

The Young Will Lead to Victory

1 Kings 20:1-21; 1 Timothy 4:12

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Church history is like a long marathon relay race in which what we have graciously been given by way of the gospel and truth of Jesus Christ must be passed along at some point to the next generation of growing Christians. Will the covenanted truths for which we have contended in our families and church continue or will they be dropped by way of neglect, apathy, compromise, or rejection?

My heart's earnest prayer is that you, dear covenanted children and young people and young adults, would joyfully take the gospel and commandments of the Lord entrusted to you and run with patience your portion of that great race, and likewise pass along to the next generation those same pure doctrines and practices in worship that the Lord Jesus has revealed in His Word. It is through you, young people, that by God's grace and power we who are older see God's victory carried forward in the work of reformation in the family, church, and nation. We who are older will not be here forever. Prepare yourselves to run that race in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

From our text this Lord's Day, we will see how the Lord used young people to bring a mighty victory to Israel against their enemies. The main points from our text are the following: (1) Ben-hadad's Pride Revealed (1 Kings 20:1-12); (2) God's Unexpected Deliverance Revealed (1 Kings 20:13-21).

I. Ben-hadad's Pride Revealed (1 Kings 20:1-12).

A. As 1 Kings 20 begins, we see that Samaria (the capital of Israel) is besieged by the overwhelming Syrian army that has a coalition of 32 other kings as well (1 Kings 20:1).

1. King Ben-hadad of Syria recognizes his great advantage over Israel and sends a letter to King Ahab demanding total surrender and submission to him (1 Kings 20:2-3). The demand of Ben-hadad means that Ahab recognizes Ben-hadad's dominion over his silver and gold and over his wives and children (not the actual taking of all his silver and gold and of his wives and children). King Ahab submits to this demand (1 Kings 20:4).

2. But then Ben-hadad goes even beyond the submission of Ahab and now seeks the complete humiliation of Ahab before his entire kingdom (1 Kings 20:5-6). This new and additional demand goes beyond acknowledging the dominion of Ben-hadad over the kingdom of Israel to taking and possessing whatever Ben-hadad and his servants desire (even to any member of Ahab's family). Ben-hadad knew how this would bring Ahab into such scorn and hatred with His own people that he would never recover from it (the people would be more at war with Ahab than with Ben-hadad over such a betrayal).

3. Ahab calls together a convention of the elders of Israel to hear this new demand and to hear counsel from them (1 Kings 20:7). With one voice, all of the elders of Israel counsel Ahab not to consent to this new and additional demand (1 Kings 20:8).

4. Ahab then sends his response to Ben-hadad's new demand, indicating he will submit to Ben-hadad's dominion, but will not submit to Ben-hadad's actual possession of all that he desires (1 Kings 20:9). Ben-hadad curses the city of Samaria with total destruction (1 Kings 20:10). The utter destruction of Samaria will be so great and final by so many invading soldiers that there will be nothing left but the dust of the ground for his army to carry off with them.

5. Ahab's response is classic (even a wicked fool will by God's mercy respond with wise words): Read 1 Kings 20:11. In other words, don't let him that is preparing for battle boast as if he had already conquered his enemy. Don't be swollen with pride as though your advantage in numbers guarantees you

victory. This so incenses Ben-hadad that he stops his drinking to his victory and calls his soldiers to prepare for battle (1 Kings 20:12).

B. Let us make application from this historical narrative to our own lives as to what God would teach us from His Word.

1. Ahab reproves Ben-hadad for boasting in a victory from a battle that he had not yet fought. We are reproved as well by the Holy Spirit. Beware of boasting in what you have or shall accomplish, which is the swelling of pride within—Samson and Peter (Proverbs 16:18).

a. Many do not take seriously the battle of being a Christian, of being a Christian spouse, of being a Christian parent, of being a Christian minister or elder as they begin with good intentions, boasting to themselves and to others how no enemy will overcome them, how their marriage will not face the difficulties that others have faced, how they will be the best Christian parents ever, how they will rise in their business or company and make a name for themselves, or how they will be powerful ministers and elders in directing the church to greatness. We are warned by the words of Ahab that we should be ever so careful not to boast about our intentions, especially as we set out into the battlefield that is before us. Intentions do not often take into account how difficult the battle will be. Intentions are not often honest in evaluating the enemies that we will face. Be humble (depending upon the Lord Jesus) rather than filled with pride in your own abilities as you begin any new endeavor. Pride comes before a fall. The proud are more likely to be caught by surprise at the trials and afflictions they will face than the humble who prepare in advance for those trials and afflictions.

b. The proverb of Ahab certainly implies that we should recognize that we are in a battle with the enemies of our soul, who want to exercise dominion over us and to possess us. If you do not take seriously the battles you will face every day, you will be overtaken by the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The enemy is serious. The enemy does not sleep in plotting against you. You must not begin a day, thinking you are sufficient, or thinking the Lord's Supper from a month ago will get you through this day's battle, or thinking yesterday's victory assures you of today's victory. You must begin every day, putting on the full armor of God, preparing to overcome the enemy in the power of Christ's death and resurrection.

c. The more you promote your own honor and accomplishments before others (as did Ben-hadad), the more you are likely to be dishonored and humiliated before others. For it is not those who trumpet forth their own giftedness or greatness that endear the trust and confidence of others, but rather those who humbly go about doing their job efficiently without drawing attention to themselves by self-advertisement (the referrals of others is better advertisement than your own boasting). When you are given over to your own boasting and shine the spotlight upon your own accomplishments before others, it generally indicates that you are more interested in serving yourself than you are in serving the Lord or serving others. How often do you defend yourself when attacked by rehearsing all of your accomplishments? Who do you want others to see working in and through you? Do you want others to see you or the Lord Jesus?

d. This boasting and swelling in pride can be observed whether you are in authority or under authority, but note how this was observed in the words of Ben-hadad even after Ahab had submitted to his dominion. A test of a man's character is seen in the way he exercises his authority over others. Is authority all about dominion and possession over wife, children, employees, congregation etc., or is authority all about loving, protecting, feeding, and leading those entrusted to your care? You see, men, we are simply acting like Ben-hadad when authority is about dominion and possession (then we simply use others to prop up our ego rather than loving others and leading them in the paths of truth and righteousness). Leading with humility is far more likely to gain followers than leading with pride. Dear Christian ladies, the pride that you see within us as husbands, fathers, or elders, does not mean that you have an excuse not to submit to all lawful commands, it simply makes submission more difficult and yet even more honoring to the Lord when it

is more difficult.

2. There is one battle about which you can rightfully boast that total victory is coming. It is the battle that you daily wage against the world, the flesh, death, and the devil. You are guaranteed final victory over those enemies through Christ; for you are united to the King in His death and resurrection over all His and your enemies (Romans 8:35-37).

II. God's Unexpected Deliverance Revealed (1 Kings 20:13-21).

A. Ben-hadad aroused himself from his drunken celebration of his anticipated victory (1 Kings 20:12), but God intervenes in mercy for a covenant-breaking nation by sending His prophet (who he was we are not told) to issue the promise of victory to Ahab (1 Kings 20:13).

1. Ahab asks the prophet who would lead forth in this victory, and Ahab is told the young men of the princes would lead them (1 Kings 20:14). These were not trained soldiers, but the servants and attendants of the princes of Israel. Upon numbering these untrained young men, he counts 232, to which are added 7,000 soldiers within the walls of Samaria to fight against the massive force of the Syrian king (1 Kings 20:15).

2. Israel prepares for battle while Ben-hadad and the 32 kings are drunk in celebrating their supposed victory. The untrained young men are set at the front of Israel's small band of soldiers and are commanded to strike the great multitude of the Syrian army (1 Kings 20:16-19). They go forth with amazing courage and put the trained (likely drunken Syrian soldiers) to flight, slaying them with a great slaughter to the glory of God (1 Kings 20:20-21).

B. Let us make some final applications from our text to our own lives before we close.

1. What a mercy was shown here to Ahab and to all of Israel. Perhaps the previous victory of Elijah on Mt. Carmel yet had affected many within Israel (perhaps even Ahab to some degree—it was not Ahab that threatened the life of Elijah, but Jezebel, 1 Kings 19:1-3). The fact that Ahab listens to and obeys the word of the Lord to him through this unnamed prophet would tend to demonstrate this as well. The Lord preserved Israel from total destruction and preserved her not because she was such a godly nation, but because of His covenant promises to her through Abraham, Moses, and David—for His own name's sake did He bring victory (just as He does and will do in your life and mine). The Covenant of Grace is not dependent upon you, but upon the faithfulness and righteousness of Jesus Christ in fulfilling that Covenant for all of His people). This should humble us, and not puff us up with pride.

2. The Lord chose extraordinary means by which to deliver Israel from total annihilation— young untrained men. Why? So that we might learn again and again that it is not the might and power or the riches and resources that we can see and touch that deliver us from our enemies. It is the Lord God Almighty that delivers, and He uses so many different and strange means to bring about your salvation from those who would destroy you. Sometimes He may deliver by the jaw bone of a donkey (Samson killed 1,000 men). At other times He may deliver by taking you through a fiery furnace (Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego). The Lord may do that which is very unpleasant as when He healed a deaf and mute man by spitting on His tongue and putting His fingers in his ears (Mark 7:33). He may save His people through prayer and singing of Psalms (2 Chronicles 20), or by an angel (Peter), or by a host of angels (Elisha in Dothan). Put not your trust in what you can see to deliver you from afflictions and trials, from hardships and loneliness, from temptation or persecution. The Lord Jesus is your Deliverer (Psalm 118:8-9). It is not political parties, bank accounts, employers, or the economy that is your savior and provider. The Lord in His mercy uses trials, afflictions, and even your enemies to humble you, sanctify you, and teach you to rely upon Him and not upon the arm of flesh.

3. Dear covenant children and young people, God will use you if you cast yourself upon Him (just as He used the young men who led the attack against the Syrians). You are God's blessing to us as

parents and grandparents. You are especially God's blessing to Christ's Church. Prepare yourself to be used by the Lord now while you are young (Ecclesiastes 12:1). He will not use you to bring Him glory and honor if you are under the dominion of this world—that must first be crushed within you. Either the world will possess you or Christ will. Will you put on the armor of the Lord Jesus and go forth daily to battle the temptations and enemies that would overcome you? Will you set an example before those older than yourselves like Timothy, Daniel, Samuel (1 Timothy 4:12)? Don't wait until you are old and gray, wasting your life in this world that is perishing. Stand with us who are older and aging. Stand with Jesus Christ. Trust Him. Follow Him. Study His Word. Be fervent in prayer. Humble yourself in the sight of God, and He will exalt you in His time.

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