

Sermon Given by

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## 2 Samuel 8 - "The coming of the Kingdom"

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This is one of those passages where no-one in church wants to catch the eye of the poor soul who had to read out loud the list of unpronounceable names. And I am glad that it is a computer-generated rota that decides who is going to get that particular task at All Saints – so they don't think I chose **them** deliberately.

But I doubt that our difficulties with the passage end there. For many the content is the problem, not just the names. There has been a fairly pronounced dislike of the Old Testament for a long time now in academic circles. And it trickles down in the comments people make that 'surely as Christians we should be spending our time in the New Testament with its emphasis on peace and mercy, rather than the Old Testament which seems to delight in blood and guts'.

So why are we studying 2 Samuel 8 tonight? The answer – and it may come as something of a surprise to you - is that this chapter is telling us about the future. You didn't mishear me: we are delving into the dim and distant past – 1000 years before Christ – because these historical events in the past actually tell us about the future.

We're part way through a series in the life of David, the great Old Testament King. And we saw last week in chapter 7 that David's kingdom is actually God's kingdom, a dynasty which will last for ever, fulfilled ultimately in a descendant of David, Jesus Christ.

That means that if we want to know what Jesus kingdom is all about and what it will look like, then we can find out by looking at the early stages of God's kingdom, under king David. We look at David's kingdom as a prototype of Jesus' kingdom, when he first came and when he will return.

And if history is heading towards the fulfilment and establishment of that kingdom then that means we will all benefit from looking at this chapter together. Whether you are a Christian or not tonight: this is a window on your future. What we see here in 2 Samuel 8 in a small country on the Eastern end of the Mediterranean would be seen again, on a much bigger scale in the future. So it's worth taking note of it – that way we can be prepared.

I want to highlight three particular aspects of the kingdom.

### **1) When God's kingdom is established, God's enemies are overthrown.**

This happens in throughout the chapter as all David's enemies are subdued by force. In verse 1 it is the Philistines; <sup>1</sup> *In the course of time, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Metheg Ammah from the control of the Philistines.*

in verse 2 it is the Moabites; <sup>2</sup> *David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put*

*to death, and the third length was allowed to live. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute.*

in verses 3-4 it is Hadadezer king of Zobah; <sup>3</sup> *Moreover, David fought Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his control along the Euphrates River.* <sup>4</sup> *David captured a thousand of his chariots, seven thousand charioteers <sup>[a]</sup> and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstringed all but a hundred of the chariot horses.*

and then when the Arameans come to help Hadadezer in verse 5-6 it is their turn to be flattened <sup>5</sup> *When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand of them.* <sup>6</sup> *He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute. The LORD gave David victory wherever he went.*

Then one more nation tries their luck in verses 13-14. It's the Edomites - to beat them guaranteed you fame and popularity, because they were age-old enemies of Israel, descended from Jacob's brother Esau.

<sup>13</sup> *And David became famous after he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites <sup>[b]</sup> in the Valley of Salt.*

<sup>14</sup> *He put garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David.*

And then a familiar refrain to bring the catalogue of conquests to a close: *The LORD gave David victory wherever he went.*

Now it might well sound like David is no different from any other Middle Eastern warlord – what is he doing attacking all these different peoples? But any look at the history of Israel will tell you: the other nations' kings were the warlords.

The strategic location of Israel on the trade route on the Mediterranean coast between Egypt and the Far East meant that patch of real estate has always been very desirable to other people: it still is! It was much less a case of David attacking the surrounding nations and truer to say that they were endlessly attacking Israel.

Our passage makes that explicit– verse 3 makes clear that Hadadezer picked the fight with David, because he wanted to restore control along the Euphrates. And when he was defeated, the Arameans attacked Israel on their own initiative. They were one of the rising super powers – and although they lost 22,000 in the war, numerically they were so strong that if they had been victorious, they could have wiped Israel of the map. David had to resist them.

Now, I'm not suggesting necessarily that David was always the victim. And no doubt he sometimes crossed the line between being a good king, defending his people and serving his kingdom and brutality on a level with the nations around him: although I was interested to learn that to spare a third of the Moabites (which sounds very harsh to our ears) would be comparatively merciful by the common standards of warfare at the time.

My point is not to emphasise anything about David's military prowess – because that is not where our writer places the emphasis. Why was David victorious? The answer lies in that phrase which comes twice in the chapter – at the end of verse 6: *The LORD gave David*

*victory wherever he went. And again in verse 14 The LORD gave David victory wherever he went.*

It is God's kingdom and it is God who preserves and protects it. And therefore when God's kingdom is established his enemies are defeated and neutralised.

Now the importance of this for us is that this will happen again in the future on an even bigger scale. One of the most quoted Psalms in the New Testament is the one we had as our first reading: Psalm 110. It refers obviously to Jesus – and to how one day all the forces which oppose him will be placed under his feet – fully and finally overthrown by him.

Which is fantastic news. You think how rattled people can be when we read about a country like Iran getting nuclear capability. And it dawns on us that London is potentially within range and under threat.

Or another terrorist nest gets uncovered and we wonder 'how many more are there trying to reduce Western civilisation to the level of a nervous wreck?'

Well Israel must have felt like that all the time – constantly under threat - and then last week God made those mouth-watering promises through the prophet Nathan: 'I will give you rest from all your enemies'. Here in chapter 8 those promises are wonderfully fulfilled. All the enemies of the kingdom are made subject to the king. And the same wonderful thing will happen for the Christian as well.

However fragile God's kingdom looks to us – and it does look fragile, doesn't it? – our Christian brothers and sisters know what it is to be under attack from Muslim or Hindu extremists; we know what it is to be squeezed on every side in the work place and maybe denied opportunities because we are Christians: 'Sorry' says the boss, 'I'm not giving this account to you, because I simply can't believe a Christian will push to make money for our clients as much as this other colleague will...'

We know what it is to be lashed by the tongues of atheists, with their conviction that their beliefs are superior and ours are childish. The new atheism of course goes further than that, because often the claim is that Christianity is immoral. It's not just childish, it is evil and for the good of society is must be resisted and ultimately eliminated. So we are not just tolerated, we are under attack.

But we do not need to fear those attacks. Because all God's enemies will be defeated. Either those enemies will bow the knee willingly or they will be defeated forcibly. But nothing will stop God establishing his Kingdom under the rule of Jesus Christ. It is great news for the Christian, because all the forces ranged against Christ and his people will fail. If you're not yet a Christian then this news is sobering – and you will be wise to think about what you are doing in not bowing the knee to God's Kingdom and God's king. Why would anyone stand outside the Kingdom, when the king is invincible? It can only lead to eternal defeat.

Well, on to another feature of the kingdom we can see in this chapter.

## **2) When God's kingdom is established, the nations' wealth is plundered**

This is another theme which runs through the whole chapter. So in verse 2 we are told that *the Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute.*

In verse 6 *the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute.*

It wasn't just a tax that was levied. Because Verses 7-12 spell out other forms of wealth that end up in Jerusalem – silver, gold and bronze that are either given up freely or plundered. Let me just read them out, so the repetition of the idea makes the point: <sup>7</sup> *David took the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem.* <sup>8</sup> *From Tebah<sup>[b]</sup> and Berothai, towns that belonged to Hadadezer, King David took a great quantity of bronze.*

<sup>9</sup> *When Tou<sup>[c]</sup> king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer,* <sup>10</sup> *he sent his son Joram<sup>[d]</sup> to King David to greet him and congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer, who had been at war with Tou. Joram brought with him articles of silver and gold and bronze.*

<sup>11</sup> *King David dedicated these articles to the LORD, as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued:* <sup>12</sup> *Edom<sup>[e]</sup> and Moab, the Ammonites and the Philistines, and Amalek. He also dedicated the plunder taken from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.*

So in each case, having defeated the nations there is a transfer of wealth into the Kingdom of God. And notice in verse 11, that David doesn't set up an off-shore account and claim all the plunder for himself. <sup>11</sup> *King David dedicated these articles to the LORD, as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued.* The Victory is God's – so the wealth belongs to him.

Now this too is a foretaste of something bigger, when the Kingdom of Jesus is ultimately fulfilled. The prophet Haggai said as much when he predicted the shaking of all nations and said that their wealth would fill God's house – because, he said, *'The silver is mine and the gold is mine'*.

And in the very last book of the Bible there is a similar promise of how the glory and splendour of the nations will be brought into the city of God.

So at the end of time, when all God's enemies are defeated there will be a transfer of assets into the kingdom – well of course there will: all those assets belonged to God in the first place and so they inevitably revert to him in the end.

If you are a television watcher or a movie goer you will be familiar with the patter that ends so many of the hire purchase or mortgage adverts. They have to say it, so they gabble it as quickly as they can, right at the end: *'your home is at risk if you do not keep up payments on a mortgage or other loan secured by it.'*

We hear it so often we can say it virtually by heart. But ask any debt counsellor: the lesson is not easy to learn. How many people think when they take out a loan that the car is theirs or the house is theirs! And in one sense it isn't: a loan is just a loan: fall behind in the payments and you quickly discover that the car or the house don't belong to you.

And the spiritual equivalent of this lesson is similarly hard to learn. Everything good we have is given to us by God. We enjoy those good things now, but they will ultimately be restored to their rightful owner.

And therefore our wealth is at risk if we do not give it up freely – along with everything else – to the one who loaned it to us.

There is a stark warning for the person who continues in rebellion against God to the bitter end because all our assets will revert to the God who gave us to them. Hell will not be a party with our mates – because those who oppose Jesus to the end will be defeated and will then be stripped of all the things they enjoyed in life.

But there is a valuable lesson in the chapter for the Christian too. We don't need to wait for the last day! I am not sure what to make of the way Tou and Joram made their gifts – it may have been sheer political expediency; but David clearly is an example for us. For he doesn't take the gold, silver and bronze as if it belongs to him. He dedicates it to God as its rightful owner.

With a gift day, the application I hope is clear: when someone lives for God's kingdom that has implications for every aspect of their lives. A converted heart will show itself in a converted wallet, where our gold and silver (and even our bronze!) are dedicated to the Lord for his Kingdom.

And we will therefore need to do an inventory of all the good things we have, on loan from God, dedicating them afresh to him. It's no use us saying we've done that already. I assume that none of us finds ourselves in the same situation as we were in this time last year. Certainly the needs of the church are in a different place a year on from the last gift day.

So we will need to re-think what we are doing with what God has loaned us AND how we will anticipate the day when the kingdom fully comes and the splendour and glory of the nations is unmistakably restored to its rightful owner, Jesus Christ.

One final aspect of the kingdom for us to focus on briefly:

### **3) When God's kingdom is established, just government is enjoyed.**

The verse which says this explicitly is there in verse 15. <sup>15</sup> *David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.*

That is not to say that his track record was perfect – there will be plenty of evidence that all was not rosy in the garden before too long in David's reign. But the peace wasn't just enjoyed externally with a cessation of hostilities from the enemies.

There was peace and harmony internally. In fact that list of names which ends the chapter is testimony to the way David did what was just and right for all his people.

<sup>16</sup> *Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder;* <sup>17</sup> *Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was secretary;* <sup>18</sup> *Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites; and David's sons were royal advisers.* <sup>[a]</sup>

He wasn't a tyrant; he shared his rule in a carefully organised way with others, where even the minor characters have an important role to play.

The humble secretary finds their name recorded for us reading three millennia later – God commits his kingdom to David and David in turn shares his rule with others... They in turn saw to it that **all** God's people flourished – but pivotal in that was David himself.

It has been fascinating in recent months to see the continuing pressure on Government ministers and members of Parliament over their expenses – how much they spend on their duck house and whether their house is a primary residence or not and so on.

The anger directed against MPs has been virulent, hasn't it? We long to live in a world of integrity.

But equally striking to me is the way we rarely join up the dots and realise that the lack of just government is an inevitable spin-off of our society losing its Christian heritage. You cannot ultimately have just government if the God of justice is ignored.

Listen to the words of R.C.Sproul, who put this so well.

'The humanist rejects God while affirming loudly the value of people. He joins hands with Christians and Jews to march for human rights, to eliminate slavery, to halt the oppression of the poor, to build hospitals, to care for men and women in misery. He exalts the virtues of honesty, justice and compassion but he must crucify his mind to do it. The humanist is caught in the vicious contradiction of ascribing dignity to the creatures who live all their lives between the poles of meaninglessness. He lives on borrowed capital, deriving his values from the Judaeo-Christian faith, while at the same time repudiating the very foundation on which those values are set. We stare in wonder at his ability to get being from nothingness, dignity from insignificance, personality from impersonality and marvel at his ability to stand with both feet planted in mid-air'. He's right: there can logically be no justice without the rule of a just God.

But equally for those of us who belong to Christ's kingdom there must be the same sacrificial leadership and just government that Jesus demonstrated – the one who wasn't self-seeking, but self-giving – to the extent that he died for the his people on the cross, paying for our sin.

And even if we aren't exactly David, we may be the minor character in his kingdom – the recorders and the secretaries, the Jehoshaphats and the Seraiahs - playing a crucial role in living out the values of the kingdom in our sphere of service – as a church leader, a father, a mother, an employer, and employee and so on – 'doing what is just and right towards all *our* people'.

So which Kingdom will you live for this week? With your diary open, or your cheque book open, will there be any evidence that you are strengthening the kingdom of God? Because make no mistake about it, Christ's kingdom is the one kingdom which has any staying power. That's where we must invest for safe future.

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(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)