

Three Mighty Men

2 Samuel 23:14-17

(14) And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem.

(15) And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!

(16) And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD.

(17) And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men.

The 23rd chapter of 2 Samuel begins with David's last words (2SAM 23:1-7) and concludes with a long list of "...the names of the mighty men whom David had..." (2SAM 23:8). The list is interesting not only for whom it includes but for whom it overlooks. The last name is *Uriah the Hittite* (2SAM 23:39), the faithful soldier whose career was cut short by a death David orchestrated in order to cover David's adultery with his wife (2SAM 11:15). Though David took his life, he could not take his honor and God preserved that in holy scripture. On the other hand, 2SAM 23:18 and 2SAM 23:24 highlight *Abishai and Asahel, the brothers of Joab* rather than Joab. These three brothers were David's nephews (1CH 2:15-16) and more is said of Joab's exploits in Scripture than of his brothers. Joab was an effective commander as the general of David's forces (1CH 27:34) who helped make David great. But he was headstrong, reckless, sometimes ruthless and he was the only one of the three who was guilty of shedding innocent blood (1KI 2:31-33). His strength, courage and exploits as a great leader could not nullify his wickedness (c/w EZE 18:24). How often in the wisdom and sovereignty of God are *the last first and the first last* (MAT 19:30). Even Joab's armourbearer made the list (2SAM 23:37). "The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot" (PRO 10:7).

Today's text highlights three mighty men of David who were so dedicated to their king that when he simply expressed a longing in the subjunctive mood, they acted upon it as though they had been given a direct order for which they had been waiting anxiously. David realized that his foolish wish was to them a command and he repented of it by his response. Let this be a lesson to those who have zealous, dedicated supporters: words, even wishes, may become policy to the supporters and this is a power of manipulation that must be carefully held and certainly not used capriciously to exploit others' devotion, especially where their response might put them in jeopardy of their lives. Indeed, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue..." (PRO 18:21) and an unseasonable word may well be the spark that ignites zealous men's hearts unto their own demise. All the disciples of Jesus Christ would have needed was a wink or a nod from Him to call down fire from heaven on benign men (LUK 9:51-56) but He was ever cautious to not give rise to their sometimes overzealous support, no, not even by something as simple as a melancholy wish. So cautious was He in this regard that He neither did give any wink, nod, word, hint or wish that could have been construed by twelve legions of angels as a command to put a stop to the plans of wicked men to destroy Him, for "...how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (MAT 26:53-54).

Nevertheless, the three mighty men in our text put themselves at great risk for their king's sake and their names were recorded for their honor. How much greater will be the honor of the likes of "...Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (ACT 15:25-26), David's Lord (MAT 22:41-45) and King of kings (REV 19:16)! They need no feast days nor stained-glass windows named after them and even if their names and exploits be not part of scripture or

recorded for posterity, they are not forgotten. God keeps a "...book of remembrance...for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (MAL 3:16). The heroes of faith in HEB 11:34-38, although unnamed, nevertheless "...obtained a good report..." (HEB 11:39). Paul and Barnabas were overcomers who no doubt are not comforted by their names on stained-glass windows on earth but because they share in the promise made to other faithful saints that they are made *pillars in God's heavenly temple* and Jesus further will write upon them *His new name* (REV 3:12). The best honour is "...the honour that cometh from God only" (JOH 5:44). To His seventy disciples who were elated about their exploits for their Master, Jesus said, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (LUK 10:20).

Even faithful small acts of love to God that may not be a great hazard are noted. Jesus said of a woman whose simple anointing of Him with fine ointment had stirred up indignation in others (MAR 14:3-5), "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (MAR 14:9). Simple acts of faith and love towards others also count. Jesus says, "...Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (MAT 25:40). In general, "...the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" (PSA 112:6) and again, "The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot" (PRO 10:7).

David's refusal to drink the water the men brought deserves attention. David was no Catholic priest who presumed to have miraculous powers of transubstantiation, yet he here plainly called the water *blood*. He basically said, "...This is the blood." It was water when he received it and water when he poured it out. David was simply using a figure of speech to represent by association the blood of those men which he had put at risk. The water was not literal, material blood; it represented blood. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, saying of the bread and wine, "...this is my body...This is my blood..." (MAR 14:22-24), He was essentially doing as David: calling the elements by what they represented. If a man takes a photograph out of his wallet, puts his finger on it and says, "This is my wife" it is evident that the photo is a representation of his wife---he hadn't miraculously changed her into a glossy print.

It may be noted here that as mighty as the three men had shown themselves in procuring that water for David, their might was on even greater display in that they apparently took no umbrage at David for not drinking it. That took real strength.

Blood is described in Scripture as being precious (PSA 72:14; 1PE 1:19) and David thus deemed that water to be too valuable for a foolish man like himself to drink. He therefore "...poured it out unto the LORD" (2SAM 23:16) as a kind of drink offering to God (c/w NUM 28:7). A better thing to pour out to God when burdened about the implications of one's folly is as Jeremiah described:

(LAM 2:19) Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches
pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy
hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger
in the top of every street.

Matthew Henry said this of David's action: "Did David look upon that water as very precious which was got at the hazard of these men's blood, and shall not we much more value those benefits for the purchasing of which our blessed Saviour shed his blood? Let us not undervalue the blood of the covenant, as those do that undervalue the blessings of the covenant." Amen.