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David's Mighty Men

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And it came to pass after this, that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob: then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which was of the sons of the giant. And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant. And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimeah the brother of David slew him. These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants" (2 Sam. 21:18-22).

This is a part of the recounting of the deeds of David's mighty men. What I want you to note is that there were a number of giants - apparently of the family of the original giant, Goliath - who were dealt with by these men of David; and alongside of that, in order to get us into our right and proper and up-to-date position, I recall to your minds the familiar words of Ephesians 6:10-12. "Finally, be strong in the Lord... Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities,... against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies". It is upon the relationship of these giants to the original giant, Goliath, that I want you to focus your attention.

A Corporate Answer To The Enemy's Challenge

You know that David himself first came into view in relation to the throne in connection with this original (and what we might call, inclusive) giant. It was in his victorious combat with Goliath that David was first taken account of publicly, and this marked his first step toward the throne of Israel, in relation to which he had been anointed. Now we have moved on some considerable distance, and

the security of that throne is seen to be the issue at the time of these mighty deeds. When these mighty men come into view, they, as in the case of David, are seen in relation to the throne and to him who is destined to occupy it. But the movement is one from the personal to the corporate. In David's case, it was personal. He fought a lone battle with Goliath; he was a lone figure on that field. When the giant challenged, all the people fled, but David moved out alone to accept that challenge and to answer it. But here, in the portion of the record with which we are now dealing, everything is corporate; but it is the same issue. It is all gathered up into a company. The one giant, the inclusive giant, has been fully dealt with and beheaded, but he has left some of his offspring, and they are all giants; and now the giant in corporate expression is being met by the corporate expression of the throne. That sets us very clearly in 'Ephesians'. We know that in the beginning of 'Ephesians' it is declared that the Lord Jesus has been raised up and set far above all rule and authority; the personal and the individual is an accomplished thing. But at the end of 'Ephesians' the Church comes into view in exactly the same connection, the issue of the throne as challenged by giants - principalities, authorities, world rulers, the great ones in the spiritual realm - as well as by the hosts of the lesser wicked spirits gathered around. I think that is perfectly clear. So that it is this company called David's mighty men who are brought in to meet the residue of the giant, to take up the same great issue of the throne and of him who is to occupy it. These giants are to be dealt with by the company as the giant was dealt with by the individual.

The Embodiment Of A Spirit

David's mighty men are not so much a class of people as they are the embodiment of a spirit. They express a spiritual state, a spiritual life. In Ephesians, it is the Spirit. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might"; and it is so clearly, in that letter, by the Spirit that we are strengthened with might into the inward man. Now there are two things to be noted about these mighty men.

Committal In Love To A Person

Firstly, they are committed to David. You cannot fail to see how they loved him, the devotion of these men to David himself. We shall come upon that again before we are through, but you will recall that some of their exploits were especially related to some breathed desire of his heart. It was to himself that they were devoted, and that was quite a discriminating feature. You notice that when the giant Goliath shouted, the people fled (1 Sam. 17:24). Why? Because they were mainly there for the benefits that they could get for themselves. It was a matter of how things affected them. That is the thing that is found in Israel's life so continually - when things were not favourable to their interests, then they were anywhere but in the right place and condition. They were all over the place because personal interests were so much in the ascendant. But these men were not at all concerned about their personal interests and how things affected them. It was David alone who mattered to them; and so when others who had lesser interests would flee because of the difficulty, because of the greatness of the adverse conditions, these men saw the adversity as an opportunity for proving their love for their lord. They were committed to him. It was, in principle, love for the Lord.

Committal To God's King

And then, of course, they were committed to his throne. Read carefully the things that are said about them, and you will find throughout that their loyalty was not just because of David as a person, but because they knew God's place for that person, because they had come to see that he was the man chosen of God to occupy the throne. The throne was for them the throne of the one of God's choice. They had to come to that through discipline, and to arrive at the point where Saul no longer held the ground for them. They saw that David was God's man for the throne. They were

committed therefore to him on the double ground of Divine destiny and of personal devotion. I am sure that simple truth needs no emphasis; here. We occupy ourselves much with the proclamation of those two things - that the Lord Jesus in Himself personally has won our hearts' allegiance, and also that we have come to see that He is the One Whom God has chosen for the place of supreme authority throughout this universe unto the ages of the ages; and we are committed - to Christianity, or to the Lord - not for merely personal reasons. If we were, when a giant loomed up we should very quickly be off the scene; the test, you see, is that. The Lord is really working very hard with us to try and woo us from our personal interests in Christianity and in our relationship with Him, because when things which touch us here on this earth and in our personal lives are threatened, we very often lose faith. We go down, we scatter spiritually, in the presence of an uprising threat to our interests here, even though we are Christians related to the Lord. We have to brush aside the consideration of how it affects us, and take a position in the interests of the Lord. It is a very testing and very important thing. We must say, 'It does not matter how it affects me, but how is the Lord going to suffer over this? What does the Lord stand to lose if I flee, or if this thing gains the ascendancy? How is it going to affect my Lord and to touch the great fact of His throne?' So these mighty men of David are distinguished from the general company of those who very largely are Christians for the sake of the blessings of Christianity and who are driven from the field by the enemy because their blessings are threatened. These mighty men speak of those who have got beyond that point of personal consideration and have seen the interests of Christ and the purposes of God centered in Him for universal dominion.

Corporate Responsibility For Throne Interests

There was a sense - and this gets very near to the heart of it - in which David had to be saved and succoured by these men. You notice in verses 16 and 17, one of these giants, in a set of new armour, marked out David and made him his object of destruction, and David was involved in very great peril. The man who had slain the original giant was now in peril from one of that giant's offspring, and one of the mighty men came to David's rescue and succoured him and slew the giant. Then David's men said to him, 'We cannot afford to lose you; you keep back and let us deal with this; we will come between you and this sort of thing.' You will say it is a wrong interpretation to put the Lord Jesus in David's place there - 'Lord Jesus, You keep out of this, we are going to look after You!' Yet there is a sense in which that is right where the Church is concerned; the very interests and honour and glory and throne of the Lord Jesus are bound up with the Church. The matter is no longer His alone, and there is a sense in which He stands to lose if the Church fails - in which God would say about His Son, 'This is not the time for you to come out personally; you have done that; this is the time for the Church to take up your interests.' David's life, David's throne, were put into the hands of these men, and they saw their responsibility, and how great it was, and what David stood to lose if they did not take definite action about it. There must be a company of the Lord's people who rise to that level, who see that the tremendous significance of the throne of the Lord Jesus is in their hands. In one way it sounds a presumptuous thing to say, but you see what I mean.

If we do not take responsibility over this matter of these evil forces in their assailing, if we are not strong in the Lord and do not move out against the principalities and powers, it is not only ourselves who are going to lose, but our Lord also. His throne is going to be affected. He has now, in a sense, made us responsible for the final issue, which is not personal but collective and corporate. So there must be a people (actual numbers are mentioned in David's case but we must not take that literally: they represent a specific inner company) who have seen the mighty issues of what is presented in the Letter to the Ephesians - those eternal counsels of God concerning Jesus Christ, and the place of the Church in those counsels as instrumental for their full realization - and have got through all personal interest in the matter of blessings, and are now committed to their Lord and to God's

intention concerning Him, and realize that the responsibility is with them. That is what I feel is the Lord's word to us at this time - not to be just 'ordinary' Christians, but to realize that God must have a company of His Own, in the midst of the general rank and file, who answer to David's mighty men, to take up the ultimate issues of Christ's Lordship on His behalf. The Lord is involved in these battles into which we are precipitated, and they are not just our battles, they are the battles of the Lord. There are situations and propositions which present themselves which are gigantic; they are paralysing if you can be paralysed. When Goliath started to shout, the people were literally paralysed - if that is in keeping with being able to run away! But all their strength went in the presence of this man's showing of himself. You can be petrified by some of the situations that the enemy brings about as tests of faith. And then what is it going to be? Well, one deciding factor will be whether we consider ourselves or our Lord; whether at once we begin to feel sorry for ourselves, get down on to our own ground - which is just what the enemy wants to bring about - or whether we say, 'Well, the Lord's name and honour are involved in this; the real issue here is the Lordship, the Sovereignty, the Ascendancy of the Lord' - and, as they did, meet the situation on that ground. They did not always wait for these enemies to come and start the thing. When the enemies loomed up before them, these men took the initiative. I am the last to suggest that we should be careless and frivolous over attacking spiritual forces. We can do that to our undoing; and I also remind you that this is a thing which it is very dangerous to do individually. This is the business for the Church - the corporate assault upon situations which loom up and which could literally paralyse and put out of action. The Lord must have people like this in whom there is the initiative of His Lordship.

Suffering For The Body's Sake

There must be some to meet the situation - may I use the word? - in a vicarious way. There are all the others, there is all Israel; but so many cannot stand up, they have not got the spiritual position, the spiritual measure; they are in spiritual weakness, and for them anything in the way of severe or extra trial or difficulty finds them at once paralysed and helpless. Is the enemy going to create a universal situation like that? No, for the sake of the Church there must be those who take this position of the mighty men vicariously for the sake of others, the strong to bear the burdens of the weak, to take the initiative on behalf of the Church for the Church's sake. I am sure that amongst the mighty men of the Lord Jesus the Apostle Paul has "attained unto the first three," and he was one who said "for His body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). He filled up that which was lacking of the sufferings of Christ for His Body's sake - vicarious suffering, not for sin, which is Christ's alone, but for the Church's victory. You are not unfamiliar with the large place in the New Testament given to the matter of spiritual strength and courage. I think that these stories are written in the Old Testament about David and his mighty men not as nice little picture book stories for the children, but as typifying what God means by courage, spiritual boldness, being strong in the Lord. There they are as great illustrations of these very passages which we have read from Ephesians. The message of the Lord to us is that He needs a company who, having seen what is involved in the spiritual warfare, will graduate out of the position of personal interests and personal blessing, and for the Lord's sake and for His people's sake take up the matter of the warfare with spiritual forces, and break a way through for the Church.