's power that delivers, not Abram's.

Abram only defeated them because God delivered them. And so the true superpower is, well, God. In this king's valley, the true king is, you guessed it, God.

For he alone has the power to deliver not just victory over enemies, but he's promised blessing to others through Abram. For through Abram, God not only saved Lot, but verse 16, he saved also the women and the other people.

You see, here is God keeping his chapter 12 promise to bless people through Abram. And he does it despite the odds, for he alone has the power to deliver his promises.

Abram knew this too, which is why Abram responds to Melchizedek not by saying, hang on a sec, Mel, I did all the fighting, why don't you praise me a bit more? He doesn't say anything like that, does he?

[19 : 48] Instead, he gives Melchizedek a tenth of all his plunder. You see, Abram knows Melchizedek is right about God. God alone has power to deliver both victory over enemies and to deliver his promised blessing of salvation.

So Abram won't keep any of the plunder for himself just in case the king of Sodom tries to take some credit. See verse 21? The king of Sodom said to Abram, give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, with raised hand I have sworn on oath to the Lord God most high, creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, I made Abram rich.

I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me to Ena, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share.

You see, Abram has rescued all of Sodom's people and possessions and as the victor they technically belong to him. As the old saying goes, to the victor belong the spoils, yeah.

[21 : 02] Yet Abram gives Sodom's king all of his own share. Why? Well it's quite clear so that this king cannot claim any credit. See, Abram knows it's God's power alone that has delivered his enemies and with the enemies this plunder, not Sodom.

And so the message of this chapter seems to be that God alone has power to deliver his promises despite the odds. After all, our author spends a lot of time establishing Kedolaioma as this big superpower, doesn't he?

Telling us all about the other people he's conquered and so on. To show us that the odds of defeating him seem impossible. And then Abram does defeat him and yet there's no mention of his faith, is there?

There's no mention of Abram calling on God for help and Abram's victory in verse 15 is described in just three words. He routed them.

That's it. That's his big victory. God on the other hand is given the credit. God is praised. God is the one who is called the most high three times. He's called the creator of heaven and earth twice.

[22 : 13] Our author wants us to know that God is the one who has the power. He's the creator, the God most high. He is the one who has the power to deliver the enemies into Abram's hand and in so doing deliver his promise to bless others through Abram.

You see the message is God has the power to deliver his promises despite the odds. So what does all this mean for us? Point four. Does it mean that God will give us victory over our enemies at work?

Or perhaps smite the person who cuts us off on the road? Press the button, the smite button, I don't know. Or even do something to the secularists who are pushing our society away from God?

Well we first need to see how this theme is fulfilled in Christ because that often changes the application for us. And when we look to Christ, we also see God's power to deliver his promised blessing.

But it's the blessing of salvation from a very different superpower. For in Christ God saves us not from the earthly superpower who ruled the Middle East for 12 years. God saves us from a spiritual superpower that has ruled the world for thousands of years.

[23 : 30] And that superpower is sin. It's been raining in the world ever since Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the garden. And we know this from our experience too, don't we?

I mean, sin not only means that people face the punishment of eternal death later, it also means that people ignore God now. And you tell me, do people in society, do they naturally tend towards listening to God or ignoring God?

It's ignoring God, isn't it? You see, sin is still reigning in our world, even here in Melbourne. And even if people did try to save themselves from it, the odds of succeeding are impossible.

And yet, despite the odds, God has the power to save by his gospel message about his son. And so the next slide we read in Galatians chapter 3 that scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, save them by faith, and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham, all nations will be blessed through you.

You see, God's promised blessing to all the nations happens in the gospel of Jesus, who is a descendant of Abraham. This is God's power to bring salvation. As Paul says below, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

[24 : 57] You see, the gospel message about Jesus is God's power to deliver his promised blessing of salvation. For the gospel speaks of Jesus whose blood paid for our sins.

We remember that today with the Lord's Supper. It speaks of how all who believe in Jesus are forgiven and set free from sin's punishment of eternal death. We're given eternal life instead. And we're also set free from sin's power to ignore God. Instead, his spirit enables us to listen to God. And how can we tell that God's power in Christ has worked?

Well, what are most of you doing right now? You're listening to God's word being explained on a Sunday morning. Who on earth in their right mind would do that? Only people have been changed by the gospel of Christ.

It's only one or two fallen asleep, but that's pretty good. What's more, we have the historical resurrection of Jesus, which proves there is life after death.

[25 : 57] And so like Abram, we can know that God has the power to deliver his promises despite the odds. He's done it in Christ against the superpower of sin and death and brought us the promised blessing of salvation.

And so we have every reason to trust his other promises too, don't we? So when we feel overwhelmed by the problems and pressures of life, we need not worry. Instead, we can pause and remember God has the power to deliver his promises.

I like that we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us, that he will give us grace to help us in our time of need. In other words, we can trust God's promises to preserve us and keep us and bring us through hardships.

I know of a number of people at our church who can testify to that actually. For one, it was their spouse had an affair that led to a broken marriage. It turned their life upside down to the point where they were overwhelmed and yet they clung to Christ and prayed to God.

It was by no means easy and yet they can testify to how God kept his promise to preserve them in the faith through all that and come out on the other side.

[27 : 13] For others, it was loss of job. For others, it was news of cancer. And on it goes. Despite the overwhelming odds they all felt, they trusted God's promises to preserve them and provide for them because they knew he had the power to deliver them despite their odds.

Or when we feel like we're outnumbered by the world with this growing superpower of secularism, then again, we need not worry. God's power in Christ has already defeated the biggest superpower of sin and death.

secularism piece of cake. It does not mean, by the way, that life in this world will be easy. In fact, it could well get worse. The rise of secularism against Christianity has grown so much that for the first time in history, it has been discussed at the European Parliament.

on the next slide even has its own name, Christianophobia, where Christian beliefs are frowned on or scared of and so people persecute Christians.

This is Europe, Western world. We're not talking about the persecution that we heard of in the Middle East as well. And while Christianophobia is real and shocking, again, there is no need to worry.

[28 : 28] For God has greater power to deliver his promises. He has greater power to build his church despite those odds and bring us into the new creation where we will rule with Christ.

And if we need not worry about God's promises despite the odds, then we also need not compromise like other churches have done on God's word despite the pressure of our society. Indeed, we must not compromise. Instead, we can have confidence in God's word and speak it faithfully in love. For God's power means his word will not return to him empty.

In fact, his gospel word is his power to save. So we ought to praise God and boast in the gospel by which he has saved us. And we ought to have such confidence in it that we do everything we can to proclaim it.

Let me finish with a story. I remember being in an old church of mine where there was a husband who was a self-confessed hardened atheist. He didn't normally come to church.

[29 : 30] This one Sunday, he decided to come along with his wife. I'm not sure if it was Mother's Day or something like that. And as it happened, it happened to be the Sunday where the minister who was speaking, he gave the most rambling sermon I have ever heard.

Now, I know I'm going on for a while today. I did warn you about that. But this one was incomprehensible. And other people said the same thing, so it's not just me. But he did mention the

gospel.

He did talk about Jesus dying to pay for our sins. And at the end of the sermon, before we even had a chance to sing the song, this hardened atheist got up in the middle of church, about where Peter is sitting, right there.

I'm not asking you to get up, I know you're a Christian. He got up in the middle of church and he said out loud, in front of everyone, what you have said today has really touched my heart and I want to commit my life to Christ now.

True story. And you want to know what my first thought was? How did this happen from that sermon? I should have thanked God.

[30 : 37] But you see, God's power to save is not in the minister. It's in his word, the gospel. And so despite the odds or the overwhelming pressure of secularism, we can and are to trust God's promises and proclaim his gospel word.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this chapter which we might normally just skip in our own Bible reading. And although it's taken longer to explain it today, we thank you for the great truths in it.

That you are more powerful. You are powerful to deliver your promises even despite the odds. And so Father, we ask that you might help us to keep trusting in your promises and in your word.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.