

2nd Samuel 21:15-22
Coping with the Fatigue of Constant Warfare
...and David waxed faint – v. 15

You may have heard it said along the way that one of the reasons it's good to preach through entire books of the Bible is that it forces the preacher to deal with matters that he might not deal with otherwise. A number of us saw the documentary presentation of the life and legacy of Martyn Lloyd-Jones this past Friday. I can remember reading his book on preachers and preaching in which he said the very thing I'm now saying. By going through particular books of the Bible the preacher can avoid simply taking his favorite themes or his favorite doctrines and preaching on them over and over again.

As we come to the end of this 21st chapter of 2nd Samuel I see another good reason for that kind of preaching also. Not only does going through a book force the preacher to deal with the topics of that book that he might not otherwise deal with but he's also forced to place an emphasis on certain things that he might not otherwise emphasize. And as you find certain themes coming up again and again then you're able to conclude that God, in His wisdom, is the One that has placed an emphasis on a certain truth or a certain doctrine or a certain practice.

No matter how hard a preacher might try, there's simply no way he can go through 2nd Samuel without seeing a very strong emphasis on the theme of warfare. And we should take that to mean that the Holy Spirit who moved men of old to write the books of the Bible deemed it necessary and beneficial to place such a strong emphasis on that theme. We've noted this in previous studies. We only recently dealt with the way David had to go to war against Sheba when Sheba led an uprising against David. And before that we looked into the uprising of Absalom against his father, David.

And in the course of these studies we've seen David's wars. If you can picture the preacher pounding the pulpit in every chapter that brings to the attention of his audience this matter of warfare then when you get to these verses at the end of chp. 21 you'll have to picture the preacher pounding the pulpit again and again and again and again.

Look at these verses with me:

- Verse 15: *Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel*
- Verse 18: *And it came to pass after this, that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob*
- Verse 19: *And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines*
- Verse 20: *And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, ...*

The great Baptist preacher, C.H. Spurgeon preached a sermon at the Royal Surrey Gardens on May 1, 1859 entitled **War! War! War!** He was not preaching on the text

we're studying this morning (His text was actually from 1Sam. 18:17) but certainly his title for that sermon would be a fitting one for this sermon this morning and for these texts.

What I want to call your attention to this morning, however, is the impact of years of warfare upon David. Notice what we read in v. 15 paying particular attention to the end of the verse: *Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint.* Another version says *and David grew weary*; Still another version puts it this way: *and he (David) became exhausted*.

Do you find anything in that statement that you can relate to spiritually? Do you grow faint? Do you grow weary? Do you become exhausted? There seems to be a consensus among some commentators, anyway, that this narration takes place in the later years of David's life. They take his faintness in this verse to be an indication that David just didn't have the same agility and strength that he knew in younger days – much the same way a professional football or baseball player loses his edge after he's played his sport for a number of years.

I wouldn't have you think, however, that the phenomenon of waxing faint is only something that older people know. In those well known verses at the end of Isa. 40 we read in vv. 29,30 *He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.*

And no wonder – like David, you see, our spiritual warfare is constant. The title to Spurgeon's sermon aligns itself with our experience – **War! War! War!** And constant warfare leads to fatigue. Let's face it – we're not exactly living in a world that gives us ample opportunity to relax. Husbands are busy – the demands upon them are great. And Mothers are amazing – I don't know how they do all that they do. And single women who in our culture must practically give themselves to doing men's work – they can't help but feel strained. And all of this in a world that is at war with Christ adds a spiritual element to all that we do and the devil and the forces of darkness never seem to grow weary.

So it's no small wonder that we read in v. 15 that David waxed faint and it's no small wonder that we find ourselves growing faint and becoming weary. And so the issue I want to analyze this morning is this issue of growing weary in the midst of our spiritual warfare. *Let us not be weary in well doing* Paul writes to the Galatians. Isn't that easier said than done? My theme, if you will, is just this: Coping with the Fatigue of Constant Warfare.

How do We Cope with the Fatigue of Constant Warfare?

I'm going to give a negative answer to the question first by considering that:

I. We Must Not Think It Strange

We live in a world that is hostile to Christ and hostile to grace. Christ said there would be wars and rumors of wars. And don't we find wars without and wars within? David certainly knew the reality of that, didn't he? All his life it would seem he was engaged in some kind of warfare. I traced for you a moment ago the verses in this section that tell us that yet again there was a battle. This isn't the only place you find that phrase. All the way back in 5:22 we read *And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.*

Twice in chp. 5 you have the Philistines coming against David and twice you find David defeating them. You would hope that once you got to chp. 8:1 you would gain a reprieve. Listen to what that verse says: *And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them.* And for a time they were subdued. But the Philistines weren't David's only challenges. When you make your way through chapter 8 you find a number of other battles that David had to fight.

8:10-14: Then Toi sent Joram his son unto king David, to salute him, and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer, and smitten him: for Hadadezer had wars with Toi. And Joram brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass: 11 Which also king David did dedicate unto the LORD, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued; 12 Of Syria, and of Moab, and of the children of Ammon, and of the Philistines, and of Amalek, and of the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah. 13 And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of salt, being eighteen thousand men. 14 And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants.

When you think about it, these wars were not the only wars David had to fight. These were the wars that took place from without the nation of Israel. There were also wars from within the nation – As I mentioned earlier there was the war against Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul and the war against Absalom which was followed by the war against the uprising of Sheba.

But we can add even more to the number. Not only do we find wars, so to speak, within the nation but wars or conflicts within the very house of David. You remember Michal, David's first wife? – how put out she was with David when he danced before the ark when it was brought back to Jerusalem? That led to an argument between them the outcome of which led to her practically speaking being put away. And we have the account of Absalom slaying his brother Amnon in order to avenge his sister who had been defiled by Absalom. In his estimation his dad had been a very poor father for failing to deal with a matter that he felt should have been handled differently and better by David. But because David wasn't the kind of father Absalom thought he should have been Absalom would eventually rise up in rebellion against his father and would chase him out of Jerusalem and would kill him if he could.

But not only do we find wars from without the kingdom, and wars within the kingdom, and wars from within the very household of David but you can also say that you find wars within the very heart of David himself – war against his conscience that he tried for a while to suppress. *When I kept silence*, he says in Ps. 32:3 *my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.*

From whence come wars and fightings among you? James asks in James 4:1 *come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* Conflicts and wars on so many levels in so many areas so much of the time. What a fitting phrase in our narrative when we read *And there was again a battle in Gob – v. 19; And there was yet a battle in Gath – v. 20.*

Have you ever asked yourself – *Is this really what the Christian life is suppose to be?* I thought Christ's yoke was not suppose to heavy and that His burden was light. I thought I was suppose to know nothing but peaceful bliss and joy and rest. Didn't Jesus say *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you* in Jn. 14:27. And the answer is yes – Jesus did indeed say that but here's where the problem often arises – *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you* but then what follows? There follows these words: *not as the world giveth, give I unto you.*

Isn't that very often what we're looking for – the peace of the world? What does the world expect when it comes to the notion of peace? The world expects just this – comfort and ease. The comfort of an uninterrupted routine that enables you to climb the ladder in your employment which in turns enables you accumulate more things and take longer vacations. Basically the world's peace is the peace to live out in fuller measure the American dream. Oh there may come that petty annoyance on occasion – when the children take issue with a household rule or your spouse has a minor question about something you've done or not done – but because all is peace and bliss, those petty annoyances are quickly resolved when you display your superior wisdom which is instantly recognized and submitted to while at the same time you are admired for being so wise and spiritual.

And when that tidy little scenario doesn't seem to match reality then you're tempted to ask – what's wrong with everybody? Or what's wrong with my religion? Or what's wrong with God Himself? Or what's wrong with me? And the thing that's wrong may be that you've made the mistake of thinking that the peace Jesus gives will be like the peace the world gives – the peace of materialism, the peace of health and wealth, the peace of rarely, if ever, having your comfort zone invaded. It's a Joel Osteen kind of peace or a home on the range kind of peace where seldom is heard a discouraging word and the skies are not cloudy all day.

There is to be sure a peace to be known. When we carry our study of 2nd Samuel into the next chapter we'll discover that the entire chapter is a Psalm, a Psalm of praise. And we'll have occasion to note that David's praise is not based on an easy life of affluence and

comfort and ease. NO – it's based, rather, on the faithfulness of God to uphold him and sustain him and deliver him during all his times of strife and distress.

So think it not strange – that's what Peter says with regard to fiery trials. We can take his exhortation and apply it to our warfare. 1Peter 4:12 *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.* And among the reasons for thinking it not strange could be added the life of David to which I would add the words of Christ: Joh 16:33 *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

How do we cope, then, with fatigue – fatigue that comes through constant warfare? A good place to start is to realize that there's a very real sense in which warfare is our portion. Think it not strange. Now admittedly, if this was all that I could offer from God's Word to help you cope with fatigue then the only thing that would be accomplished would be to add to your fatigue. It is important, however, that we gain some perspective on our battles and trials. But let's consider next that not only must we not think that our warfare is strange but:

II. We Must Not Allow the Light to Diminish

Notice again the words that begin in the middle of v. 17: *Then the men of David sware unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel.*

It's interesting to see here, isn't it, that the Israelites saw David to be the light of the nation. It makes me wonder – did they see David this way only because he was their king? One might argue, I suppose, that when the Philistines defeated king Saul at the battle of Gilboa that the light of Israel was quenched for a time. The nation was left in disarray and the people were scattered and made subservient to the Philistines.

And now with the kingdom solidified under David there was certainly no desire to have that light quenched again. And the Israelites recognized, didn't they, that David was not in his prime any more. The narrative indicates that this was a close call for David. He was nearly slain and would have been slain by one of the sons of the giant had it not been for Abishai coming to David's aid.

I wonder though if the Israelites saw more than that. I wonder if the spiritually minded men among them saw that a greater light was destined to arrive through David and for that reason David must be protected? David himself, I believe, understood that. When the Lord entered into a covenant with David back in chp. 7 I think David saw a much greater significance to God's design than just extending David's dynasty.

At any rate – we certainly are able to see in our day that there was a greater David to come and that there would be therefore a much greater light to come. *I am come a light into the world*, Christ says in Jn. 12:46 *that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*

I am the light of the world He says earlier in Jn. 8:12 *he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* There's a spiritual sense, then, in which we face the same challenge as the Israelites in David's day. They did not want their light to be quenched and so David must retire from the battle field.

Now, the analogy here between David and Christ obviously has some limitations. For while it's true that while He walked this earth Christ did know about such things as tiredness and fatigue – He was a man with a real humanity – but by the same token, it would not be correct to say that Christ knows such limitations today in glory. The word of the Psalmist applies to Christ when he writes in the 121st Psalm *Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep* (v. 4). And Christ is not seen and should not be viewed as a King that is retired from the battle field the way David was retiring from the battle field. Not at all – I believe He's seen in the book of Revelation as the One who goes forth conquering and to conquer.

And so I recognize the limitations to the analogy between David and the greater David who is Christ Himself. But by the same token, I also recognize that there is a spiritual sense in which we face the same challenge that the Israelites faced which was the challenge of not allowing the light of Israel to diminish. In our case that light will not diminish because of anything inherent in Christ our King. He shines as brightly as He ever has in all His majestic splendor but the thing that causes even that glorious light to diminish is the dimness or the weakness of our faith in that glorious light.

When carnal sight sees and assigns a stronger reality to the passing things of this world than spiritual sight assigns to the unseen things that are eternal, then our light diminishes and when that light diminishes, fatigue overtakes us and weighs us down. My favorite illustration of this and one I've referred to often is found in the book of Numbers. It's the account of those 12 spies that were sent by Moses to scout out the promised land. They saw the glory of that land, you may recall. They testified that it was indeed a land that flowed with milk and honey.

But they also saw the obstacles. Just like in our passage today in 2nd Samuel 21 there were giants in Numbers 13. *And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, they say in v. 33 which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.* Question – how brightly was the light of Israel shining when those spies gave their report? Answer: for 10 of those 12 spies it wasn't shining brightly at all. All they could see were the obstacles – the strong warriors and the high-walled cities which made conquering the promised land impossible in their estimation.

For two of the spies, however, Caleb and Joshua, that light shone with much greater clarity and fullness. *Let us go up at once, and possess it* they say in Num. 13:30 *for we are well able to overcome it. ... We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we* the other ten spies counter. Now let me ask you a question this morning that I want you to honestly answer in your own heart. The question is this: How brightly

does the light of Israel shine in your heart today? Or to put it more precisely – how brightly does the light of the gospel shine in your heart?

I have always found the words of Joshua and Caleb so profound in the next chapter of Numbers as the narrative that describes the contention between them and the other 10 spies carries over into that chapter. And here is where you may gain some help in being able to answer the question about how brightly that light shines in your heart.

Listen to these words from Num. 14:8. These are the words of Joshua and Caleb: *If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.* You see the key? *If the LORD delight in us...* If the light of the gospel (or the light of Christ) is shining brightly in your heart then you'll understand the basis for the Lord delighting in you. He delights in you because He delights in His Son and He sees you in His Son. If that light is not shining brightly because your heart is ruled more by what the carnal eye sees than what faith affirms then you'll grow weary in the battles of life.

And so the challenge is the challenge of basking in gospel light. And what that means is that you expose yourself to the preaching of Christ to the point that you are able to preach Christ to yourself and preach Him to others. There's an aspect of this narrative that I haven't even touched and that's the generational aspect of the narrative. Did you notice that the Philistine foes to Israel that are mentioned in these verses consist of 4 sons that were born to Goliath? Look at v. 22 *These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.*

That's a sure indication, isn't it, that when giants fall more giants arise. That will always be the case. Some may be of the opinion that the giants of opposition to Christ we face in our day are larger and stronger than giants have ever been. I don't think so. There's been imposing and intimidating giants that opposed Christ in every generation. But notice also that the ones who slay these giants are the ones of the next generation. That's stated in the case of a man by the name of Jonathan mentioned in v. 21. He's the son of David's brother, which means he's David's nephew. And it's certainly implied that the other characters were of that up and coming generation.

Which means, then, doesn't it, that the challenge we face is the challenge of not only preaching Christ to ourselves and living in the reality of His delight in us but teaching our children to believe the same thing and to live the same way. And when this is done then the two things come together – warfare, but peace in the midst of our warfare. The warfare is constant so don't harbor the notion that that's ever going to change. Don't fall for the lie that tells you that you can have no peace until that kind of conflicts stops. The peace that can and should be your portion will be the peace of believing that Christ delights in you.

If that peace which is not the peace that the world gives – if that peace will rule your heart through the gospel of Jesus Christ then you'll know peace in the midst of your warfare rather than peace that you mistakenly think can come by being excused from your warfare. May the Lord convict and convince you, then, that Christ, by virtue of His life

and atoning death has taken you to Himself. You are His and He is yours and He will never disown you. He's paid too high a price for you to ever let that happen. To the degree that you can affirm that – to that same degree you'll fortify yourself for the continual battles that you will face. By studying and basking in the love of Christ, seeking the Holy Spirit to shed the reality of that love in your heart, you'll be able to do what David does in the next chapter. Listen to these words from 2Sam. 22. Notice the vividness of the images that depict spiritual vitality:

Verse 29: For thou art my lamp, O LORD: and the LORD will lighten my darkness. 30 For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall. 31 As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. 32 For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God? 33 God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. 34 He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: and setteth me upon my high places. 35 He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. 36 Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great.

May the light of Christ shine so brightly upon your soul that you'll be able to make this affirmation and live in its truth.