

Not the Losing Side
2 Samuel 8 & 10
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It was 1987. The Soviet Union celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik or Communist revolution. Almost everyone assumed the Soviet Union would continue to be a world power for at least the next seventy years.

In 1952, a man named Whittaker Chambers wrote a book entitled, "Witness." He told of his decision to leave the CPUSA (Communist Party USA) and help the FBI as a loyal American citizen and said:

"I know that I am leaving the winning side for the losing side, but it is better to die on the losing side than to live under Communism."

Chambers was not alone in his belief that the Soviets would ultimately defeat the United States in what was called "The Cold War."

And then it was 1989...just two years later.

The Solidarity Labor Movement in Poland forced the first free elections in the Soviet Bloc since World War 2.

A wave of freedom began to sweep over Eastern Europe, and by November of 1989, the Berlin Wall came down.

Two years later, the Soviet Union itself officially dissolved.

Whittaker Chambers and many others were wrong. **Communism was not the winning side!** Though Leon Trotsky insisted that all who opposed Communism would end up in "the dust bin of history," this was instead the destiny of the Soviet Union.

Why this little history lesson? Well, partly I want to remind you of the evils of Communism. The Soviets and their allies in China and other parts of the world killed over 100 million of their own people in the 20th century. Though we usually think of Communism as the enemy of Capitalism, the reality is that Communists often focused even more energy in combatting religion, especially Christianity.

Embracing atheism, Communism in a sense declared war on God and often persecuted those who claimed to follow God with great zeal. This is the main reason why I find our society's current fascination with Socialism (sometimes called Communism with a human face) to be quite disturbing.

My primary purpose, however, is to remind you of one of the important lessons of the Bible and of history. Rulers and governments who oppose the Lord will fail and fall. Though they may seem to have an invincible army; or in our day, a strong nuclear arsenal, they are simply no match for the Lord. This is the clear message of:

Psalm 2:1-2 – Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the LORD and his Anointed One.

In response:

Psalm 2:4 – The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord ridicules them.

And the rest of the psalm describes how all the nations will one day acknowledge God and God's Son as the true King; which means **all the rulers opposed to the Lord, no matter how powerful, will ultimately fail and fall.**

Friends, I am not claiming any special revelation from the Lord, but I think this clearly applies to the Soviet Union.

As the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Empire crumbled, I could not help but think of:

Psalm 2:4 – The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord ridicules them.

Oh, the Lord certainly used human tools like Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II, but ultimately it was the Lord who brought down the Soviet Empire.

And so, as the Soviet Union boasted of their invincible military strength, as they tore down

churches or turned them into museums, as Communist rulers murdered pastors and ordinary Christians or sent them to Siberian prison camps, as Soviet cosmonauts went into space and claimed they discovered God was not there, as Soviet leaders told the free world, “History is on our side – we will bury you,” as they promised people a “workers’ paradise, a heaven on earth,” **the one enthroned in heaven laughed.**

Whittaker Chambers and many others may have thought Soviet Communism was the winning side, but God knew it was not. He laughed at such a crazy thought.

Those who oppose the Lord will never be on the winning side. Oh, for a while it may seem that way. It may feel like they are ahead 15-0 going into the bottom of the ninth. But in that last inning, in the end, things will turn around – always.

The fall of the Soviet Union was a vivid reminder of that to me, and it should be to you – that those who oppose the Lord, the true God, are never on the winning side! However, this is a lesson we should have learned long before the 20th century.

This morning, as we continue our journey through the book of 2 Samuel, we will explore chapters eight and ten (page 260). Here we find accounts of Israel’s military victory under King David. Of equal importance, we also see the defeat of those who opposed the Lord and his people.

Let me start by reading the first portion of:

2 Samuel 8:1-6 - After this, David defeated the Philistines, subdued them, and took Gath from Philistine control. He also defeated the Moabites, and after making them lie down on the ground, he measured them off with a cord. He measured every two cord lengths of those to be put to death and one full length of those to be kept alive. So the Moabites became David’s subjects and brought tribute.

David also defeated Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his control at the Euphrates River. David captured seventeen hundred horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers from him, and

he hamstrung all the horses and kept a hundred chariots.

When the Arameans of Damascus came to assist King Hadadezer of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand Aramean men. Then he placed garrisons in Aram of Damascus, and the Arameans became David’s subjects and brought tribute. The LORD made David victorious wherever he went.

Now, friends, we don’t want to get lost in the trees and miss the forest today. We won’t pay a lot of attention to the trees (the details of the story). The main point of the chapter is reflected in the last part of:

2 Samuel 8:6 – The LORD made David victorious wherever he went.

That thought is re-emphasized in:

2 Samuel 8:13-14 – David made a reputation for himself when he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in Salt Valley. He placed garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites were subject to David. The LORD made David victorious wherever he went.

Friends, about 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus, the Lord had made this promise to a man named Abraham:

Genesis 12:2-3 – I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

This is a magnificent promise, but for about a thousand years it seemed like kind of an empty promise. Yes, Abraham’s descendants had become a nation, Israel, named after Abraham’s grandson Jacob. Yet, they had seemed like a rather “average nation.”

The Lord had brought Israel out of captivity in Egypt, but for the next three or four hundred years, the people of Israel had lost many military battles. I don’t think their victory rate was even 50%. Reading the books of Joshua, Judges and 1 Samuel makes that clear.

Incidentally, there is a debate about precisely when the Exodus from Egypt occurred. It may have been anywhere from 1441 to 1290 BC. That is why I say it is three or four hundred years before the death of Saul.

However, when David becomes king, things change. Remember, he is God's anointed or messiah king. Under David, Israel becomes really for the first time, a great nation.

The geographical boundaries expand to include almost all the land God promised in Deuteronomy 11. The surrounding peoples that oppressed and harassed Israel for centuries – Philistines, Moabites, Edomites, etc. – were driven out. Under David's rule, it became a time of peace and prosperity.

2 Samuel 8:15 – So David reigned over all Israel, administering justice and righteousness for all his people.

In many ways, this fulfills the promise the Lord makes:

Psalm 2:8 – Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession.

When we go to chapter 10, we see David generously extending peace to the king of the Ammonites, people who lived east of Israel in what is now Jordan. King Hanun, however, is convinced by his advisors that he should not trust David and humiliates the ambassadors he sends. **When they realize they have made David angry, the Ammonites conspire with their neighbors to the north, the Arameans, modern Syria, to join them in fighting against Israel.**

Psalm 2:2 – The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the LORD and his Anointed One.

However, Israel, under David and his general Joab, defeat these enemies. Both Aramean and Ammonite armies flee, run away from Israelite forces. The Arameans regroup, recruit a larger army and attack Israel; but again, in the end:

2 Samuel 10:18 – Arameans fled before Israel, and David killed seven hundred of their charioteers and forty thousand foot soldiers.

After that:

2 Samuel 10:19b – ...they made peace with Israel and became their subjects. After this, the Arameans were afraid to ever help the Ammonites again.

Israel is a great nation. David is a great king. The words of Psalm 2 provide sound advice for all the rulers around Israel.

Psalm 2:10-12 – So now, kings, be wise; receive instruction, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with reverential awe and rejoice with trembling. Pay homage to the Son (David, the anointed, messiah king is considered God's special son) or he will be angry and you will perish in your rebellion, for his anger may ignite at any moment. All who take refuge in him are happy.

Under David's reign, it becomes clear that those who oppose the Lord will never be on the winning side. For hundreds of years, it seemed like the people of Israel were losing. But now, through David, God has kept his promise of victory for his people.

Now, before we go on, I want to take a step back. **The actions of David and the army of Israel often seem brutal and cruel.** Why would David execute two-thirds of the soldiers from Moab that he captured? Why would he hamstring the Aramean's chariot horses?

Well, the answer to the second question is easier. Israel did not have chariots so they had no use for the chariot horses, and he didn't want to risk his enemies recapturing these horses.

Still, why does the Lord seem to condone all this cruelty? Well, first we should remember – the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23), and when Israel did or we do, that is not pleasing to the Lord.

However, sometimes war is a necessary evil, and it would be foolish to judge the actions of ancient warriors by modern standards of warfare. Mass execution, for example, was considered more merciful than the torture to which many armies would often subject their captives.

It is important to remember, however, that the Moabites, for example, were not nice people. They had been the persistent enemies of Israel for generations. They refused to worship the true God. They believed the false gods they worshiped required child sacrifice and temple prostitution.

As Tim Chester says in his commentary:

“David was acting as God’s agent in bringing a just judgment upon them. The text says David ‘strikes down’ his enemies...the same word that is used when God strikes down the Philistines (chapter 5) and Uzzah (chapter 6). Those who reject David’s rule are not just rejecting a human king, but the living God himself.”

Now, I am sure what I just said doesn’t answer all the questions some of you may have. I would ask you, however, to be careful not to judge what David did or what the Lord told him to do on the basis of very limited understanding of what was actually occurring in that context.

Suggestions by atheist Richard Dawkins that the God of the Old Testament is a “moral monster” or even by Pastor Andy Stanley that Christians need to “get over the Old Testament and focus on the New.” simply doesn’t take seriously the complexity of what was happening during that time. Let me say if you have questions about that and would like to talk more, just give me a call.

OK, so those who oppose the Lord are never, ultimately, on the winning side. And those who trust in the Lord are never, ultimately, on the losing side. That, friends, should be a great encouragement to us.

David was the anointed one, “messiah” with a lower case “m.” Though, God seemed to fulfill the promise he had made to Abraham and to his people through David, it didn’t last. It was only a temporary fulfillment. David’s kingdom was soon divided and, ultimately, shattered.

David was a messiah who provided a taste of what the Messiah would do. And friend, that Messiah, Messiah with a capital “M” is Jesus!

Matthew 22:41-45 explains how David himself realized that the ultimate Messiah would not be just his descendant, but also his Lord.

As we look at the world around us, we don’t always see a lot of evidence that those faithful to Jesus the Messiah, Jesus Christ, are on the winning side. **We live in a society which is becoming more and more antagonistic toward Christianity.**

Some of you know the story of Israel Folau, the Christian rugby player in Australia who was cut from his team for expressing biblical views on LGBT issues. When he tried to raise money on GoFundMe for legal fees, that website cancelled his project and returned to donors over \$500,000 that had been raised in one week, rather than giving it to Folau. Fortunately, he was able to raise even more money on the more Christian-friendly-crowd funding site, WonderWe.

In the United States, Jaelene Hinkle, recognized as one of our country’s best female soccer players, did not make the World Cup team, reportedly because of her Christian testimony.

Of course, this type of discrimination is nothing compared to the persecution and even martyrdom faced by Christians in many Islamic and Communist countries.

Are these people really on the winning side? Frankly, it doesn’t always seem like it.

A young widow with three small children whose Christian husband was just beaten to death by a mob of radical Hindus probably doesn’t feel like she is on the winning side.

If you find yourself constantly being ridiculed and shunned by others because of your faith in Jesus, there is a good chance you won’t feel like you are on the winning side. But you are! You truly are!

There are two things to keep in mind:

#1 The battle is not over, yet. We are in that “already, but not yet” time where Jesus is the true King already, right now, but his rule is not recognized by many people and in many places. But one day that will change! One day Jesus will return and:

Philippians 2:10-11 – At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And then it will become clear that we, and all believers in Jesus, are on the winning side. In the end, Jesus will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, forever and ever. We will be in a place where:

Revelation 21:4 – He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more.

That is what is ahead. It is a wonderful future to which we can and should look forward.

#2 But...there are many ways we are experiencing the fruit of Jesus' victory right now, today.

For example, we are already on the winning side when it comes to guilt. **Through his death on the cross, Jesus has paid the penalty for our sin – all of our sin – past, present and future.** All believers in Jesus Christ are declared and considered not guilty by God. Then, when we acknowledge that sin and repent, we experience that forgiveness:

1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That promise is a great victory that we experience right now, today!

The truth and power of that is evident in the life of my brother, Tim. Some of you know his story because he shared it at our Adult Retreat last spring.

Tim served as a pastor at Bethel Baptist Church in Janesville, Wisconsin for twenty-three years – eight as an Associate Pastor and fifteen years as the Senior Pastor.

For a number of years, he was involved in sexual immorality and adultery – blatant sin that his wife, children and congregation knew nothing about. But Tim knew about it, and he carried a huge burden of guilt for years. In fact, the burden of guilt was so heavy that he sometimes wondered if he was really a Christian, sometimes wondered if God could ever forgive him.

And then one night in November of 2016, everything came crashing down. His secret sin

was no longer a secret. Within a few hours, he was no longer a pastor, his job and career came to an abrupt halt, his wife left him, and his children no longer spoke to him. His life was a total disaster, and he had no one to blame but himself. It was all his fault.

But, it was also one of the best nights of his life. Because that night, in November of 2016, he truly repented and confessed his horrible sin to God and to a handful of some dear brothers in Christ. At that point, he knew that even though his life was falling apart, he was free! The burden of guilt he had carried for so long was gone. He was experiencing the magnificent forgiveness God provides through Jesus.

And even though deep sorrow began to fill his soul because of the terrible consequences of his sinful actions, there was joy as well. A joy that comes because he knew Jesus had conquered his guilt and shame, Tim Erickson's guilt and shame, on the cross.

Now, nearly three years later, Tim still struggles with the consequences of his sin. He is in the midst of a divorce, and two of his four children still refuse to talk to him. He is tempted to feel guilty. He knows Satan, the accuser, wants him to feel guilty. But he also knows the Lord Jesus has conquered the evil one and has made all Satan's accusations totally false and empty.

We are going to close with a song that celebrates the victory Tim is experiencing.

*When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of my guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin*

*Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me*

That, folks, is a victory all believers in Jesus experience right now, today. Let's celebrate by singing that wonderful hymn, "Before the Throne."