

2 Samuel 21:15-22

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[0 : 0 0] If you would turn with me to the book of 2 Samuel, we are looking at chapter 21 tonight. Starting in verse 15. Do you know the difference between an appendix and an epilogue in a book?

So an appendix is where an author will just jam all sorts of stuff that he didn't know where to put in the rest of the book. Or that's where like all the charts and the graphs will go that are sort of, you know, didn't quite fit in the other pages. That's an appendix. An epilogue, an epilogue is a place for the author to take a step back, to assess all the ground that he or she has covered, and then to draw the threads together and try to make a big point. Or to sort of drive home what it is they're trying to say. And in many ways, as we kind of come to the end of our series in the book of 1 and 2 Samuel, chapters 21 and 22 and 23 and 24, these last four chapters are really that. They're an epilogue where the author, the compiler, the narrator is sort of drawing all his threads together. So for the next few weeks, we're sort of marching through this epilogue, taking stock of the book, and sort of learning from what these last few chapters have to teach us today. So if you're looking in a pew Bible, that's page 274. And we are going to look at verses 15 through 22 of chapter 21. Let me read this for us if you're there. There was war again between the

Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary. And Ishbi-ben-ob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed 300 shekels of bronze, and he was armed with a new sword thought to kill David. But Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, you shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.

After this, there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibikai, the Hushethite, struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants. And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. And El-Hanan, the son of Jare-Oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath, the Gittite, with a shaft of whose sphere was like a weaver's beam. And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, 24 in number. And he also was descended from the giants. And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan, the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down. These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants. Let's pray together.

Lord, we pray for the light of your spirit to be shining in our hearts and upon your word tonight that we might understand and apply rightly this text before us. We thank you that you give us your word to do your work and your continuing work of presence in the world. Lord, so thank you that we get to gather around it tonight. Lord, we ask that you would do your work as you see fit. In Jesus' name, amen. Okay. Well, have you ever noticed that sometimes great athletes make not so great coaches? Great players like Wayne Gretzky in hockey or Isaiah Thomas and Magic Johnson in basketball. These guys all have sterling careers as players, right? They are all stars, they're MVPs, they have lots of championships. But you know, each one of them has a not so bright track record as a coach, as a leader of a team. I don't really follow hockey, but I saw this the other day that Wayne Gretzky, when Wayne Gretzky, the so-called great one in hockey, left as the head coach of the Phoenix Coyotes, they had failed to make the playoffs four seasons in a row. And when he left, the team was just completely mired in bankruptcy and investors didn't want to touch it.

[4 : 18] Uh, he kind of drove that place into the ground. Uh, even Michael Jordan, right? Arguably still the best player in NBA history, hasn't had the greatest track record. Uh, now true, he's never actually sort of taken on the role of a head coach per se. He's been more involved in sort of owning and managing and sort of orchestrating things behind the scenes. But even so, his teams have also been pretty mediocre.

Um, and in, in 2012, his team went, uh, a whopping seven and 59. Seven, seven wins in the whole season.

Uh, that by the way, it was the worst record in NBA history. Uh, this year, the Charlotte Hornets are just over 500. Uh, they might make the playoffs, so we'll see if they can turn it around. But, uh, but great players rarely make great coaches. They can rarely reproduce in others the greatness that they themselves embody and that comes so easily to them. Uh, now, as we come to these final chapters of second Samuel, as I said, we've come to this sort of carefully crafted epilogue that draws together some of the important threads of David's life and kingship. Um, and if you look, if you sort of take a, just a span of the whole chunk, you see this sort of chiasmic, this pattern that goes basically David cleaning up, uh, Saul's mess. And then you've got this little episode about David's mighty men. And then you have a song and then you have a song and then you've got an episode about David's mighty men. And then you have David cleaning up a mess that actually he made. Uh, so there's this beautiful sort of literary pattern that signals to us that this is kind of the grand summary of the book. And here in this little section, you know, as you look back over David's life, as we're sort of drawing these threads together, what's one of the themes that you see in his life? Well, one of those themes is, is that David was a great warrior. He was a military hero.

Um, one of the number one hits on Jerusalem pop radio in the 11th century BC went like this. Saul has killed his thousands, but David, his 10,000s. That's what all the kids were bumping on their stereo in downtown Jerusalem. That was the literally, that's the song that you, not literally, that's the song they used to sing in the streets when the army would come home. Saul has killed his thousands and David has killed his 10,000s. Um, and of course, as we look back over David's life as a warrior, what is the one story that we all remember? What's the sort of, uh, just quintessential moment in David's life as David and Goliath, right? That's the one David was Israel's great giant slayer.

Uh, now of course there had been other giant slayers actually before David in Israel's history. Uh, Moses being the primary one, actually, uh, not only did God sort of take down Egypt under Moses's kind of leadership, uh, but Moses in the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan in the book of numbers as a sort of ending their time in the wilderness and coming to sort of on the brink of the promised land, we're told that Israel, uh, that Moses led Israel to defeat Og, the king of Bashan, who apparently slept in a 13 foot bed. So here was a giant that Moses took down.

[7 : 33] But you know, it's really David, isn't it? Who sort of stands out as the great feller of giants. Uh, and by the way, I should mention here sort of as a side note, when the old Testament talks about giants, uh, don't think sort of Jack and the beanstalk giants, um, you know, 40 foot high, mythological legendary creatures that don't really ever exist. Don't think about that. Think more like Shaquille O'Neal. I'm going to use a lot of athletic metaphors tonight. Think Shaquille O'Neal. If Shaquille O'Neal were to walk in here, now I'm six one. That's kind of average height for a guy. How tall is Shaquille O'Neal? He's like 7 million something, right? I mean, he would dwarf me. We would literally think that he was a giant. And if we lived in the ancient near East and we had to sort of do hand to hand combat to see who got to live somewhere, we would be frightened of him. This is what the, this is really what the Bible is talking about when they're talking about giants. They're talking about real humans who were uncharacteristically big. In fact, the word giant in this text, uh, here in the Hebrew text actually just translates a word wrath, uh, which is probably the name of a tribe or an ancestor from which these guys all came from. They were probably part of a tribe that was just uncharacteristically big. Uh, just last month, actually, CNN ran a story on, uh, Polynesian high school football players. Uh, some people have called this the Polynesian pipeline because some of these kids are just so big that they dominate high school football and many, many, many of them go to the pros. So even though in the United States, there's only something like 300,000 Samoans and Tongas who sort of make up these sort of Polynesian people groups, they're just an unstoppable force in high school athletics. And of course, again, in the ancient near East, a whole group of guys like that would be utterly terrifying. They would be a force to be reckoned with. So this is sort of giants that we're talking about here. And again, David, Israel's great King was known as the one who could bring them down.

And so you would expect that as the compiler of the book of Samuel brings his story to a close in this climactic epilogue, that we'd want to get one more really good gripping story of David's military prowess, right? Or maybe he could give us sort of a highlight reel of some of David's greatest hits to sort of just put the cherry on the top of the Sunday. But surprisingly, that's actually not what we get. Instead, we get a story, not about some great victory that David had, but we get a story about David's very last time on the battlefield. And we don't know exactly when this particular battle came in David's life. It's probably sometime after David's major victories over the Philistines in chapter five and chapter eight. You can go back and read those. But whether it happened, say, before or after Absalom's rebellion, for instance, we don't quite know. We don't know sort of when chronologically this happened. But the important thing to see is this, that in this last battle, it's not David who hits the game winner, right? It's not David who makes the amazing play so that they can all go home happy and glad and sing their songs of victory. We don't get a romping story about David's strength.

Instead, we get a story where David grows weary. And David, the great rescuer of Israel, needs himself to be rescued. Isn't that interesting? And it's not David, but it's Abishai, one of David's men, who brings down the giant. And in verse 17, afterwards, all the soldiers are thinking, whoa, that was a close one. In fact, that was too close. And they all make a pact that David, from that point forward, is never ever going to go out with them again into battle. Because he is too important to the life of the people and the life of the nation to make that mistake again. And so from this point forward, David stays home.

But then, in the following verses, verses 18 through 21, the narrator sort of shows us an important point. And it's actually a point, it's a truth, that will extend all the way into the New Testament and comes down right to the church today, to you and me.

You see, if we were to read just verses 15 through 17, we might think that Abishai got lucky, right? That, you know, we might think that the army of Israel, and David too, for that matter, just dodged a huge bullet on this one. Abishai got lucky, he brought down the giant in just the nick of time, and they can all go home and sort of retrench their strategy.

[12 : 27] But lest we think, lest we think that this was just a fluke, just a sort of lucky shot that saved their skin, the narrator goes on to give us, not one, not two, but three more accounts where David's men bring down giants.

The narrator, drawing together the threads of his story, is saying, yes, in David's reign, the giants fell, and his men participated in the felling.

This is the point I think the narrator wants us to see. That the victory of the king is advanced through the people of the king.

That the great triumph of David is extended then, out and through his very people. Unlike the great athletes who make not-so-great coaches, who can't lead other people to greatness, around David, cropped up, grew a whole host of men who participated in his victory and took it forward.

Sibakai takes down a giant warrior named Saf. El Hanan defeats another Goliath. Which, if you look at the parallel text in 1 Chronicles 20, chapter 20, verse 5, we learn that this is actually the brother of the Goliath that David slew back in 1 Samuel 17.

[14 : 08] And lastly, Jonathan, not David's friend Jonathan here, but David's nephew, ends up defeating a man with 24 fingers and toes. Which, by the way, actually, is actually kind of a well-documented condition called polydactyly or hyperdactyly.

I didn't know that until I started learning about this passage. But according to the Children's Hospital in Boston, one out of every thousand births experiences some form of being born with multiple digits. Some stats actually say one in five hundred.

So it's actually pretty common. CBS News actually ran a story not long ago about a man from Cuba named Hernandez Garrido who had, you should look it up on the internet because the pictures are stunning. He has, I kid you not, unless this was a total hoax website, which I don't think it was, twelve perfectly looking fingers and toes.

Unbelievable. Anyway. But, back to the story. Like Goliath, back in 1 Samuel 17, this giant here, whoever he may be, with his 24 fingers and toes, also taunts Israel.

And like Goliath, those taunts are silenced. And he comes down. Again, not at the hand of David, but at the hand of one of David's men. And again, the point seems to be that the victory of the king is advanced through the people of the king.

[15 : 31] But note how the passage ends in verse 22. The narrator says, they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants. Now that's interesting, you think.

David's hand had nothing to do with these giants falling. But I think the point there is that there is a sense in which this is still rightly understood as David's victory.

The glory for this moment in Israel's history is still creditable to David. As the king, he's the one under whose command and presence God does these amazing things.

And because these men are connected to David by their bonds of allegiance and loyalty, they participate in his triumph and they take it forward. And as I mentioned just a moment ago, this pattern isn't just a feature of David's reign some 3,000 years ago.

But in fact, this pattern extends right into the New Testament and onward into the church today. What do I mean by that? What I mean is that when God took action in the book of Samuel here that we've been studying, when God, you remember how the book of Samuel starts?

[16 : 51] It starts with the people in massive spiritual decline. Probably one of the darkest moments in Israel's history. That's when the sort of pages of Samuel start. But when God took action through the historical events recorded in this book to renew his people and to raise up a king that would rescue them from their enemies, we see here that those who are connected to the king are swept up into that kingdom advancing work.

And in the New Testament, when God took action to renew his people once and for all, and when the king came who would truly rescue us from our enemies, not just our political enemies, not physical giants, but friends, our real enemies, the enemies of sin and death and condemnation.

When that king came, when God did that through Jesus Christ, what we see in the pages of the New Testament, friends, is that those who are connected to the king in loyalty of heart and allegiance, in other words, by faith, they too are swept up into that kingdom work.

Where do we see that? Well, we see it during the life of Jesus himself. In Luke chapter 10, Jesus, on the way to Jerusalem, sends out the 72, just like he had sent out the 12 before them, telling them to preach in his name and to do powerful works in his name.

There was Jesus sort of extending his kingdom movement through his followers. And so that's what they do. In John's gospel, chapter 14, verse 12, Jesus tells the disciples that after he ascends to the Father, after the definitive victory is won through his death and resurrection, that they will do even greater works than they had experienced during his earthly ministry.

[18 : 49] And after his resurrection, he tells them, go, make disciples of all nations. And right before his ascension, go be witnesses to the ends of the earth. My spirit's going to come upon you and you'll go.

In other words, this once for all victory of the king, sins forgiven, death conquered, the new creation begun, the victory of King Jesus now advances through the people of the king.

So we see it during Jesus' own lifetime and we see it in the life of the apostles themselves. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5, the passage we start our service with, that we are ambassadors of Christ, he says.

We've received reconciliation. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. And now, knowing that, we go to others with the message of reconciliation.

Be reconciled to God. Paul ends that passage. For we are ambassadors, friends, participants in the king's victory, agents of its advance.

[20 : 01] But you know, for my money, one of the most profound statements of this reality in the New Testament is found in Acts chapter 13. In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas are in the city of Pisidian Antioch, a little city sort of in south central Turkey.

And they've proclaimed the gospel in the synagogue of that city. They've proclaimed the good news that Jesus is God's long-awaited Messiah who fulfills Israel's story. Jesus is the true offspring of David who frees us from the condemnation of the law.

Jesus is the one who's born, sins, curse in our place and has liberated us. And then in verse 47 of that chapter, Paul and Barnabas say that they're taking this good news not just to the Jews, but they're taking it to the Gentiles as well.

And then, they quote Isaiah 49, verse 6, which says this, I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

Paul and Barnabas say this is what we're doing. God has made us a light for the Gentiles that we may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Now, here's the amazing thing.

[21 : 16] If you go back to Isaiah 49 and read that verse in context, who is Isaiah talking about? Well, Isaiah 49 is one of the servant songs of Isaiah.

And the servant songs in Isaiah, which we know in the light of the New Testament, are about the coming Messiah. They're about Jesus. Jesus is a servant of the Lord who's doing all, who sort of brings all this great thing to completion.

Jesus is the one through his own person and work will restore the people of God and be a light to the nations, which is what Isaiah 49, verse 6, is all about. He's the one who's going to bring the Gentiles into the family of God.

God. But, Paul and Barnabas in Acts chapter 13 understand what Jesus taught in his earthly ministry and what the Old Testament kingdom pattern showed all along that this great victory that the king had won was now being advanced through his people.

Paul knew that because he was united to Jesus by faith, because he had received the blessings of the gospel that now he had a role to play and that he would be a means whereby King Jesus extended his victory and light to the nations.

[22 : 41] Paul understood himself as so united to Christ and to his kingdom and to his message and to his mission that he could say, we're going as that light in the name of Jesus.

And friends, of course today, God's kingdom does not advance through swords but through words.

It's through the proclamation of the gospel. The New Testament is so clear about this that it's the word of God that is the real and lasting and true sword of the spirit, Paul will say in Ephesians 6.

You see, Israel's battles all along were types, they were pictures, they were foreshadows of an even more greater kingdom advance, the kingdom advance that we live in today.

Not about defeating political enemies or material means but about the spiritual kingdom of God advancing and changing hearts and communities. So when Paul tells the church in Ephesus to take up the armor of God, he's not telling them to take up metal and steel and guns and sword, he's telling them to gird themselves with hope and with love and with justice and with truth.

[24 : 00] And he's telling them to pray and he's telling them to proclaim and he's telling them to pour themselves out in self-giving love. And that these, from the world's perspective, very paradoxical, but these are the means whereby God's kingdom really advances in hearts and in communities.

And you know, the kingdom advance today won't necessarily mean material prosperity or physical health. Again, Paul in Romans 14, 17 says, the kingdom of God isn't a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

That's how you know the kingdom is taking roots in people's hearts, not because they're being materially blessed, but because there's an overflow of righteousness that leads to peace, that leads to joy, which you better believe if those three things are working in the human heart, that person is going to care about suffering and injustice in the world and they're going to work really hard to alleviate it.

And yet, how do we know that the kingdom's going forth when those three things are just richly dwelling in our midst? And like David's mighty men here in chapter 21, any advance that we get to participate in is ultimately the Lord's victory still.

Just like David's men got to share in the glory of seeing God grant them victory over tremendous foes, and yet at the end of the day, it was still in a sense on account of David that they fell and then everybody could say they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

[25 : 38] Friends, even more so for us today. Jesus is allowing us to share in his glorious kingdom advance and at the end of the day, all praise belongs to him.

But, united to him, we too experience the joy and glory of being participants in his kingdom. So we don't get to pat ourselves on the back or feel so great about ourselves that we're doing such great kingdom work.

It's God's work. Jesus is advancing his kingdom through his spirit and yet we get the joy of being swept up in that. But note another difference between our situation now under Christ and the situation then under David.

David's men in our passage acknowledge and knew that David was, as they say here, the lamp of Israel. He was the one, in other words, through whom God was beginning to dispel the darkness and beginning to renew the people.

And this idea of the lamp of Israel was actually an image that was kind of borrowed from the lampstand, a lot of commentators say, in the tabernacle. If you went into the first section of the tabernacle, what would you find there?

[26 : 56] Well, there was a bread where they laid, there was a table where they laid out some bread and there was an altar of incense. But then right here on your left, I think your left, would be a lampstand with seven lights on it, perpetually shining in the tabernacle.

Here was a lampstand symbolic of God's perpetual light shining forth, his warmth, his grace, his truth. And each one of those seven lights, what does the number seven make you think of?

Of course, it makes you think of the opening of the Bible, doesn't it? those seven sort of primordial creation days. And here was a light right in the middle of the people of God, seven lights saying, one day, I'm going to renew this creation from the inside out and I'm going to make all things new.

And it's going to happen through the shining of my light. And David, in his own way, was the way in which that light was beginning to be incarnated in the world.

And yet, as we see here, it was a fragile light, wasn't it? David's old in our passage. He's getting tired. And the men, in some sense, are worried that the light's going to be snuffed out.

[28 : 19] And of course, by God's grace, God allows it to endure. God had made a covenant promise with David that his offspring would sit on the throne forever.

And the greater David, Jesus Christ, would come and say, not just I'm the lamp of Israel, right? But Jesus would come and say, I'm the light of the whole world.

And as the prologue to John's gospel says, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. That the light of the resurrected Jesus, the light not just of Israel, but through Israel, through the whole world, will never grow dim and never be snuffed out.

And you know how the end of the Bible, you know how the Bible ends? There's the new heavens and the new earth recreated in beauty and glory. And what's in the middle of the new heavens and the new earth?

Not a temple, not a lamp stand. Jesus Christ himself giving light to everyone. And friends, that fact that Jesus is the perpetual new creation light of the world should give us the greatest confidence and the greatest courage to be participants in the victory that Jesus has won through his own death and resurrection.

[29 : 43] And it should give us great confidence and great courage to extend that work into the world. And at the same time, it gives us great humility, doesn't it? Because it's his work.

It's his Christ. It's his light. It's not ours. It's his. Let me close then with three really brief applications. First, as we look at ourselves, friend, realize that if you are in Christ, you have a role to play in his kingdom.

Cling tightly to him in allegiance, and begin to pray that he would show you where you belong in his kingdom advance. Second, as we look at the church, as you look around, what do you see?

Do you see sort of a ragtag assembly, kind of a motley crew as you look at the church, not just here at Trinity, but sort of citywide, worldwide? Or do you see the church as it really is in God's sight?

As the assembly of mighty men and women through whom the victory of the king is being made known in the world. The church is not perfect.

[31 : 02] I grant you that. I'm in it. Therefore, it is not perfect. Just like David's men of old weren't perfect, here's Abishai of Zeruiah once again.

Do you remember him? I think I've had to preach on all the passages about him. But, Jesus loves the church, friends. And as someone once said, I think commenting on the book of Acts, the church is God's plan A for the world.

And he doesn't have a plan B. Thankfully, God is faithful to his plan. And he won't let it fail. Third, as we look out at the world.

Friends, it was not a fluke that David's men brought down giants. They were united to God's anointed king. And friends, the world is no match for God's redemptive love in Christ.

Paul once described the gospel as the power of God for salvation to all who believe. Friends, don't fear. The gospel was power then and it is still so today.

[32 : 14] Even if things look dark, even if many so-called giants gather on the horizon, whatever they may be, the victory of the king will ultimately prevail.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we are humbled by the fact that you would take us, sinners as we are, bring us into your kingdom through the price of your own blood.

Make us your sons and your daughters and give us a mission. Lord, help us to live this out in a way that's in line with the truth of your gospel, with boldness and humility, with truth and gentleness, with love and justice.

Lord, make us a people whose words and actions are fitting to the nature of your kingdom, Jesus, and your death and resurrection. O Lord, would you lead us in our day to take great risks for the advance of your kingdom and to trust, Lord, that you are king and you are in control and you are the light of the world and one day that light will cover all things and make all things new.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.