

Scripture Sketches
—Christian Attitudes—
A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

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Preface

The accounts of men and women recorded in the precious Word of God “...were written aforetime... for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). It is the blessed Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” Who “will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself...He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [it] unto you” (John 16:13,14). May He be pleased to take, according to His perfect time and will, each of these divinely inspired records and apply to the seeking heart, precious, vitally important lessons and applications for the blessing and spiritual growth of each of God’s dear children.

It is one’s desire in presenting the following ‘**Biblical character sketches**’ to consider some of the more obscure figures found recorded in the Word of God. Though we do not know much about them, what our God has seen good to record of their lives certainly contains important lessons. May we prayerfully and humbly meditate a bit on their lives, seeking to learn and profit from these divinely inspired accounts. Moral lessons gleaned from these accounts, because they are part of the Divine Canon of Scripture, present infinite applications for our lives—applications which may only be made good to each individual and their personal circumstances by the blessed Holy Spirit.

Above all, may our blessed Lord Jesus be honored in all that is written and all who read these pages be blessed too, for “*edification, exhortation, and comfort*” (1 Cor. 14:3) in each life.

Christian Attitudes —A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

Introduction

Over and over we find the closing salutation of so many of the Epistles ending with a desire that *grace*, the very grace of our Lord Jesus, would be found in the walk and ways of believers. In Philemon we read: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen*”, while 2 Corinthians ends in this manner: “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*”. In like manner Philippians ends with these words: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*” In Colossians 4:6 we find an apostolic command: “*Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*”

Our blessed Saviour is the Perfect example to us of this grace, giving a pattern for each of His redeemed to follow as we pass through this world. John tells us that “*the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*” (Jn. 1:14). In Luke 4 we find the blessed Lord Jesus beginning His earthly ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth. The Lord’s words were such that those who had known Him all His “*bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth*”. At the end of His life we bow in worship and wonder at His gracious words uttered as He hung in agony on the cross: “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34).

Realizing that the Bible is full of exhortations to believers that we might display this same grace that has been shown us to others, such wondrous divine examples and commandments surely ought to be considered a very important guide. Let’s ask ourselves, does the *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* have its proper display in our lives in each and every circumstance which confronts us? What a searching and exceedingly humbling question!

We trust that the following meditation of the life of Abishai might deeply stir each who read it to a greater desire of heart that our lives and testimonies as Christians would ever be characterized by a spirit of grace, even when faced with the most adverse of circumstances.

Christian Attitudes —A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

A Disobedient Spirit—1 Sam. 26

“ And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him. Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will go down with thee” (1 Samuel 26:5,6).

Tests

Dear David, being hunted by Saul like a *partridge on the mountain*, heard of the place of Saul’s encampment. Yearning that Saul might realize he posed no threat to him, David determines to go down to Saul’s camp where he and his men are in a deep sleep. Evidently when David decided on his course of action there were two who were near him—Ahimelech and Abishai—who heard David’s question: *“Who will go down with me...”*— a question that at its root was a test of love for David. Abishai’s desire to be with David and to fight for him prompted a quick, decisive answer proving both Abishai’s love for David as well as his fearless courage. Yet there remained even stronger tests for dear Abishai—such as would greatly test the spirit in which he followed David. Would his faithfulness to David be expressed in a spirit of grace or one of harshness?

Some Background

Scripture records little about Ahimelec the Hittite. We can however reasonably assume the following things: (1) He evidently was of the lineage of Heth; (2) Esau, knowing it would distress his parents, married a Hittite woman; (a daughter of Heth), (3) they were inhabitants of the land of Canaan and were enemies of Israel, hindering them from claiming their promised inheritance in the land; (4) Ahimelec, though of a people generally seen at enmity with Israel may himself have been distressed, discontented and perhaps in debt and thus become a follower of David.

Perhaps Ahimelec is a picture of we Gentiles who, though having no claim on or connection by birth with God’s promised

earthly blessing to Israel, by faith in Christ and God's matchless and undeserved grace are still brought into blessing. The dear Syrophonecian woman recorded in the gospels presents a sweet example of this as well (see Matt. 15).

Scripture however gives us quite a bit more information concerning Abishai who was one of David's nephews. David had a sister named Zeruah (2 Sam. 17:25, 1 Chr. 2:16) who bore three sons. All of them figure more or less prominently in David's life. Their names were Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. From the 'Chronicles' account (1 Chr. 2:16) we gather that Abishai was the oldest, Joab next and Asahel the youngest of Zeruah's three sons.

Abishai was truly attached to David though we find his actions frequently grieved David's heart. He was a fearless warrior who was truly valued by David. His name is found included in the list of David's mighty men both in 2 Samuel 23 and 1 Chronicles 11. From the account in Chronicles we learn not only of the courage of Abishai but of His love for David for he was one of the three who brought water from Bethlehem's well to quench David's thirst.

Wrong Assumptions

v 7: “ *So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him.*”

The cover of darkness, a deep sleep from the Lord, a weapon stuck in the ground, body guards all in a deep sleep as well. Such favorable circumstances seemed to Abishai to present an excellent opportunity for David to finally be rid of his enemy Saul. Outward circumstances however are often allowed of God as a test to our spirits; and these circumstances proved a strong test of Abishai's spirit.

Wrong Conclusions

v 8: “ *Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time.*”

The spirit of revenge rather than the spirit of grace caused Abishai to reach a very wrong conclusion. Wrongly assuming that this favorable opportunity to kill Saul was *of God*, he was quick to seek David's permission to strike him. His harsh spirit fueled the

fury with which he promised to exact ‘just revenge’ on the sleeping Saul. Abishai’s vengeful attitude would require but one opportunity—one stroke of his weapon—to mete out justice.

How much like Abishai we may become in our dealings with one another or with the world! The Spirit of Christ, compassionate, gentle, patient, is so easily forgotten—set aside when we are presented with what may seem a very good opportunity to ‘set right’ a perceived or real ‘wrong’ endured at the hand of another—even another believer. The flesh does not like to hear “*vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord*”. May the words of our blessed Saviour when hanging on the cross—“*Father forgive them ...*”—ever be a guard and guide to our spirits. Sadly, dear Abishai was thinking of ‘retaliation’ rather than ‘restraint’ or ‘patience’ at that moment.

Leaving All With the Lord

v9,10 “*And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD’S anointed, and be guiltless? David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish*”.

Dear David’s answer to Abishai is full of both *grace and truth*—qualities seen in perfection in our Lord Jesus and needed in every step of our lives. Though David knew Saul had been rejected and he was God’s chosen, rightful king; until the Lord dealt with Saul, David would do nothing to ‘set matters right’. David’s spirit is a beautiful example of Prov. 20:22: “*Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.*” Let us be careful lest we think only Abishai was capable of displaying a harsh, ungracious spirit, for these things are recorded for *our learning* as well.

A Simple Command

v11 “*The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD’S anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go.*”

Though some might think David’s reaction far too lenient we see a beautiful and humble acceptance of the sovereignty of God in his life. David would do nothing to change circumstances that God had allowed. Perhaps if we thought more of the vital importance of humbly accepting God’s sovereign ways in our lives there would be

less frustration, chaffing and harsh spirits displayed towards others God uses in our lives according to His own perfect sovereign will.

Rather than allowing Abishai to kill Saul, David requests that he would retrieve the sleeping king's spear and water jar and then quietly leave. What a lovely display of the pure *wisdom of grace* rather than the ugly *harshness of revenge*. We may say too, what a test to Abishai's warlike spirit!

What would taking Saul's spear and water jar accomplish that Abishai's spear could not accomplish more quickly? Everything! Oh! we say again, the beautiful wisdom of grace! David's request shows sweet submission to God's sovereign ways and was calculated to remove Saul's *ability* (spear) and *strength* (water) to fight. Oh! what a crucially important lesson for our us! How much better for all if we would, through divine wisdom that is always available to us, learn to graciously *remove* the ability and strength from those who seek opportunity to strive and contend with us! Such divine pure and peaceable wisdom is freely available to all (see James 3:17, 1:5).

Wrong Reaction

v12 “*So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the LORD was fallen upon them.*”

We ought to be shocked and saddened in pondering on this verse. There is no doubt that the heart of Abishai rang true and loyal for David—no question of his courage and willingness to defend David. Yet let us soberly ponder why this valiant warrior *refused to obey his leader!* David had made his request to Abishai but it was *David himself who had to complete the request.*

Why, we may ask again, did Abishai refuse to obey his leader's command? Oh! do we not see an all too clear reflection of our own harsh spirits and willful hearts in Abishai's actions? Must we not admit that often *righteous indignation* overrules *grace* hastening the desire to set matters straight with those who have who have personally offended or followed a course we perceive to be wrong. Does not the heat of controversy and conflict too often render our hearing deaf to our blessed Saviour's tender desire that grace to shown to the erring? Alas, to often like Abishai, a vengeful spirit results in disobedience to our Lord.

Christian Attitudes —A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

A Vindictive Spirit—2 Sam. 3

“And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah: but David knew it not. And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother” (2 Sam. 3:5,6).

Abishai seemed to fail in judging his harsh, vengeful spirit during the ensuing years after Saul's death. The next account we have of him concerns a very sad event after the death of Saul. The leader of Saul's army, a mighty man of valour named Abner, set up Saul's son Ishbosheth as king after his father Saul's death. Most of Israel seemed content to follow him though Ishbosheth was a weak, lazy leader. For some reason, perhaps jealousy of Abner's power, Ishbosheth foolishly and wrongly offended Abner, accusing him of a serious moral sin (see 2 Sam 3:7-12). Abner, so angered by the false accusation, turned against Ishbosheth aligning himself with David and made plans to bring all of Israel under David's rule.

During this time a battle between Israel and Judah took place and Israel was put to flight by the followers of David. Abner, forced to flee from Joab and David's men, was chased by Asahael, the younger brother of Joab and Abishai. Though swift as a deer, Asahael's fighting skills were no match for the mighty warrior Abner. Although warned by Abner to *'turn aside'* from pursuing him, Asahael refused and Abner was forced to slay Asahael. From the moment that Joab heard of his brother's death, he evidently planned revenge on Abner.

Later when David had sent Abner away in peace from a meeting with him, Joab who was not present at that meeting became angry at King David for not slaying Abner. Under the deceitful guise of a peaceful meeting, Joab contacted Abner as though to speak friendly words to him. Catching the unsuspecting warrior off guard, Joab slew him as recorded in the above verses. Such a treacherous act causes indignation in upright hearts—a righteous loathing of the cruel, unforgiving spirit of Joab who so wickedly conspired to carry out a heartless, vindictive vendetta against Abner.

But an even more solemn revelation follows the sad record of Joab's wicked guile and cruelty. We read these grave words in 2 Sam. 3:30: "*So Joab **and Abishai** his brother killed Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.*"

These solemn words tell our hearts that in all things we must remember that "*Thou God seest me*". Proverbs 15:3 reminds us that "*The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*" Oh dear Christian! Nothing escapes Him! He judges our hearts and actions in perfect righteousness ("*Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?*"; Gen. 18:25). Again there are more sobering words for us found in Hebrews 4:13; "*...all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*"

Abishai, the oldest of the three sons of Zeruiah, bore the greatest responsibility for slaying Abner, though he did not wield the knife. His spirit was still one of vindictiveness that would 'set right' a perceived wrong done to his family. Doubtless it was his spirit that encouraged Joab on his wicked course. Joab may indeed have used the weapon and slain Abner, but God saw and judged all perfectly. Thus we read the chilling words; "*So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner...*". Before God Abishai was just as guilty of Abner's murder as Joab his brother who carried out the wretched act.

How careful we must be that a spirit of family feuding not gain entrance into the assembly, nor guide our actions as brethren in Christ. Family difficulties are a great test to our hearts. We dare not point an accusing finger at Abishai as though we would never do such a thing. May we be very humble realizing that we too might act morally in such a way and in doing so sadly dishonor and grieve our blessed Saviour.

We hasten to add that in this 'moral application' we are not contemplating a situation where a Christian actually carries out the physical killing of a brother in Christ. However let us ask ourselves in the presence of God, has a family offense caused us to desire to be rid of the brother or sister in Christ we perceive to be the 'perpetrator' of that offense against a family member? This is the very kind of vindictive spirit we must judge before our Father seeking grace that such feelings not guide our actions with each other.

How David's nephews grieved him: "*these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me*" (2 Sam. 3:39). Oh! that our blessed Saviour as He views our actions with one another, not be thus grieved with us!

Christian Attitudes —A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

A Chaffed Spirit—2 Sam. 16: 5, 9

“And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. ... Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.” (2 Sam. 3:5,6).

How often we brethren in Christ must hang our heads in sorrow admitting that our spirits, oft beset with problems, trials, even needless contentions with other dear brethren cause our spirits to become chaffed to the point that there is no longer a desire to forgive and go on together in love and peace. Instead a fleshly longing for vengeance gains entrance in our hearts against beloved brethren in Christ who may have offended us and thus a *root of bitterness* is allowed to develop. It surely was so with Abishai.

In love and faithfulness for David he had followed him when Absalom had overthrown David’s rule in Jerusalem, installing himself as king in Israel. David and the little company loyal to him had to flee for their lives. It is surely to dear Abishai’s credit that he *went with God’s true king*—But Abishai did not go in a properly humbled, broken and contrite spirit, the very spirit we see so beautifully displayed in David.

Perhaps none had more reason to be chaffed in spirit than dear David. One of his own sons, a son that he loved, secretly rose up in rebellion against his father the King. David could have stayed to do battle but his words to Zadok the priest show the beautiful submission and humbled spirit of David. *“ if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him”* (2 Sam. 15:25,26).

Perhaps at the first Abishai did feel the sorrow and humbling in some degree for we read that all those who followed King David in his flight from Jerusalem *wept with a loud voice* (v.23, also v. 30). It was not long however before Abishai’s spirit was once again put to

the test and once again he sadly failed in his spirit.

Testing Spirits

The way was doubtless weary and in spite of Mephibosheth's servant Ziba who conspired to deceive his master and David by meeting the fleeing king with food and wine, a very strong trial was about to test all the spirits of those who were with David.

A relative of the slain King Saul whom God had rejected in choosing David to be King over His beloved people, hearing of David's flight comes out cursing and insulting the king. Though Shimei's curses, insults, casting of stones and dust on the weary, broken hearted David were doubtless specially meant for the King, all those who were near to David heard and felt the insults as well.

We read in 1 Sam 16:14 (YLT) that "...*the king cometh in, and all the people who are with him, wearied...*". What a test of spirits! Fleeing for their lives with the true King of Israel, love for King David motivating them, tired, hungry, and wearied with the wicked insulting actions of Shimei—only a truly submitted spirit, broken and humbled before the Lord could quietly continue in the face of such adverse circumstances.

Abishai, sadly, would not submit his spirit to such an affront and indignity as Shimei rendered to the king. He angrily chides David desiring to vindicate him (and no doubt, his own chaffed spirit as well); "*Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.*"

Useless Vindictiveness

Oh! must we not confess that we often, when facing just a little test allowed of the Lord to humble our spirits, react in the very same way toward a brother or sister in Christ whose ways have offended—'Let me go take off his head!'. No desire to win their heart. No interest in seeking for *things which make for peace*. No remembering or acting on the blessed Lord's words to "*love one another as I have loved you*", but instead a harsh desire to 'take off his head'. We are reminded of beloved Peter who cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. How well could that servant 'hear' the truth about the Lord Jesus once his ear was gone? Though speaking in a figure, we may well ask our own hearts what communion, fellowship or joy in the Lord can be experienced with a headless believer!? When has such a vindictive, chaffed spirit and action ever solved any conflict between brethren?!

A Sorrowing Heart

May we be solemnized and deeply exercised by dear David's answer to Abishai for in it we surely see a little picture of the heart of our blessed Lord Jesus. David's answer to Abishai suggests to our hearts the grief our Lord surely must feel when His own display an 'Abishai' spirit towards one another. *"And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah? so let him [Shimei] curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him."* (2 Sam. 16:10,11).

Refreshing Rest

"it may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2 Sam. 16:12).

It was after David's sweet and humble response to Abishai, submitting completely to the ways of the Lord with him, that we read of those who followed him were able to refresh themselves in the very presence of Shimei's persecution. Surely it will be so with us as well! Quietly humbling ourselves in full submission to what the Lord has allowed, praying for those who have offended or chaffed us (instead of fighting with them) will surely bring a refreshing rest and peace to the soul—ours and others as well. *"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace"* (Jas 3:18).

Christian Attitudes —A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

An Unforgiving Spirit—2 Sam. 19: 18-22

“...And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan; And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For thy servant doth know that I have sinned... But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD'S anointed? And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I [am] this day king over Israel?”

At this time there seemed to be a genuinely repentant spirit with Shimei for the shameful way he had treated David (Though later, during Solomon's reign, Shimei's actions proved that he was an unworthy individual). Here, however, we find his actions suited to one repentant of his sin. David, ever a man whose spirit was one of kindness and grace, accepts Shimei's confession and apology, allowing him to live.

What a lovely picture of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ shown to each one of His redeemed! *Saved*—“*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*” (Eph. 2:8). *Justified*—“*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 3:24). *Grace for trials*—“*And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness*” (2 Cor. 12:9). What an infinitely rich and wonderful gift is the sovereign grace of God so freely shown to undeserving sinners—grace which has fully met and provided for every need. Thus comes the admonition found in Philemon 1:25: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your **spirit**. Amen.*”

But we must ask our hearts how is it with us when one who has wronged or offended us returns displaying a repentant, apologetic spirit. Our response can be like that of dear King David or it can be similar to poor Abishai who seems as yet not to have judged his harsh, vindictive spirit. His solution in dealing with Shimei's confes-

sion of wrongs done to David was far from forgiveness; “*Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD’S anointed?*” Oh how very far from the spirit of perfect grace shown by our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, when, having been crucified could utter those sublime words to His Father; “*Father forgive them for they know not what they do*”.

The Need of Grace

How grieved the heart of David was at the harshness of Abishai’s ungracious spirit; “*What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me?*” Oh! how sad that we as well might harbor such an ungracious spirit and feelings against a repentant brother or sister. Is it not very solemn that our blessed Lord Jesus must look upon those displaying such a spirit as *adversaries* to His sovereign gracious forgiveness and love for the erring one?!

Poor Abishai could only seem to remember and dwell on the wrong and insult done to David and his followers. The sad result is that his heart, lacking a spirit of grace, only thinks of retribution and revenge against the repentant offender. The spirit of forgiveness seems, sadly, a foreign concept to Abishai.

In Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus tells us of a debtor who owed his master *ten thousand talents* and had no way to pay his debt. His plea for mercy to his master brought full, free and total forgiveness of the huge debt. Yet, displaying a despicable attitude of harsh un-graciousness towards a fellow servant, he demands immediate payment of a paltry 100 pence debt, else he will have the fellowservant cast into prison. That harsh spirit reaped the most solemn of consequences for the one who displayed it towards another. Oh! that we might remember that we are all ten thousand talent debtors to our blessed God and that our precious Saviour has fully and freely forgiven us all our debt through His blood shed at the cross. Dare we use any less spirit of forgiveness towards others who have offended us in some way?

“*Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you*” (Eph 4:32).

Christian Attitudes —A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

A Changed Spirit—2 Sam. 20: 6,7

“ And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom: take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us. And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri”.

We are not told what took place between the time of Abishai's harsh, ungracious spirit held toward Shimei and this incident in which David is opposed by a *son of Belial*, Sheba. The king, however, realized that Sheba's current rebellion held more potential for disaster to his reign than even Absalom's rebellion. David selects Abishai (rather than Joab) to stop the wicked Sheba before the rebellion gained momentum against the king. It seems obvious some sort of positive change in Abishai's spirit had taken place—a change that gave King David a renewed confidence in Abishai.

What mars Abishai's leadership here does not really seem to be his fault. His brother Joab's treacherous heart and actions again cause great sorrow to David. Not only does Joab usurp the place David had given his brother, Abishai, in leading the army against Sheba, but once again he wickedly slays an innocent man. Amasa, the former head of Absalom's army had fully returned to support David. It had been in David's heart to set Amasa in Joab's place as head over David's fighting men—something the envious Joab hated.

We do not see here, as we did in the case of Abner and Asahel, that Abishai was involved in the wicked conspiracy carried out by Joab against Amasa. Abishai's spirit seemed repentant, subdued and obedient, not vindictive or revengeful. His happily renewed spirit is now one that David can again trust—allowing David to have confidence in Abishai's service to him. It is lovely to see how Abishai's changed spirit acts in immediate obedience to David's order to wage war and fight against the rebellious Sheba.

What an encouragement to our hearts as well. How often we must admit that we fail our Lord by our harsh spirits. Yet our blessed

all-gracious Lord is ever ready to forgive and once again use such a one who has repented and whose spirit has changed, in some little service for Himself.

Though today is surely a time when each believer ought to show themselves faithful to our blessed, rejected Lord Jesus, it is surely not a time to have a spirit which would “*command fire to come down from heaven, and consume ...*” (Luke 9:54) those who do not know the Lord, have in some way missed the Lord’s will, or have somehow offended us.

Such a sad, harsh spirit as dear James and John displayed when the Samaritan village refused to show hospitality to the Lord and His disciples, called forth a solemn rebuke from the blessed Lord. How often does Scripture remind us of the need of love, gentleness, forgiveness and grace! May the light of divine love and grace shine more brightly in each of our lives for when it does there will surely be blessing for others as well. “*He giveth more grace... to the humble*” (Jas. 4:6).

Christian Attitudes —A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

A Courageous Spirit—2 Sam. 21:15-17

“Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint. And Ishbibenob, which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him.”

What a glorious and vital service the renewed spirit of Abishai allowed him to render to David! When he was young—a lad—David had, in faith, met and slain the giant Goliath. Now, evidently, time has passed, David has grown older and, in battle with the Philistines becomes faint and is almost killed by another of the giants of the Philistines, Ishbibenob. How encouraging to read of Abishai’s spirit of courage—a spirit that could only be born of true repentance, submission and love for David.

Earlier Abishai and his brothers’ harsh spirits had been a distress to David and David had rebuked them saying they were *too hard* for him, their hard spirits causing them to act as an adversary to him. Now what a wonderful change we see in Abishai when we learn that he *succoured* his beloved king, stood in the gap, met the giant and slew him, saving the life of David who had grown faint.

We are reminded of Saul of Tarsus, the inveterate enemy of Christ and his church. What a change repentance brought to that proud Pharisee! No longer Saul of Tarsus, but now the Apostle Paul, he writes in Philippians 3; *“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ... That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings...forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”*

David had become everything to Abishai. Our Lord Jesus was even more so to the beloved Apostle. May we too give our Lord that preeminent place in our hearts—the place He alone is worthy of having!

Christian Attitudes —A Meditation on the Life of Abishai

A Rewarded Spirit—2 Sam. 23:13-19

“And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam ... 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!...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 ... These things did these three mighty men. And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, and slew [them], and had the name among three. Was he not most honourable of three? therefore he was their captain:...”

We find how much our blessed Lord delights to reward service done in love, obedience and submission to His perfect will in spite of our past failures. Dear Peter learned that sweet lesson and so have multitudes more who have loved and served the blessed Lord Jesus. Remember that even a cup of cold water given in His Name will not lose its reward.: *“And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward”* (Matt 10:42).

The story of dear Abishai—a record that began with such dark, sad failure—ends on a sweet, wonderful, and victorious note. What an encouragement for each dear child of God who, though often failing, still desires to serve the blessed Lord Jesus. Perhaps like Abishai, we have often with our harsh, unkind spirits and words failed and grieved our blessed Lord Jesus even as Abishai did to David. Yet now we find that the Spirit of God is pleased to list thirty of the chiefest of David’s mighty warriors—those who had loved David, faithfully following and serving him while battling against his enemies. What mighty victories were won by these courageous men. How kind of our blessed God to let us see that there were failures in their lives—but that such failures did not stop a life of fruitful service for Himself.

To our delight (and perhaps surprise as well), we find near the top of the list none other than Abishai’s name is recorded! What a joy

to see one who had failed so often in his harsh, unforgiving, vengeful, and wilful spirit, brought to a real sense of love for and humble submission to David, his spirit subdued. It is in this record that we learn just how much Abishai loved and valued his king.

We have often enjoyed reading of the longing of King David for a drink from the well of Bethlehem and of the three brave warriors who in love for him jeopardied their lives and broke through the enemy's defenses to draw water from the well, bringing it to him. David uses their loving service as a precious sacrifice of worship and praise to Jehovah. And who, we may well ask, was the 'leader' of these three brave warriors? None other than dear Abishai whom the Spirit of God records as the '*chief among the three*' in carrying out this loving, courageous service.

No longer do we read of a grieved David saying "*ye sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me*". No longer was Abishai's spirit harsh or vindictive (*let me take off his head*). All that had been a grief to David's heart. Now his spirit, truly humbled and ruled by love for David, is such that he is counted as one of the very chiefest and mightiest of David's warriors. The Spirit of God also adds this precious commendation to Abishai's name— "*was he not most honourable of three? therefore he was their captain.*"

How important that our spirits also be in fellowship with our loving, gracious Saviour's heart. It is only when our spirits are 'meek' and 'lowly' as our blessed Saviour was in perfection (Matt. 11:29), and with a felt sense of our own weakness ("*when I am weak, then am I strong*" - 2 Cor. 12:10) that the strength to do *all things through Christ which strengtheneth me* (Phpp. 4:13) will be given for every service He may call us to undertake for Himself.

Has there been failure, harsh spirits, angry feelings displayed in our lives? If repented of, that need not hinder loving service to our blessed Saviour. Let us, in humility and repentance, own the sin of harsh, ungracious spirits, so unlike our blessed Lord Jesus, and then with renewed confidence in His forgiveness, love and guidance, look for opportunities to show forth to all around the *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* in our every action. "*And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work*" (2 Cor. 9:8).

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