

WHY SHOULD WE BE STRONG by Carl McMurray

We live in a “What’s in it for me?” world. This attitude rears its head far too often. Whether it is why we should help another or who we’re voting for, we often have to confront this question in ourselves and others. Even Christians are not immune. Do we cast our vote *in favor* of the abortion side if we like the tax promises, or *stand against* the murder of children and accept whatever bogus environmental policy comes down the pike and costs us more? Since 1975 it seems as if we are called upon more and more each election to ask ourselves whether we will vote by our morals or our wallets. Some continue to repeat “Well, they are going to get abortions anyway,” so that is not really an issue. Really? They are going to murder, steal, gamble, lie, and engage in homosexual and adulterous behavior anyway so shall we just quit opposing them? These things are “not really issues” because “they” are going to do it anyway? The argument doesn’t make sense. In this matter of morals versus money, some appear to be simply looking at who is promising the most money and asking themselves, “Why should I be strong? Why should I stand? What’s in it for me?”

In reading 2 Samuel 10 this past week it occurs to me that we have been given the answer to the above questions, if we will pay attention. The occasion is that Ammon and Aram have united to fight against Israel. When David learned of the menace he sent his commander, Joab, out to lead the army in defense of the nation. Verse 9 seems to indicate that when Joab arrives at the field of battle he discovers that they have come into an ambush. Hired mercenaries and soldiers have surrounded Israel in front and behind and the text says that Joab saw, “the battle was set against him.”

Joab had very little choice but divide his troops to face both battle fronts, behind and in front, with the plan that whoever was victorious should turn and assist the others. They were in an untenable position. The troops were divided and they appeared to be outnumbered, but the commander’s words of encouragement ring powerful. In v. 12, Joab told his men, “Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what is good in His sight.”

The end of the account was that when Israel went forward into battle the Arameans fled. And when the Ammonites saw that the Arameans had run out, they also broke and ran. Not only was this a complete rout of Ammon, but subsequent military maneuvers on the part of the Arameans taught them some excellent lessons. The last verse in the chapter says, “So the Arameans feared to help the sons of Ammon anymore.”

What can we learn from this? What do you suppose would have happened if Joab and his men had trusted their own sense of military strategy and just laid down their arms and surrendered? After all, they might have figured, the Ammonites were going to win anyway. Instead, Joab gave his men three reasons to stand strong and be courageous. I note that none of them had to do with what was in it for them.

He told them to be strong and courageous 1) for their people. Their families. Their wives and sons and daughters and parents and all the rest who were waiting behind them, looking to their protection, and example for their defense.

He told them to be strong and courageous 2) for the cities of the Lord. For their brethren in other places whom they did not know, but who would be effected one way or another by the actions on this battlefield.

And he told them to be strong and courageous because 3) the Lord would do what is right in His sight, i.e. He would not let his children go down in a battle with the enemy if they are faithful and obedient. He will do, and always does, what is right.

These lessons are lessons for today. We too need to be strong and courageous. We need to vote in a way that is God pleasing, whichever that way may be, as much as is humanely possible. We need to help and serve others without regard for what return they might give us. We need to worship faithfully and encourage our brethren without whining about what they do for us. In other words, we need to quit asking, “What’s in it for me?”

We need to be strong and courageous and do what is right simply because it is right, whether there is anything to be obviously gained or not! We need to do this for our “people.” Our families who look to us and lean on us and whose dreams of the future revolve around us. We need to do what is right for our extended family, the church, in all places. Stand or fall, victory or defeat, word gets around both in the body and out and people are built up or discouraged, made proud or humiliated by what goes on in THIS field of battle. And we need to do what is right because the Lord will do what is right. We need to trust Him and stop trying to figure out the strategy of how to make things best for ourselves. Trust Him that His way is best and take your stand with Him, no matter if the enemy is in front AND behind. He WILL bring you through. Be strong and courageous.