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Another Chapter, Another War

2 Samuel 10:1–19

The Eleventh Sermon on Second Samuel

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The number one reason why I believe it is best to preach through the Word of God book by book, chapter by chapter, and verse by verse is that this is how God led it to be written for our edification. And because it is written this way, when we read it this way we read well known stories and obscure stories, stories that confront and stories that comfort, stories that are unique and stories that repeat. This morning we read a story that repeats: *Another Chapter, Another War*.

As we read, we get the feel of it being a fast-paced war narrative. Notice the five uses of the verb “see”: the Ammonites “saw” that they were a stench to David (v. 6); Joab “saw” the armies in front and behind him (v. 9); the Ammonites “saw” that the Syrians fled (v. 14); the Syrians “saw” that they were defeated (v. 15); and all the servants of Hadadezar “saw” that they were defeated (v. 19).¹

But what does yet another chapter about war specifically teach us?

1. *The Historicity of Our Faith*
2. *The Lifestyle of Our Faith*
3. *The Nature of Our Faith*

May the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth of his Word today.

¹ Davis, 131.

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The Historicity of Our Faith

As we read another war chapter, the first thing I want you to appreciate here is *the historicity of our faith*. What do I mean? As we read the story, we read about kings, and nations, and places that we do not know or that do not mean anything to us. But these were real people and places; they really existed. I think we can easily slip into reading the Old Testament, especially, as fairy tale, myth, and saga. That's how the modern scholars and media want us to read it, isn't it?

But we read here of real peoples such as **the Ammonites** (v. 1) and the **Syrians** (v. 6). We read here of verifiable places like **Jericho** (v. 5), **Jerusalem** (v. 14), **the Euphrates River** (v. 16), **Helam** (v. 16), and **the Jordan River** (v. 17). We read here of particular people like **Hanun** (v. 1), **Nahash** (v. 2), **David** (v. 2), **the king of Maacah** (v. 6), and **the men of Tob** (v. 6), **Joab** (v. 7), **Abishai** (v. 10), **Hadadezer** (v. 16), and **Shobach** (v. 16). We even read here of ancient customs that exist to this day of consoling even your enemies at the death of their king (v. 2) as well as the ancient custom of humiliation by shaving the beard and cutting the clothes to expose (v. 4). The Bible is an historical book; your faith is rooted in that history.

Let me put it to you like this. Recently I read a great little article online entitled, "Christianity: The World's Most Falsifiable Religion."² Have you ever stopped to ponder that your Bible, your religion, and your salvation make the most outrageous claims—God made the world, God is one yet three, one of those divine

² <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2013/07/christianity-the-worlds-most-falsifiable-religion/>

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persons became a human in a virgin birth, that same one, Jesus, rose again, and the list goes on? Not only this but that these claims are clothed in the context of real space, time, and history? Our faith is not like Buddhism or Hinduism, which make no historic claims, which religious books occur apart from human history. They are philosophy not verifiable or falsifiable claims. Our faith is not like Islam or Mormonism, which are the claims of one man. Our faith—yours and mine—is based on things that happened in history that can be studied and among people that can be spoken with today. While every other major world religion must be taken on blind faith, ours is a faith based on fact. When King Festus said Paul was out of his mind when he spoke of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul responded, “I am speaking true and rational words...for this has not been done in a corner” (Acts 26:25, 26). The birth of this Jesus happened during the reign of the Roman Emperor, Augustus, while Quirinius governed Syria. We confess in the words of the Apostles’ Creed, “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” And as we heard last Sunday from 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ did not actually rise my preaching is vain, our faith is in vain, we are still in our sins, our hope for our dead loved ones is in vain, and we are of all men most to be pitied.

The Lifestyle of Our Faith

That’s the big picture this morning as we read yet another chapter about war. So what else can we learn here? I want you to see in David *the lifestyle of our faith*. In verses 1–2 we read that **the king of the Ammonites died, Hanun his**

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son reigned in his place, and that when David heard this news he said, **“I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me.”** Therefore he **sent by his servants to console him concerning his father.**

Again we read of that Hebrew word, *hesed*, in verse 2, that speaks of faithfulness, loyalty, and mercy. In chapter 9 David showed *hesed* inside Israel with the grandson of Saul and son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, and now in chapter 10 we see David showing this loyalty outside the boundaries of Israel even to his enemies.

Why? Well, it was customary then even as it is today for rulers of one people to send condolences when another ruler dies, even if it is your enemy. We see it today when national and international figures die and there is an international array of guests to the funeral. But more than this, we are seeing again that in David the sinner is David the saint. We see that while he has done terrible things the Lord is at work within him, even as he is with us. And when David desires to show this loyalty, he expresses that love of enemy that the Lord calls us to as his children: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Paul reiterates this to Roman Christians, who were increasingly becoming an object of persecution by the middle of the first century: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them,” “Repay no one evil for evil,” “live peaceably with all,” “never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God,” and “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:14, 17, 18, 19, 21).

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Of course, this merciful expression of David is not received by the unspiritual man, Hanun, who proceeds to create an international event by having David's servants humiliated in verses 3-4. He listens to his advisors who convince him that **“David sent his servants to you to search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it”** (v. 3). He then has half their beards shaved off, contrary to the law of God for Israelites males not to cut the edges of their beards (Lev. 19:27), and their garments cut all the way up **at their hips** (v. 4) expose them to shame. In Numbers 15:37-41 we read that the Israelites had tassels at the edge of their garments to remind them of the law of God.³ So **greatly ashamed** were these servants that David says to them, **“Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown”** (v. 6). The irony of the story is that while David came in *hesed* but Hanun was afraid that David would overthrow him, David does overthrow him anyway despite originally coming in a spirit of *hesed*.⁴ It just goes to illustrate to us that love of enemy is the best policy as we let the Lord deal with the rest.

The Nature of Our Faith

How easy is it to love someone who acts and talks in a way that is unlovable, children? Not easy at all! And we see here that love itself doesn't melt away everyone else's anger and fear. David shows love, but Hanun escalates a war. And it is in the midst of this war that *the nature of our faith* is illustrated in a beautiful way. Because of what Hanun did, **the Ammonites saw that they had become a**

³ Leithart, 234.

⁴ Leithart, 233.

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stench to David, meaning, he was incensed! So **the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah with 1,000 men, and the men of Tob, 12,000 men** (v. 6). David then sends his army under the leadership of Joab (v. 7) to meet them before the walls of the Ammonite capital; and so we read that **the Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate** while his hired hands **the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open country** (v. 8).

The trap was set. Israel marched to Ammon, the Ammonites came out of their city to face off, but then **Joab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear** (v. 9). Joab decides to divide his army and sent some behind to fight the Syrians (v. 9) and the rest **he put in the charge of Abishai his brother...against the Ammonites** (v. 10). The result was a total joke, as Joab's army caused the Syrians to flee (v. 13) and when this happened the Ammonites fled back behind their city walls (v. 14). This embarrassment led the Syrian's to regather with an even bigger army and to march toward Israel, which led David himself to march his army out beyond the Jordan into the wilderness and to rout the them and to be subject to David (vv. 15–19).

But it is in all the fog of war that we see faith. When Joab divides his army he tells Abishai in verse 12, **“Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God”**—sounds like what a general would say—but then he adds this, **“and may the Lord do what seems good to him.”** What is

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faith? Ultimately it is a resting in the Lord, isn't it? It is trusting in him, not yourself. It is receiving him, not your own resources. The Westminster Larger Catechism speaks of justifying faith as resting in the bed of Christ's righteousness for us in his life, death, and resurrection. We see that here, in the type and shadow of the Old Testament figure of Joab. He rests himself in the Lord's hands to do what he desires and pleases.

It's this faith in Jesus Christ that is rooted in history! It's this faith in Jesus Christ that results in love and mercy even to our enemies! It's this faith in Jesus Christ that rests content in him alone for all that seems good to him, which ultimately is good for us! Is this your faith today? Amen.