

Thirty-One Kings, or the Victory Over Self

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the need to overcome the subtle forms of self-life that hinder our spiritual growth and relationship with God.

Scripture: Joshua 12:7, Joshua 14:15, Joshua 15:14, Matthew 16:24-25, Luke 9:23, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:3-4, 1 John 2:15-17

Topics: "Surrender to God", "Victory Over Self"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the spiritual battle against the 'thirty-one kings' representing various forms of self-life that hinder our relationship with God. He explains that while gross sins are left behind upon entering the land of holiness, subtler forms of self-will, self-indulgence, and self-seeking must be confronted and defeated. Each king symbolizes a different aspect of self that must die for the believer to fully embrace God's will and love. The sermon calls for a complete surrender to God, allowing His love to transform our lives and lead us to true victory over self. Ultimately, Simpson encourages believers to recognize their identity in Christ and live for His glory rather than their own.

Transcript

"These are the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel smote on this side Jordan on the west. . . . All the kings were thirty and one." (Josh. 12: 7, 24.)

"Arba was a great man among the Anakims." (Josh. 14: 15.)

"Caleb drove thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi." (Josh. 15: 14.)

"For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." (2 Cor. 5: 14, 15.)

These words describe the great conflict of the higher Christian life in the Land of Promise. This is not a conflict with the grosser forms of sin, for we leave them behind us when we cross the Jordan and come into the land of holiness, obedience and rest.

Surely it ought to go without saying that no consecrated Christian would dare to indulge in wilful disobedience or sin. But there are other foes more subtle, and these are symbolized, we believe, by these kings with whom Joshua made war so long.

They are the various forms of self-life which, while not perhaps directly and wilfully sinful, in the grosser sense, are yet as contrary to the will of God, and as necessary to be subdued and slain, before the soul can be in perfect harmony with the divine will. They are all tyrants which, if allowed to remain, will ultimately bring us into subjection to sin and separate us from the Lord.

They belong to one family, and the progenitor of every one of them is Arba, the father of Anak ; and his first-born son, Anak, has perpetuated his generation through many children, and the numerous offspring constitute a line of no less than thirty-one; so that there is a foe for every day in the month, in the Christian's calendar.

The name Arba means "the strength of Baal." This represents the strength of the natural heart. Baal was the ancient Sidonian god of nature, and Arba stands for the natural heart, in all the force of its self-will and self-sufficiency.

The name of his son, Anak, signifies in Hebrew "long-necked," and everybody knows that a long neck suggests pride and self-will; so that these two names express the character of the whole family.

The other three sons whose names are mentioned, Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, carry out the family resemblance. Sheshai means "free," suggesting the idea of the license in which selfishness delights. Talmai means "bold," representing the independence of the self-life, which brooks no control. Ahiman means "brother of men," and expresses aptly the humanitarianism which ignores God, and would make humanity a god unto itself, expressing the self-sufficiency of the race rather than of the individual.

Shall we look at these kings of the old Self Dynasty, and see if we can recognize any of them in our own experience?

SELF-WILL

This is old Arba, the head of the dynasty. It expresses its decrees in the personal pronoun and the active verb -- I will, I shall. It recognizes no king but its own imperative choice.

Arba must die before Hebron can be won by Caleb. Self-will must be slain before love can reign.

Yield yourself unto God, is the watchword at the gate of holiness and peace.

It is not only the evil will, but the self-will that must die. Things that it would be right for us to have, God cannot give us when we want them wilfully, and therefore He has often to crucify us to our own will, for no other reason than to break us, and make us self-surrendered and wholly subjected to His control.

Often, therefore, in our lives, we have had to surrender something to Him which He really wished us to have; and later in our life, when we no longer wanted it because we wanted it, but because it was His will for us, He could trust us with it without harm, and it was freely given, when we could receive it no longer as a selfish idol, but as a divine trust.

So God had to take Isaac from Abraham, and then give him back as no longer Abraham's Isaac, but God's.

The will thus surrendered becomes a stronger will, because it is henceforth not our will, but His within us; and when we choose, we choose with the strength of God, and choose forever.

Have we yielded our will and received His in return? Has the city of Arba become the city of Hebron, and the home of His love?

SELF-INDULGENCE.

This is the gratification of self in any of its forms.

Is it wrong to eat and drink, and indulge our appetites? No, the act may not be wrong in itself, but it becomes wrong when we do it for the sake of the indulgence. I am not to eat because it gratifies me to eat; I am not to drink because I enjoy the act, but I am to eat and drink for the glory of God; that is, with the distinct thought and purpose of pleasing Him and ministering to my bodily wants that I may be strong to serve and glorify Him. It is the thought of self-gratification that defiles the act which in itself is right, but in its motive may be wholly selfish and sinful.

So the commonest acts of life are to be wholly consecrated to Him and done unto Him, and thus they become sacred and holy.

Have we learned the secret of thus living for His glory, and dying unto ourselves?

SELF-SEEKING

Self-seeking is one of the forms of self-life which must be surrendered. "Love seeks not her own." Her object is not to accomplish some personal end, but to benefit another and to glorify God.

The great business of the people of this world is to seek their own ends, aggrandizements, honors and pleasures. But a consecrated life has but one purpose: to "seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and then to rest in His will, knowing that "all these things shall be added."

SELF-COMPLACENCY

This is the spirit of Anak, the long-necked one. It is the spirit of pride; the pride that takes delight in our own qualities and rests with satisfaction in ourselves.

It is very different from vanity, which seeks the approval of others. Self-complacency is so satisfied with itself that it cares little for the opinion of others, and has a lofty independence about it that even scorns their criticism and rises superior to their praise. It is a god unto itself. It is one of the most subtle forms of self-life, and has a sort of lofty grandeur which blinds its possessor to its danger and its deep sinfulness.

SELF-GLORYING

Self-glorying is the converse of this. It seeks the praise of others, rather than its own. It may be very small in its own eyes, and for this very reason tries to shine in the eyes of others. A lady of rank is not dependent upon her dress or her equipage for her position, but is usually very simple. It is the lack of real greatness that makes the society butterfly eager to attract attention by her gaudy display.

Self-glorying vaunts itself and inflates its little bubble because it is so small. There is no creature so diminutive in its real proportions, when really reduced to its actual dimensions, as the dude and the daughter of fashion.

The truly consecrated life wants none of this. It is conscious of its nothingness, and knows that it is dependent on God alone for all it can ever possess, and therefore it covers its face with the veil of His loveliness, and robes itself in His own righteousness, and then hides in His bosom, saying, "Not I, but Christ that lives in me."

SELF-CONFIDENCE

This is a form of self-life which relies upon its own wisdom, strength and righteousness. It is Simon Peter, saying, "Though all men shall deny You, yet will not I."

This is your man of strong common sense and self-reliance. He believes in his own opinion. He relies upon his own judgment. He laughs at the people who talk about divine guidance and the Spirit's leadings. This must die before we can become established in the strength of Christ. Therefore, the strongest natures have often to fail in order to bring them to the end of self, and lead them, like Peter, to lean on God, and like Jacob, with wounded thigh, to go forth depending henceforth on the strength of God.

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Closely allied to this is self-consciousness. This is the self that is always thinking of itself and covered with its own shadow. Every act and look and word is studied. Every feeling and inward state is morbidly photographed upon the inward senses. Sometimes we become conscious of our own physical organism. We watch our breath, our pulses, our temperature, and our physical state. We carry about with us continually a morbid consciousness of our functions and conditions. All the simplicity is taken away. We are bound to ourselves like a man with his hand on his own collar, trying to pull himself along.

This is a dreadful bondage. God wants us to have the freedom of a simple child, that acts without thinking from spontaneous impulses and with a beautiful liberty. He does not want us to see the shining of our faces, to be conscious of our holy acts, or to make a note of every sacrifice and service; but He would have us, when He comes at the last to say, "I was an hungered and you gave Me meat; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink"; to be so self-forgetful that we shall answer back, "When did we see You hungry and fed You, or thirsty, and gave You drink?"

How shall we get out of this wretched self-consciousness? Only by getting into a higher consciousness, even the presence of our Lord, and a purpose and object beyond ourselves, to live for God and others, and realize that He is living for us, and living in us, in those sweet, spontaneous impulses that are the true springs of action.

SELF-IMPORTANCE

An exaggerated form of self-consciousness is self-importance. This is very offensive and yet very common. Some people carry it in their very gait and bearing, as they walk along the street, and almost tempt one to step up to them and ask the question which it is said Sydney Smith used to ask of people whom he saw on the street, "Excuse me, sir, but may I ask if you are anybody in particular?"

This is not the usual accompaniment of true greatness, but it is very common in very small men and women, who make up for their lack of real weight by an immense amount of self-assertion and swaggering assumption. This is very offensive to a true Christian taste.

Holy modesty will show itself in the very bearing. True humility consists not so much in thinking meanly of ourselves, as in not thinking of ourselves at all. And the ripe head of wheat always hangs down in proportion to its weight.

SELF-DEPRECIATION

Closely allied to this is self-depreciation. This is just as bad as the other. Some people are egregiously conscious of their own shortcoming and inability. It keeps them from useful service and is always thrusting its littleness and nothingness upon every situation. If it sees its name in print, it is afraid of being puffed up. If asked to be seated on the platform, it will blush and shrink, and hide away. If called upon to do some service, it will refuse on the ground of inability. This is all self.

A truly-surrendered heart hasn't got any name to see in print, any person to be conscious of, any power to serve. Its name has been given to Christ, and if He wants it used, let Him have it, and blaze it before the universe in fame or infamy. It hasn't any ability to work, and if Christ wants to send it, He must equip it and supply it with all necessary resources. Therefore it goes unquestioning and fully assured, because all its strength must come from God.

SELF-VINDICATION

This is the self that stands for its own rights and avenges its wrongs. It is quick to detect an injury or an offense, and to express its sense of it in some marked and unmistakable way. It believes in receiving the respect and consideration due to it in all cases, and while it asks nothing beyond, yet it insists upon all its rights. It is not egregious in its own conceit. It does not demand applause beyond its merits, but it asks proper consideration, and is going to have it.

Now, this is a very respectable, but a very real form of selfishness. It is directly contrary to the spirit of Christianity and the Lord Jesus Christ. The very idea of His incarnation was the renunciation of all His rights. Being in the form of God, He was entitled to be equal with God, but we are told He did not count this a prize, but "He emptied Himself and made Himself of no reputation."

If God wants to bring you here, it is very easy for Him to empty you and make you of no reputation, and there will be lots of people who will be ready to help Him do it. But it is very lovely to do this ourselves, as Jesus did, and not wait to have it done for us.

The very essence of Christ's humiliation was that He gave up all His heavenly rights, and when He came down to earth He gave up all His earthly rights, and made it the business of His life to let go, until there was nothing left to give up, but even His very life was yielded.

You have not begun to deal with the question of self-surrender until it reaches your dearest rights, and you let them go into His hand as a glorious deposit; and every time you do so, He puts it down in your bank account, and when the interest has all accumulated, O! how He will pay you back, -- much of it in this world, but how much more in the day of eternal recompense!

I solemnly believe that most of the blessings that have been given to me in my life and ministry have come because of the evil things people have said of me, and because God made me willing to allow them to do it. "Let Shimei curse; it may be the Lord will requite you good for his cursing this day."

SENSITIVENESS

Sensitiveness is one of the most painful forms of selfishness.

One day, in India, I picked up a beautiful little vine that was spreading over the ground. I thought how lovely it would be to press it in my note-book. But by the time I had taken it up it disappeared, and there was nothing left in my hand but a long string on which the leaves had been. It was as stiff and hard as a leafless stem, and I said, "Why, where has my plant gone?" I looked on the ground, and the other leaves were spreading over the grass as before, but I could see no trace of the one I supposed I had dropped.

I looked at the little dry stem in my hand again, and I found it was the same little branch I had picked from the ground, but its leaves had all folded up as firm and dry as if it had been struck by an autumn blast. And when I touched the other leaves on the ground they disappeared in the same way. Then I said, "Why, it is a sensitive plant !"

I thought of people I had seen who had been all bright and radiant for a time, but something touched them that was offensive, uncongenial, or humbling, and they suddenly disappeared and shrank into such hard, dry, leaf-less sticks that there was no point of contact with them. They seemed to have become all at once like Egyptian mummies, ready for a glass case. What was the matter?

Self?

"Great peace have they that love your law, and nothing shall offend them." The Lord bring and keep us there!

There is a place where we can be, or rather where we can cease to be; and Christ becomes instead of me. And of that place it is true, "He that was begotten of God keeps him, and that wicked one touches him not."

SELF-SEEING

There are some people who always see things from their own side. How does this affect me?

You see your own side of it, but if you would wait and see your brother's side, if you would be willing to believe that there is another side, you, yourself, would be saved from a thousand stings and others from a thousand misunderstandings.

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Put yourself in your brother's place. Take into consideration his circumstances, his views. Think how you would act if you felt as he feels, saw with his eyes, were placed as he is placed. You will be surprised to see how differently you will look at things. And yet this is only one of the first things in the holy art of self-forgetfulness.

INTROSPECTION

Our morbid and excessive self-examination is one of the forms of self-life that causes much pain and works much injury in our Christian life.

There is a right, but there is a wrong, self-examination. God alone can truly search us. We are very apt, when we attempt it ourselves, to get poisoned with the effluvia of the sepulcher into which we penetrate. Even Paul said, "Yes, I judge not my own self, but He that judges me is the Lord."

Let us commit our own way unto Him and honestly say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Thus let us walk in Him, trust Him to show us all we need to see, and then believe "if in anything we be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto us."

SELF-LOVE

Self-love is the root of all these forms of the self-life. It is a heart centered upon itself, and so long as this is the case every affection and every power of our being is turned inward and self-ward, and the whole character distorted by the false adjustment of our nature; just as much as our eye would be if it were ever turning inward upon itself rather than outward upon the objective world which it was made to perceive.

God, who is the type of all true being, is essentially love, and lives not for Himself, but for others, and when we become self-centered we are the opposite of God, and really assume His throne and become gods unto ourselves.

It is the ruin and perversion of a soul to love and live for itself.

SELFISH AFFECTIONS

Selfish affections are the natural fruit of self-life.

We love our own friends and families and the people who minister to our pleasure; and even those we love, we love not so much for the blessing that we can be to them, as for the pleasure that they minister to us.

Love that terminates on ourselves is selfish and degrading. The love that seeks another's blessing is elevating and divine.

SELFISH MOTIVES

Selfish motives may enter into the highest acts and mar and pervert them to their inmost core.

It is not only what we say and do, but why. God sees the very thought and purpose, and He judges the act by its intent.

The natural heart cannot do a good thing without some selfish object which perverts and destroys its purity.

SELFISH DESIRES

Selfish desires are always springing up in the old natural heart, and even if they never reach fruition, or never become choices, acts or facts, we want to be free from the very wish, and have God so give us our desires that they shall spring from Him, and be prompted by His love.

The spirit of covetousness is just a selfish desire, and God has pronounced it idolatry, and most dreadful sin.

SELFISH CHOICES

Selfish choices are still more serious, for the will is the spring of human actions, and determines all our words and deeds. We want a rightly directed will, which chooses not its own gratification, but because of , "Him who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure."

SELFISH PLEASURES

There are two kinds of enjoyment: one, which we seek for its own sake, and this is selfishness; the other is the pleasure that comes to us from doing good, and because we are in harmony with God and with our own being, which is the truest enjoyment.

Selfish pleasure, the desire that seeks its own, and terminates on itself, is earth-born, transitory and wrong.

SELFISH POSSESSIONS

The worldling seeks to gain the world, and calls his possessions his own. The true child of God has nothing for himself, but holds all as a sacred trust for God. "Neither said any of them that aught of the things that they possessed was their own."

The true Christian conception of property is stewardship; the holding of the gifts of God for His service, and subject to His direction, and for His glory.

This is the sovereign remedy for avarice and the grasping spirit of the world, and we are never consecrated until all is laid, absolutely and forever, at His feet, and held there subject constantly to His will.

SELFISH FEARS AND CARES

Nearly all of our cares and anxiety spring from pure selfishness.

If we were wholly yielded to God, and recognized our life in its every moment as absolutely His, we would have no anxiety, but would regard ourselves as His property and under His safe and constant protection. The Lord has said, "You cannot serve God and Mammon," and has added, with strange logical suggestiveness, "Therefore, I say to you, take no anxious care for the morrow."

That little word, "therefore," discovers the link between Mammon worship and anxious care.

SELFISH SORROWS

Many of our griefs and heartbreaks spring from the purest selfishness, wounded pride, ambition, self-love, or the loss of something which we should not have called our own.

The death of self blots out a universe of wretchedness and brings a heaven of joy.

SELFISH SACRIFICES AND SELF-DENIALS

Selfish sacrifices and self-denials are as real as they are paradoxical.

A man "may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, and have not love." He may do it all for the gratification of his vanity or the display of his orthodoxy, and the propagation of his own beliefs and opinions.

Simon Stylites, after sitting a quarter of a century on the top of a pillar, and living on roots and pauper pittance, was, perhaps, the most egregious embodiment of self-righteousness and self-consciousness in the whole world. He had denied himself to gratify himself, to exalt himself, and to save himself. It was simply the old stream of his life turned into a new channel.

SELFISH VIRTUE AND MORALITY

And so there may be selfish virtue and morality.

The Pharisees were virtuous, but their virtue was a selfish cloak, intended for display, and therefore worthless, or worse. It was simply an advertisement, and its motive destroyed its value.

The lady who walks the street with her skirts held carefully away from the touch of her fallen sister may be an icicle of selfish propriety; while her poor sister, with all her faults, may have a generous heart, and may even be sinning from some motive of mistaken love, and sacrificing herself for another. And while this does not palliate her sin it may make her a nobler character than even the virtuous one who scorns her.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

And so there is a self-righteousness which would even seek to justify itself before God by its own religious works, and thus forfeit His righteousness and salvation. For it is not of our sins alone, but even of our righteousness that He has said, they are "as filthy rags," and they must be laid down, and we, as helpless, worthless sinners accept the righteousness of Christ for our justification before God.

SELFISH SANCTITY AND SANCTIFICATION

We may have selfish sanctity and sanctification, and be so absorbed in our religious experience that our eye will be taken off Jesus and centered upon ourselves, and thus we shall become offensive exhibitions of religious self-consciousness, and our very good be marred by its indirection and introversion.

True sanctification forgets itself and lives in constant dependence upon the Lord Jesus as its Righteousness and All-sufficiency.

SELFISH CHARITIES AND SELFISH GIFTS

So we may have selfish charities and selfish gifts. The largest generosity and the most munificent offerings of money may be only an advertisement of ourselves, and prompted by some motive which terminates on our own interest or honor.

Some people give liberally, and then hamper their gifts with so many conditions and get themselves so wrought into the administration of their beneficence that all its disinterestedness is lost, and it looks like the gratification of their own higher pleasure.

OUR CHRISTIAN WORK MAY BE SELFISH

We may preach because of the intellectual pleasure it gives us.

We may work for the church because we like the church, the minister, or the people.

We may engage in a benevolent or Christian profession because it enables us to make a comfortable livelihood, and gives us congenial employment.

Or we may do our religious work on selfish principles and from religious selfishness.

The Church of God today is blighted by the selfishness of her evangelistic work. She is spending seven hundred times as much for her own people as she does upon the heathen world, and the spirit of religious selfishness runs through all her plans.

SELFISH PRAYERS

There is nothing that sounds so selfish as the prayers of many Christians.

They travel in a circle about the size of their own body and soul, their family, and perhaps their own particular church, and the suffering household of faith and the perishing world are scarcely ever touched by their sympathies or their intercessions.

The highest prayer is the prayer of unselfish love, and as we learn to pray for others, and to carry the dying world upon our hearts, we shall find ourselves enriched in return, a thousandfold, and prove, indeed, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

SELFISH HOPES

The future of many persons is as selfish as their present. They live in the dreams of coming joys and triumphs, and their vision is all earth-bound, and often, alas! as baseless as the fading cloud-land that floats upon the summer sky.

The true Hope of the Gospel swallows up all these selfish visions and earthly hopes. Looking for that blessed Hope and the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we hold all other prospects subordinate and subject to that supreme prospect. Even the old hope of heaven that was sometimes a selfish weariness, and a longing to be at rest, has been exchanged for that high and glorious looking for his coming that lifts us out of ourselves into the greater blessing it is to bring to millions, and nerves us to the highest and noblest efforts to work for the hastening of the coming glory and the preparation of the world to meet Him. God alone can give this new and heaven-born hope, which is as divine as it is lofty and inspiring.

OUR LIFE

Our very life must be held not as a selfish possession, but as a sacred trust.

"Neither count I my life dear unto myself," is the true spirit of consecration; "but that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus Christ." That is the meaning of life, and the only object for which it should be cherished.

So we find the same Apostle saying, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"; and he adds, "Therefore I know that I shall continue with you all for the furtherance of your faith."

The unselfish life is a safe life, and it is immortal until its great purpose shall be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

How shall we overcome these giant Anakim? How shall we win the victory over self? How shall we possess Hebron, the city of love?

1. We must definitely and thoroughly enter into the meaning of that mighty word, "You are not your own." We must surrender ourselves so utterly that we can never own ourselves again.

We must hand over self and all its rights in an eternal covenant, and give God the absolute right to own us, control us, and possess us forever.

And we must abide in this attitude and never recall that irrevocable surrender.

2. We must let God make this real in detail as each day brings its tests and conflicts, and each of these thirty-one kings comes face to face before us. That which we did in the general must be fulfilled in the particular, and, step by step, we must be established in the full experience of self-renunciation and entire consecration.

As each of these issues meets us, God is asking us the question, "Are you your own, or are you Mine?" And as we stand true to our covenant, He will make it real.

We must choose that each new Agag shall die, and God will make the death effectual the moment we sign the death warrant.

3. We must receive the great antidote to self -- the love of Christ.

We have seen the power of love in a human life transforming a selfish girl, living for the pleasures of society and the gratification of her own self-love, into a patient, self-sacrificing wife and mother, willing to endure any privation and go any length for the man she loved with all her heart.

In a far higher sense the lo

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