

God's Gracious Gift of an Unbearable Burden, Part II- Strengthening Our Confidence

Call to Worship: Psalm 18:1-3

Hymn #79- *Though Troubles Assail Us*

1st Scripture: 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2

Hymn #80- *How Firm a Foundation*

2nd Scripture: 1 Samuel 30

Hymn #580- *When Peace, Like a River*

Introduction:

Last time, we began to consider the fact that God does, indeed, at times, lay unbearable burdens upon the backs of His beloved children. And by this means, He deepens our faith, as He wrests our hearts further and further away from our natural self-dependence, that we might learn more and more to depend upon Him, our invisible and yet, all-mighty, Creator. Unbearable burdens are God's gracious (though, often painful) means of bringing about the end of our sanctification, namely, Christ-likeness, as we learn to walk by an ever increasing faith in our reliable God, while relying less and less on our unreliable, frail selves. Such burdens have a way of converting our verbal professions into experiential realities, and by means of them, our faith becomes sight, as it were.

The first example that we considered unto the confirmation of this end, was the example of the mighty Apostle Paul, who was able to relate the severity of the trouble he faced in Asia, to the church at Corinth, in his second letter to the Corinthians. There, we were led to understand that the Apostle (along with his companions) was called to bear an impossible, unbearable burden. He described it as being, "beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life." And yet, he went on to say how the Lord used this burden to bring them to look completely away from themselves, and toward the living, invisible God, who even raises the dead, for their help. And God indeed delivered! God parted the Red Sea, as it were, and brought them across to the other side, deepening their faith all the more in His sovereign, almighty, power.

Well, this morning then, we continue on with this theme, as we consider a second example found in the life of the beloved David, the man after God's own heart. Only, this time,

we will be given a more concrete description of the actual burden born by David. If you remember, we were not given the specific details that surrounded the trouble, which came upon the Apostle Paul. The severity of the trial was described for us, but the actual details were left in the realm of the abstract. And the benefit of that study was that we could obtain some of the general principles that surround unbearable burdens, while leaving us room to insert our own experiences into the general description, given us by the Apostle Paul. In other words, we were not pushed out by any specific details. Rather, we were given the freedom to identify with the Apostle without any detailed interruptions. That said, there is a great benefit in receiving details as well. Sometimes, details, while disallowing us from directly identifying with the specific circumstances, actually serve to better help us identify with the drama and the emotions that are produced by the circumstances. And I believe that this example in the life of David, does just that. And so, having benefitted from Paul's less detailed description of the actual burden that came upon him, when he was in Asia, let us now benefit as well from the detailed description of the burden that had come upon David in Ziklag.

I. David's Unbearable Burden

David was a man of faith, right from his childhood. Who never heard of the story of the time that the little shepherd boy, defeated and killed the great giant Goliath, with a smooth stone and a sling? Israel was at war with the Philistines, with both armies stationed on opposite mountains. And the Philistines had sent their champion giant with his weighty armor and large sword into the valley that joined these mountains, seeking to challenge the Israelites to bring forth their best man to face their champion in "one on one" mortal combat. However, the whole army of Israel was terrified, for Goliath was a huge and powerful tower of a man. And David strolls in, too young for war, just seeking to bring supplies to his brothers and the army, when he hears of the untaken challenge of this giant. And being bold in the Lord, but foolish in the sight of his brothers, David replies, "What? Will we let this uncircumcised Philistine speak against the Lord in this way? Who in the world does he think he is?" You see, all David could see was the greatness and power of His infinite God, and the giant Goliath looked quite small in that light. His brothers fail to shut him up, and David actually convinces King Saul to let him fight against the giant. David cannot even stand up in the armor that Saul had given him...he's just not big

enough, and so he takes it off and goes to battle with a few smooth stones and a sling. Goliath sees this little pea of a fellow coming toward him with a sling and a bag full of stones, and basically laughs. "What am I, a dog, that you come to me with a stick?" And then, in the name of His God, David drops a stone in the sling, whirls it around and beans the giant right in the forehead, knocking him unconscious, face to the ground. David takes the giant's own sword and cuts off his head with it, the Israelites come down and defeat the Philistines, and David is dubbed a champion. And at the center of this rejoicing is King Saul...at least for a time.

Later, setting David over his army, Saul witnesses David achieving great military victories and conquests, far beyond what he had ever achieved, and when a song is sung to this end, in the ears of Saul, his love for David is turned into bitterness, envy and jealousy. Saul then decides it's time to get rid of David, who seems to be crowding his limelight. And after several failed attempts of Saul trying to kill David, David realizes that there is no safe place in Israel for him, while Saul is king. God has spared David on many occasions, but when the king is "set on killing you," it's time to make a move, even if that move takes you into the land of the Philistines.

And so, David and 600 of his followers defect to Achish, a ruler in Gath, hoping that he will provide them with a place of refuge there. Seeing the strong contention that exists between King Saul and David, Achish takes him in, and David finds favor in his eyes. David and his men are ultimately given the city of Ziklag, and they dwell among the Philistines for one year and four months.

While David is living in Ziklag, he and his men decide to go on raids, defeating and plundering the enemies of Israel. And so, they conquer various portions of the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites (1 Sam. 27:8). However, lest Achish, the ruler of Gath begins to question the reality of David's defection from Israel, David lies, and tells Achish, that these raids were done against various portions of Israel, rather than against the enemies of Israel. And in order to prevent his victims from coming and telling Achish of the true news of David's raids, David and his men killed everyone (men and women), wherever they attacked. They took everything and left no one alive. And in verse 11 of 1 Samuel 27, we are told, "And thus was [David's] behavior all the time he dwelt in the country of the Philistines." In other words, brethren, David's full time job was raiding, killing and plundering the *enemies* of Israel, the

whole time he lived among the Philistines. And the whole time, the king of Gath, thought that David was attacking the Israelites, and thereby, deepening the wedge between Israel and himself.

But then, something else happens, when we come into chapter 28. Now the Philistines are preparing to attack Israel, and Achish plans on making David his right hand man, and taking him into the battle. After all, who better knows how to defeat King Saul and the Israelites, than David, who has been victoriously conquering and plundering the Israelites all along? And David, at least playing along for the time, agrees to go with him.

And so, David and his six hundred men, leave their wives and their children in Ziklag, while travelling north to unite with the entire Philistine army in Aphek, as they prepare to attack Israel. However, in God's good providence, the lords of the Philistines, upon looking over their army, find David and his men present, and are not as convinced of David's faithfulness as Achish is. And they refuse to take him with them, lest he turn and attack the Philistines in the midst of the battle. After a bit of a dispute with Achish, the lords of the Philistines prevail, and Achish apologetically sends David away, back to Ziklag. David pretends to be upset about their decision, but ultimately leaves, probably with a great sense of relief, having been alleviated of the challenge of having to be among the Philistines, when they war against Israel. We ought to note here, God's gracious providential interruption, preventing Israel's future king from entering into any kind of conflict with his future kingdom.

But on the heels of such a wonderful promise, David is immediately called to bear an unbearable burden. Notice the changing tide of emotion very carefully here, brethren. Things could not have been going any better for David and his men. They have just been spared from entering any kind of conflict with either the Philistines or Israel, and they are free to go back to their families in Ziklag. God has intervened on their behalf...only to bring them back to a plundered, devastated, burned and barren Ziklag! Listen again to the terrifying details of the circumstances David had faced, upon his return. [Read 1 Sam. 30:1-6a]

Brethren, let's pause for a few moments, and consider some of the specific details of this impossible burden that David was called to bear:

1) Everything David has worked for was gone, and all that remained was burned with fire. David himself was the victim of a raid, only he was not there to defend his hometown.

2) David's two wives, along with the wives and children of all of his men, were taken captive by the raiders.

3) The people who raided Ziklag were the Amalekites. Remember, one of the groups whom David and his men had continually raided and plundered, were the Amalekites. And when David raided them, he left no one alive? Should David and his men expect these Amalekites to be any less harsh? Ought they not to have expected that these enemy heathen, whom they had constantly attacked and killed, would ravage their wives and then kill them, along with their children?

4) We are told in verse 4 that David and his men, "lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep," upon witnessing this horror. They wailed aloud, to the point that they had no more strength to cry! Some of you know what that is like...I know I can relate to that. The situation is just so unbearably painful, that you weep and weep, and all of your energy is exercised in that weeping, to the point that you are left with no more tears. The minimal comfort brought about by "letting it all out," fades into a spell of dry emptiness, where you become almost catatonic for a time. You could wish that your present trial and circumstances were a dream; you blink quickly and hope to awaken in your bed, but you are stuck in the reality of an unbearable burden.

5) Well, at least David has his fellow grievors to help share the burden...but no wait, his burden is even increased by them. We are told in verse 6a, "Now David was *greatly distressed*, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved/bitter, every man for his sons and his daughters." The people began to envision the families that they once had; their beloved wives and children, and now they were nothing more than memories. And so, for a time, they are looking for a place to vent out their bitterness, frustration and anger, and David, their leader, seemed like the ideal target. This is what they get for following him and sticking to his orders.

6) All of this, came on the heels of a wonderful providence! God had just greatly intervened on behalf of David and his men, sparing them from joining the Philistines in the battle against Israel...only to bring them back to this?

Now brethren, stop right there, and try to imagine the level of burden that rested upon David, in this portion of history. It is so easy to read right past it; to fail to stop and appreciate the ticking of the clock, through those painful hours of anguish and torment, that had come upon David. For some reason, we tend to treat biblical history different from our own, as if the clock of their time just jumped from problem to solution immediately. No, they felt our pain and our anguish. David felt it on many occasions. The man after God's own heart; the beloved David, within whom rested the Seed of the Messiah, bore unbearable burdens! He was greatly distressed, wept till he was without strength...like the Apostle Paul, we could probably bet that David, at least for a short time, wished death upon himself, right here! But notice what the anxious, weary, over-burdened David does next, brethren.

II. David Strengthens Himself in the Lord [Read 1 Sam. 30:6-8]

"David strengthened himself in the Lord!" When he was without strength; when he was hard pressed and burdened beyond measure, David reached out and laid hold of the divine resources that were available to him, and he found a strength from without, which held him up, and enabled him to take steps toward dealing with the problem, rather than sinking underneath it or running away from it. Notice brethren, rather than complain against God for the providential burden that had come upon the innocent David, David accepted the burden from God, while looking to God for the divine strength to bear it. And by this means, David gained a weighty, spiritual return on his faith investment.

Now brethren, how are we to understand what David had done here? Should we just leave all of this in the realm of the mystical and the abstract or should we seek to understand exactly what it means to, "strengthen one's self in the Lord?" Let me tell you what I believe this means, especially within this context. I believe that what David had done was this: Rather than run to any other means of escape (drinking, over-eating, looking to some form of immorality or quick fix, temporal relief...etc), David stood upon a settled conviction that God would somehow intervene in this (and that unto David's own profit), and he took steps toward dealing with the problem in the most wise and practical way, beginning with prayer; beginning with seeking the direction of God concerning where to go from here.

It could have been very easy for David to just stay down, to wallow in despair, to flee or to try to smother his sorrows away with some form of idolatry. It could have been very easy for David to say, "Look, there is no possible way that our wives and children are alive, and there is no way that my men will ever respect me again, so let me wrap it all up and call it a day." But instead, he cast every ounce of confidence and hope he had, on the living and all- sovereign God; he took a risk of faith and "threw it all on God" as it were, and he went forward in that strength. And as a result of this, God answers David and gives him the ok to go and war against the Amalekites, assuring him that everything that was taken; every single item and person, would be retrieved. And that is exactly what happened. Can you imagine how much David's faith and God-confidence increased on that one occasion? Do you think he was better prepared to wisely rule over Israel, which begins to take place right after this, when King Saul dies in the war that was presently taking place against the Philistines up north?

Notice brethren, David had an unbearable burden, and in this case, even upon strengthening himself in the Lord, the burden itself was not immediately removed. He was just stronger to bear it. He still had to rally the men and go and fight a war against the Amalekites. He still had to go and rescue his family. You might say, "Well, couldn't God have just delivered them some other way, rather than throw all of that on David, at this time?" Well, he certainly could have done things that way, if He didn't intend on finishing His great work of strengthening David's faith and confidence, in this blessed process. You see brethren, from God's standpoint, the Amalekites were just holding onto David's valuables for a time, until God finished His work with David and his men. God had it all under control, didn't He? Doesn't it compel us to constantly remind ourselves of the sovereignty of God over all things, including the magnitude and length of our unbearable burdens? [This also led to David sending spoils to some of the southern cities of Judah, bringing him favor as he was about to replace Saul as king].

III. Bringing it home to us

Brethren, do you see that, in Christ, there is an infinite measure of strength and grace available to us, at all times, so that we can be led to do even the impossible, when the impossible is necessary in our service unto Christ? We are never alone in our trials...ever! God is right

there the whole time, and though He may not remove even our unbearable burdens for a time, He will always provide us with the strength and grace that are necessary to bear them. You can take every God-honoring risk; you can cast your whole confidence in Him, and trek through any path that His divine providence sets before you, because He will always meet your faith with His power, the same power that actually raised Christ from the dead! You see, God is not like us. He is not exaggerating one iota when He says "Be anxious *for nothing*, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

You will have to bear the burden; you will have to continue to fight in sweat, tears and anguish, but in Christ, you must and will prevail. You may lose everything you have *in this world*, in the process, but He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Let me ask you, when the pressure is on; when the burden is quite heavy and overwhelming; when the stress is greatly felt, where do you turn? Some of us over eat, don't we? Some of us have a few drinks or a few cigarettes, don't we? Some of us may turn to various drugs, legal or illegal. Some of us just bury ourselves in the world of TV, where we can hide from reality and our problems. Some of us just complain and seek to organize "pity parties." Some of us cave into the quick fix relief that comes with viewing immoral videos or magazines. Some of us just pull out the credit card and spend money on new things that can elate us for a short time. And there are many other idolatrous options out there. Now brethren, here's the point. None of those avenues are profitable in the long run, and none cooperate with the sanctifying work that the Holy Spirit is doing in you. The easy way may suffice for the short term, but it only ultimately stunts your growth. Let us embrace our trials with David. Let us bear the burdens that we have been called to bear. Let us strengthen ourselves in the Lord and fight the good fight, overtaking the Amalekites for the glory of God! Let us see our trials as providentially, ordained means of growth and prosperity in the Kingdom of God, and let us run the race that is set before us, agonizing unto the eternal crown that awaits us in glory! And in doing so, God will meet us right there! We will sweat, we will agonize, we will weep, but we will meet our glorious God, right in the center of His will, and there is no better place for us to be!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25