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August 20th: 2 Samuel 8 & Philippians 2:1-11

August 20, 2020



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David pacifies his enemies on all sides. 'Let this mind be in you...'

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Samuel chapter 8. After this David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and David took Methagammur out of the hand of the Philistines. And he defeated Moab, and he measured them with a line, making them lie down on the ground, two lines he measured to be put to death, and one full line to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute.

David also defeated Hadadizah the son of Rehab, king of Zobah, as he went to restore his power at the river Euphrates. And David took from him 1,700 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers. And David hamstringed all the chariot horses, but left enough for 100 chariots.

And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadizah king of Zobah, David struck down 22,000 men of the Syrians. Then David put garrisons in Aram of Damascus, and the Syrians became servants to David and brought tribute. And the Lord gave victory to

David wherever he went.

And David took the shields of gold that were carried by the servants of Hadadizah and brought them to Jerusalem. And from Beta and from Berethi, cities of Hadadizah, king David took very much bronze. When Toai, king of Hamath, heard that David had defeated the whole army of Hadadizah, Toai sent his son Joram to king David, to ask about his health and to bless him because he had fought against Hadadizah and defeated him, for Hadadizah had often been at war with Toai.

And Joram brought with him articles of silver, of gold, and of bronze. These also king David dedicated to the Lord, together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued, from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadizah, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah. And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the valley of Salt.

Then he put garrisons in Edom. Throughout all Edom he put garrisons. And all the Edomites became David's servants.

And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people.

Joab, the son of Zeruah, was over the army. And Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilod, was recorder. And Zadok, the son of Ahitab, and Himalek, the son of Abiathar, were priests.

And Saraiah was secretary. And Benaniah, the son of Jehoiada, was over the Cherithites and the Pelethites. And David's sons were priests.

In 2 Samuel chapter 8, after centuries of territorial insecurity, the territory of Israel expands under David, and their enemies on various sides are subdued. In verse 10 of the preceding chapter, the Lord had promised to David, And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. Now the Lord is bringing his word to pass.

As Peter Lighthouse notes, the chapter is ordered geographically. David's conquests move from the Philistines in the west, to the Moabites in the east, to Hadadiza of Zobah in the north, and then to the Edomites in the south. The kingdom is stretching out on all sides.

The Lord had promised an expansive territory to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 15 verses 18 to 21. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt, the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gilgashites, and the Jebusites. Under David, many centuries later, Israel is finally entering into possession of the promise.

David begins by defeating the Philistines. David of course first rose to prominence with his defeat of Goliath of Gath, the Philistine champion. Later, fleeing from Saul, he sought refuge in the land of the Philistines in Gath, and at a later point became a mercenary for Abimelech, living in Ziklag with his men.

The Philistines had struck against David when they saw the threat of him uniting Israel and Judah into one kingdom. They had failed in that assault. On two separate occasions they had been defeated by David.

The Philistines had been the dominant force in the region for quite some time. Back in the story of Samson, they clearly dominated Judah, the Judahites being prepared to sell Samson into their hands to protect themselves from reprisals. The Philistines had delivered a crushing blow to Israel in the battle of Aphek, with judgment falling upon the house of Eli, his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, dying on the same day, and he dying when he heard the news, and then the Ark of the Covenant being captured.

When it was returned after it had plagued the land, the unity of Israel's worship was not restored until a century later. Saul fought against the Philistines with his son Jonathan on a number of occasions, and won important victories, thanks especially to the courageous faith of Jonathan and David. However, at the battle of Gilboa, the Philistines struck down Saul and his sons, leaving Israel in a state of such insecurity that they could only regroup in the land of the Transjordan.

It is possible that in his early years as the king of Judah, David would have been a vassal kingdom of the Philistines. The Philistines in scripture are associated with Egypt, from chapter 10 of Genesis onwards. Some have suggested that the Philistines were established as a vassal kingdom of Egypt to bolster its power and its dominance over the land of Canaan.

However, as Egyptian dominance crumbled, the Philistines themselves filled the vacuum. In this passage, David and Israel are rising to dominate a land that was often ruled by vassal kingdoms of Mesopotamian empires to the north and Egyptian empires to the south. Verse 1 says that David took Methagana from the hand of the Philistines.

A number of commentators suggest that this is a reference to Gath as the mother city. In 1 Chronicles 18 verse 1, in the parallel passage, we read After this David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Gath and its villages out of the hand of the Philistines. David had of course sojourned in Gath for a while, and 600 Gittites had followed him.

This is a spectacular turnaround in just a few years. In the days of Saul, the Philistines had a monopoly upon ironworking. They had garrisons based throughout Israel, and then in the final defeat of Saul, they had wiped out large areas of the land.

David also defeats Moab. We're not told how the conflict started and who instigated it. But given David's treatment of the Moabite prisoners of war, even while it was likely considered lenient at the time, was possibly a judgement for a war that they had started.

We should recall that back in chapter 22 of 1 Samuel, David had sent his parents to the king of Moab to protect them. David also has Moabite blood through Ruth, his great-grandmother. Much of the passage is given to the discussion of the war to the north against Hadadiza and the kingdom of Zobah.

Hadadiza and other Arameans are mentioned in the following chapters, so it seems likely that much of the material in this chapter is not in chronological order, but is in thematic order, just as we were told of Solomon's birth a few chapters ago. The purpose is to underline the way that God is fulfilling his promises to Israel and to David, and the way in which he is giving them rest on all sides. David's victory leads to the winning of great spoil, and the spoil is dedicated to the Lord.

He obeys the law not to accumulate a great army of chariots, preserving only 100 horses for that purpose. He also wins friends to the north. Toai the king of Hamath sends his son Joram to King David, in thanks for David's defeat of Hadadiza, who had often been at war with his kingdom.

In 1 Chronicles chapter 18, Joram's name is given as Hadorum. The difference between the names Joram, the Lord is exalted, and Hadorum, Hadad is exalted, maybe suggests that there has been a name change and a conversion. Moving to the south, David dominates Edom.

He places garrisons throughout the land, and the Edomites become David's servants. Jacob's twin Esau comes under his sway. We might see Isaac's blessing of Jacob in which he gave him lordship over Esau as being fulfilled in these particular events.

Later on in 1 Kings chapter 11, we learn a bit more about the brutality with which Joab and David cut off the men of Edom, and the way in which an enemy is raised up from Edom to fight against Solomon. Along with pacifying the surrounding region and allowing Israel to finally dwell in peace, David conducts the internal affairs of the land with justice and equity. The chapter ends by describing the court of David.

The court of David is over the Kerithites and the Pelethites, who are David's bodyguard, and David's sons are described here as priests. This last identification has caused a lot of debate, since the kingly and the priestly line were quite clearly distinguished. In 1 Chronicles chapter 18, verse 17, they're described differently.

David's sons were the chief officials in the service of the king. How are we to make sense of this? It seems to me that the most promising explanation is found in the recognition that the temple is the palace of the Lord, and the priests are the household stewards or

officials. Consequently, it is appropriate to call the chief officials of the king in his palace his priests.

The term priest, then, does not have an exclusively religious meaning, and when we understand the analogy between the royal palace officials and the priests in the temple, we'll have a better understanding of the role of the priests more generally. Throughout this chapter, we're seeing God fulfil his promises. In verses 6 and 14, this is underlined by the expression, "...and the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went." Furthermore, just as the covenant made with David echoed the Abrahamic covenant in a number of details, so in this chapter we see the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise concerning the extent of the land.

God is fulfilling promises to Abraham through David. A question to consider. Comparing this chapter with 1 Chronicles chapter 18, how can we see the victory house-building pattern continue to play out? Philippians chapter 2 verses 1 to 11.

Philippians chapter 2 verses 1 to 11. The first half of Philippians chapter 2 is one of the most famous passages in all of Paul's writings. Many regard verses 5 to 11 as a sort of a Christological hymn.

Although it clearly has a pronounced poetic character, whether or not it was actually a hymn is uncertain, and there are various competing theories of the hymn's supposed origin. Paul begins the section by appealing to the Philippians. Do they enjoy encouragement in Christ? Do they find comfort in his love? Do they know fellowship in the Spirit? Do they know affection and compassion in him? Paul doesn't make the source of this encouragement, comfort, fellowship, affection and compassion plain.

However, while the primary source is clearly Christ, it probably also includes what they experience from brothers and sisters in Christ too. If they do have these things, they should go even further and make Paul's joy complete. They have already brought him great joy, as he has made clear, but they could raise his joy to even greater heights.

They can do this by pursuing unity of mind and love with each other. By mind, Paul is referring to mindset and attitude. In unpacking what this united mindset should involve, Paul contrasts selfish ambition and conceit to a humility that puts others ahead of themselves, and which is mindful of and concerned for others' well-being.

The success of the Christian understanding of virtue can be seen in part by the fact that we are probably not startled by this exhortation from Paul. In the Roman culture of the Philippians, humility would not be regarded as such a virtue. Rather, it would be regarded as weak and servile.

To many minds, this passage is the very height of the sort of slave morality that Friedrich Nietzsche identified as subverting the master morality of nobility, strength of

will, pride, power and courage. Until we have some grasp of the mindset of the typical Roman, the shock of Paul's teaching here won't hit us. This passage is a direct assault upon the fundamental morality of the society Paul was living in.

The importance of Christians recognising, being attentive to, serving and not exerting their strength at the expense of others is a recurring theme in Paul's writing. Rather than vaunting themselves over others, pursuing their own rights, advancing themselves ahead of others, acting without regard for others, or putting others down to privilege themselves, the Philippians are to act out of a humility with regard to themselves and an attention to the value of others. Just how revolutionary this vision of morality was is difficult for us to grasp in a society that has inherited the world that it transformed.

The historian Tom Holland has recently written about the way in which the entire world of Rome was built upon systemic exploitation and brutality and an extreme master morality. Millions were killed and many millions more enslaved, and that was something to boast in. It was a sign of might, a sign of the Roman will to power achieving its ends.

Sex, for instance, was about the free Roman man and the eclipse of the concerns of the parties that they exerted their dominance over. Paul's teaching here goes for the jugular of such a society, rejecting and disqualifying it outright. In this message and the good news of a king that, as we will see, exemplifies this humility and meekness, this entire Roman way of perceiving the world would be brought down.

In the section, or perhaps the hymn that follows, Paul presents the example of Jesus himself, an example in which, as we will soon see, humility is presented as something divine. You can imagine the Roman man responding to the notion of humility as a virtue by claiming that such a virtue might perhaps have a place for slaves and women, who need to put some positive spin upon their weakness and lowliness. By suggesting that humility is a virtue, the unavoidable state of servility can be made somewhat less alienating.

However, the free Roman man is above such morality. He has strength, power, status, and humility is just for those who lack such things. However, the biblical understanding of humility is not just the lack of power, will or greatness.

Humility can be seen in God himself, as God displays his power and greatness, not in self-aggrandizement, but in service of the weak and dependent. In Jesus the Messiah, the Lord of the Universe is revealed to be a humble God. When we are called to adopt the mindset of the humble, we are not being called to act as slaves, crafting a vision of morality around the unavoidable condition of our powerlessness and our resentful frustration at the master morality of those who lord over us, but as those who are imitating our master, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, following in his path.

The hymn, if we are to call it that, divides into two parts, verses 6 to 8 tell of Christ's

humiliation and verses 9 to 11 of his exaltation overall. The focus of the first section is upon Christ's voluntary humiliation. From the outset we can see that Paul is working with an extremely high Christology.

Christ pre-exists his birth. We have hints of this elsewhere in Paul, in places like 2 Corinthians 8, 9. However, it is at its clearest here and in Colossians 1, 15-20. Christ isn't just sent by the Father, he voluntarily empties himself and comes.

Various commentators have suggested that Paul is drawing a contrast between Christ and Adam, much as he does in Romans 5, the connection with the servant of Isaiah that some have proposed is weaker if it is present at all. Adam had been made in the image of God and had grasped at equality with God in the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By contrast, Christ, being the very image of God, did not regard the equality with God that he already possessed as something to be exploited or used for his own advantage.

The translation here is difficult and even when scholars agree with the general sense of the passage, the more precise sense is a matter of some lively debate. The translation in the form of God might remind us of Colossians 1, 15. The word the ESV translates as a thing to be grasped is even more debated. Some have suggested, for instance, that the word translated as robbery or a thing to be grasped or something to be exploited might have a more particular reference to something to be exploited for rape and robbery.

At the very least, this would sharpen the contrast between Christ and the false gods of the pagans, whose divine power was used precisely for such self-aggrandisement and exploitation of others, often involving rape of human women, as in the case of Zeus, on numerous occasions. This is what divine power looked like to the Greeks and the Romans. Christ stands out, then, not only from Adam, but also from the false gods and idols.

While Adam was made in God's image but sought to grasp at equality with God, Christ had equality with God, yet did not exploit it. Rather, he voluntarily forwent all his prerogatives and assumed the position of a slave, someone without any of the honour that he possessed by right. Many have speculated about what it would have meant for Jesus to empty himself, an act referred to as his kenosis.

Some have argued that he gave up his divine power and other divine attributes, ceasing to be truly God in order that he might become truly man. This, of course, must be rejected, not merely on the grounds of Christian orthodoxy, but also on the basis of a proper reading of this passage. The full force of Paul's teaching cannot be appreciated unless we recognise that Christ's emptying of himself was, far from a departure from divinity, a true manifestation of it.

Christ, who was in the form of God, took the form of a slave. The seeming contrast could

not be sharper. But the contrast is a revelatory one and isn't fundamentally opposing.

The character of God is revealed in Christ's assuming the character of a slave. What the form of a servant involved becomes clearer when we are told that he was born in the likeness of man and was found in human form. However, this wasn't the measure of the depth of Christ's self-humbling.

He, like a slave, took the path of obedience. The path of obedience to the cross itself, practically the most humiliating death imaginable, the annihilation of all dignity, status, honour, glory, belonging, all these sorts of things. In his disobedience, Adam had taken from the tree to grasp at equality with God.

In his obedience, Christ went to the tree, not merely to reverse Adam's action, but also to reveal what God is truly like. In John's Gospel, for instance, it is in the cross that Christ is lifted up. This is the beginning of his glorification.

God is not as we expected him to be. The hymn concludes with a movement of exaltation that responds to the downward movement of the first half. Christ did not exalt himself, but God highly exalted him.

Indeed, God exalted him to the greatest degree imaginable. His name is above every name. Every knee everywhere must bow before him, and every tongue must confess his lordship.

The name that Christ receives is the name that is above every name. There is only one such name, the name of God himself. In his exaltation, Jesus' divinity is openly proclaimed.

When we baptise, for instance, we do so in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Not three different names, but the one name of the Triune God. Of course, Jesus doesn't become divine in his exaltation.

Rather, his divinity is openly declared. And as it is declared, the way of the cross that led to that exaltation is declared to be the way of God himself. In bestowing the name that is above every name, upon Jesus, the Father sets him forth as the one to whom the worship of all is due.

Every knee must bow and every tongue confess. There is an expression taken from the Old Testament here. Isaiah 45, verses 18-23 reads, For thus says the Lord who created the heavens, he is God, who formed the earth and made it, he established it, he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited.

I am the Lord, and there is no other. I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness. I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, seek me in vain.

I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right. Assemble yourselves and come, draw near together, you survivors of the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a God that cannot save.

Declare and present your case, let them take counsel together. Who told this long ago, who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour, there is none beside me. Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.

By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return. To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance. The one true God was unique in creating the world.

The one true God is unique in his rule over the world. And the one true God will demonstrate his uniqueness over against the idols through the great salvation that he will bring about. This is what the Lord is speaking of in this passage in Isaiah.

And the proof of all of this is that the day will come when every knee will bow to him, and every tongue will swear allegiance to him. Read against such a background, Philippians chapter 2 could not be more astonishing. Paul's startling message is that the uniqueness of God has been revealed in Christ, and if that wasn't remarkable enough, it has been revealed in the self-emptying way of the cross.

God will not give his glory to another, but the Father is glorified in his Son who lives and reigns with him in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Glory and God-likeness is found not in self-aggrandizement, but in humility and in the path of service to others. If the Philippians take on the mindset that Paul wishes them to, they will be formed according to the character of the Lord of all, according to the character of God himself.

A question to consider, how might knowing that God's true character is seen in Jesus challenge some of our preconceptions about God and about virtue?