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David and his mighty men

'So he became captain over them'.

1 Samuel 22:1-2

The rejected king

After having been anointed by Samuel, David had to wait a long time before he could assume his royal power. In this respect, he is a type of Christ who, in spite of His royal dignity, does not yet wield His power publicly. He is still the rejected One here on earth. The world has cast Him out: it lifted Him up on the cross. His own people rejected Him and did not want Him to be their King. But meanwhile God has exalted Him to sit at His right hand in heaven, above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named (Eph. 1:20-22). He is King of kings and Lord of lords even now, although the public power that is linked with it will only be seen at His second coming (Rev. 19:11-16).

When David had to flee because the time for his reign had not yet come, he became the center and the captain of a number of faithful followers. Similarly, Christ, although still being rejected by the world, has a company of followers: His disciples who are very closely linked with Him. He is the Centre of His own, whom He has chosen and drawn toward Himself.

This is in a typical way presented here in the life of David in First Samuel 22. His brothers went to him in the cave of Adullam, but then also 'everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him'. The first group offers us a picture of those who already know the Lord and realize that He calls them His 'brethren' after His finished work on Calvary's cross

(cf. Ps. 22:22; John 20:17). The second group was formed by men who came to David compelled by various needs. They would represent all those who hear the Lord's call and accept His gentle invitation: 'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11:28).

It is very remarkable in this connection that Matthew's Gospel not only depicts Christ as the rejected King, but also as the Center of all those who take refuge with Him. For He tells them to come to Him. So He is not without faithful followers, and to them He declares the precious name of His Father. At present, He does not maintain publicly His rights with regard to Israel and to the world, but He gathers His own out of Israel and the world. Why does He do so? The grand object in this dispensation is to take out of all the nations a people for His name, and to reveal to them the name of His Father. As the Lord announced it Himself: '(...) nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him' (Matt. 11:27; cf. John 17:6, 26).

Such is the work of His grace in this present day by the Holy Spirit's action. The Spirit shows us the glories of the Son, and He gathers us as God's dear children around Christ the Lord. In Matthew 18:20 we are told that Christ is the Center of His own who are gathered together in His name. They form a people set apart from the world, a heavenly company of priests who draw near to God and to the Lamb for worship.

His leadership

However, just as David was not only the center but also the leader and captain of his followers, Christ is not only the Center but also the Author or Chief Leader of all His own (cf. Heb. 12:2). From the place where we dwell in His presence, we go out into the world for His name's sake. Our being with Him is the preparation we need for our mission as His ambassadors in this world. We read of the disciples that the Lord called them, (1) to be with Him and (2) that He might send them out to preach (Mark 3:14).

David became their leader, the captain of all those who took refuge with him. Similarly, Christ is not only the Savior but also the Lord and Master of all those who come to Him in order to find rest for their souls. He has authority over us and wants to lead us in the battles which we have to wage in this world for His name's sake. After His resurrection from the dead, the disciples who had been with Him became mighty men of valor and brave witnesses, so that even their enemies had to acknowledge that 'they had been with Jesus' (Acts 4:13). Living in the presence of

the Lord had very much changed them and made them fit for battle. The followers of David learned from him and so they changed from down-hearted people into mighty men of valor.

The same thing happens to all those who labor and are heavy laden, when they take refuge with Christ. They are transformed into His image. In their battles with the enemy, they go from strength to strength. Under the leadership of the risen and glorified Lord who vanquished Satan and defeated him with his own sword, they form God's army here on earth. As we fight in His strength we gain victories to the honor and glory of Him who has slain His ten thousands. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37).

His army

We also read about David's heroes that 'they came to him day by day to help him, until it was a great army, like the army of God' (1 Chr. 12:22). They were courageous like lions and swift as gazelles on the mountains. They recognized David's authority over them and they helped to make him king (1 Chr. 11:10). They were the first to subject themselves to David's authority, although he did not yet reign over Israel. And they were highly instrumental in making David king over God's people and the surrounding nations.

Applying this to ourselves, it would mean that we belong to the number of Christ's mighty men when we bow to His authority and fight for the honor of His name in the day of His rejection. Although His public reign has not yet materialized, He is able and willing to lead us by His Word and by the Spirit. Do we follow our heavenly Lord?

In First Chronicles 11 David's mighty men and their victories are mentioned in detail. It is striking to see that the battles of David's men often are directed against the Philistines, who are a type of nominal believers. They lived in the Promised Land, but had not entered it in the way that God had appointed for His people. Unlike the Israelites, they had not crossed the Jordan. Therefore these uncircumcised men are typical of natural men who neither died with Christ, nor are raised with Him.

In First Chronicles 11:12-14 one of the major feats of David's men is mentioned, namely the defense of a field full of barley against the Philistines. Barley speaks of the resurrection life that is the fruit of Christ's death and resurrection (cf. John 6).

Nominal Christians do not know this blessing and their claims to it should be challenged by the servants of the Lord.

This chapter also offers us a detailed report of an action of three heads of David's mighty men, who broke through the camp of the Philistines in Bethlehem in order to draw water from the well of Bethlehem, which was by the gate. In Scripture, well water speaks of the refreshing and quickening work of the Spirit of God through His Word (cf. John 4 and 7), the enjoyment of which is hampered or rendered impossible by the influence of 'Philistines' – nominal believers, unbelieving theologians. Even in the days of the patriarchs, the Philistines stopped up the wells that Abraham had dug (Gen. 26:15). Therefore, it is a special valiant deed (at least in God's eyes) to overcome these enemies and make the living water available again. Our Lord, great David's greater Son, takes delight in these things.

In First Chronicles 11 and 12, all the heroes of David who recognized him as their captain, are mentioned by name. The same thing goes for those who follow Christ as their Lord in the day of His rejection: 'The Lord knows those who are His' (2 Tim. 2:19); their 'heroic deeds' are recorded in heaven!

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