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FACING THE BOAR

1 Samuel 17:38-51

A couple of weeks ago I woke up in the middle of the night and had to heed the call of nature. After doing so I crawled back into bed and was just drifting back to sleep when I was jarred awake by a noise. I heard something get knocked over. The sound was unmistakable. I knew I wasn’t dreaming because Laurie sat up and said, “Did you hear that? What was that noise?” I didn’t know what it was, but it was distinctly the sound of some object getting knocked over onto a hard surface. But what had been knocked over? What knocked it over? Where was it? I didn’t know, but it sounded to me like it had come from outside on the sidewalk at the side of our house. I thought I should investigate. I started getting out of bed so I could investigate.

As I was getting up Laurie said, “You’re not going to go out there, are you?” I said, “Well, don’t you think I should?” She didn’t think so. She thought I should just forget about it and get back in bed. But, I thought, what if there is a person prowling around our house? I began to envision how it might go if there was an intruder. What was I going to do about it? I have a hockey stick in my closet that I keep there for security. I don’t know why, but I’ve never actually thought that through. If there is someone on our property, what exactly am I going to do with a hockey stick? Go after him and get a two minute penalty for slashing? I really need to rethink my security system, beginning with that hockey stick. It’s not a good option at all. I pictured coming upon some prowler in our house. I felt that little twinge of fear. I didn’t know how I’d react, and certainly didn’t know how I would deal with it if that happened. What if the person had a weapon?

I decided doing a security sweep was not a good idea. After all, if there was someone in the house, there wasn’t really anything of value for him to steal. Maybe our TV would be worth something, but I doubted a cat burglar would be interested in disconnecting and hauling a 55 inch TV out of our house. I got back in bed, and eventually did get back to sleep. The next day I looked around the homestead, trying to figure out what had happened during the night. I found exactly zero. We have no idea what that noise was. But that little incident gave me just a small taste of fear. As I envisioned what it would be like to actually confront an unexpected intruder, I got a sense of the jolt of fear that would hit me in that moment. It wasn’t a big deal. I wasn’t paralyzed by it or terrified. But even that little taste was not very pleasant.

One of the challenges we will have to face as we go through life is fear. We will constantly be assailed by a zoo of fears, some of them small, even insignificant, and some of them large and truly ominous. Our fears control our behavior and our thinking way more than we would like. All of us have at some point not said or done something we thought we should because we were afraid of what people will think. We have all compromised in some way because we were afraid. Some of us have our lives twisted or even dominated by fear. We miss out on opportunities because of fear. When Toby was in college he worked as a surfing instructor for a couple of summers. He told us about one couple that flew across the country to go to his company’s week long surf camp. But the wife decided when they got on the beach that she was afraid of the ocean. Despite the urging of her husband and encouragement of the instructors she spent the whole week sitting on the beach watching, because of her fear.

There are some fears common to all of us. We all fear rejection. We fear pain to at least some extent. The ultimate fear, the fear of death, is something we all share. Some fear speaking in public, some fear flying. As I was thinking about this subject I reflected on my son, Toby, and his job. On one recent shift in the emergency room he had to deliver a baby in the hospital parking lot. On multiple occasions he has cracked open a patient’s chest and reached in and using his hand pumped the person’s heart to keep him alive. Either one of those things would petrify me, but they are part of his job. I would fear them, but he doesn’t. My guess is that most of you don’t have church dreams very often. They’ve been a part of my life and Laurie’s life for many years. Invariably those dreams are not happy ones because things are chaotic and going wrong in them. They are a reflection of things that we fear at a low level, but they are always there.

Because fear can cause us to compromise, one of the most commonly repeated commands in the Bible is “do not fear.” We are going to think about fear today, and how to deal with it. We are going to look at a familiar story. If I were to ask you what the 5 most well known stories in the Bible are, my guess is every one of you would name this story as one of the 5. It’s commonly known as the story of David and Goliath. We are going to focus on 1 Samuel 17:38-51.

EXPOSITION

PREMISE: DAVID NEEDED COURAGE

David was the youngest of 8 sons of a man named Jesse. He was fairly young when this incident occurred. Israel was at war with the Philistines. During that time period Israel was always at war with the Philistines. They had a constant conflict that would be at low levels for a time then would flare up into open warfare. Israel was initially set up as a theocracy, with no king. But the people eventually demanded a king, and one factor that contributed to that demand was the people wanted a leader who could deal with the Philistine problem once and for all.

In this particular flare up of open war the Philistine army and the Israeli army met at a valley. The Philistines occupied high ground on a ridge on one side of the valley and the Israelis were on a ridge on the other side. Neither side wanted to give up their position on high ground to make an attack from low ground against the other side’s strong position, so there was a stalemate. The Philistines came up with a plan for breaking this stalemate. They sent out their best fighter to challenge the Israelis to send out their best. The two allstars would go head to head in a winner take all match. The idea was that the “war” could be settled with much less bloodshed than usual. This was not uncommon in the ancient world, though it was more frequent in the west. The Philistines had come from the west and possibly brought this idea along with them. One weakness with this plan was that it usually didn’t work. When the mano y mano match was decided, often the winner’s side was emboldened and would attack, and the loser’s side would be demoralized, and often would run in fear, being massacred as they fled.

In this instance the Philistines sent out a huge man named Goliath. Aren Maier, head of the archaeology department of Bar Ilan University in Israel, found a ceramic shard at the site of the ancient Philistine city of Gath with the name Goliath on it. It was dated around 1000 B. C., close to David’s time, suggesting Goliath might have been a common name. There is some disagreement as to just how big this Goliath was. Some ancient texts indicate he was over 9 feet tall! But there are a few others that place him at just under 7 feet tall. It is possible that the 9 feet tall figure was correct, but that would have made him truly unique. We have no other records of any humans of that size. Perhaps this guy was that one of a kind freak of nature. But it’s also possible that he was more like 6 feet 10 inches.

That’s not as impressive as a 9 foot giant, but we should remember that back then the average man was less than 5 feet 6 inches tall. That would make Goliath at a minimum almost a foot and a half taller than the average Israeli soldier. Have you ever been around someone that tall? Back in my early 20’s I got to know a guy who played basketball at UCLA, and he was 7 feet tall. I felt like a midget next to him. Furthermore, the text tells us that Goliath wore 125 pounds of armor. For him to move around and fight wearing that much weight he had to have been enormously strong. In other words, this was a huge dude. He was way taller than anyone the Israelis had ever seen, and he was almost as broad as he was tall. He also had a fierce reputation as a ferocious fighter.

This monster of a soldier would come out every morning and loudly issue a challenge to the Israelis to send out someone to take him on. Verse 11 says, “On hearing the Philistines words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.” Verse 24 says, “Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.”

This scene was repeated day after day for 6 weeks. It was accomplishing exactly what the Philistines wanted. It was humiliating the Israelis because there wasn’t a single Israeli soldier willing to take on the big brute. Each day he would make his announcement, and the Israelis would run in terror. He was rubbing their faces in it. The effect was demoralizing. Fear would grow every day, breaking down their resolve, destroying any hope they had.

Enter David. His older brothers were in the army, and at one point his dad sent him up to the front to deliver a care package from home. When David witnessed this scene, he was appalled. He couldn’t believe not a single countryman had the courage to step up and take Goliath on. He found it galling and dishonoring to God. Though his brothers were annoyed by him, as older brothers typically are by their upstart, cocky younger brothers, David volunteered. He’d fight Goliath.

What he was volunteering for seemed like a suicide mission. David might have been cocky, but he wasn’t blind and he wasn’t stupid. To step in to that fight required some nerves of steel. He was betting his life, and the odds weren’t in his favor, at least they didn’t look to be by all appearances. Yet he did it without hesitation. This required a serious dose of courage.

What is needed to deal with our fears will always be courage. Courage is commanded by God. 1 Corinthians 16:13 says, “Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith; be courageous, be strong.” We need to be courageous or fear will defeat us. Courage honors our God. When we live with courage we worship him. It is ultimately, as we will see, an inevitable consequence of faith. Where did David get his courage? How was he, not even a soldier, a young man, able to have the courage to do what no one else in Israel would attempt?

DAVID LIVED TO HONOR GOD

Look at the end of verse 26. David’s reaction to Goliath’s challenge was, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” Goliath was an uncircumcised Philistine, meaning he was not part of God’s chosen people. He did not know or serve the one true God. David was mortified that Goliath was making it look like the people who know and serve Almighty God could do nothing about this man. It was humiliating, and it made it look like God was helpless against him. David would not stand for that.

When David went out to confront Goliath, the giant scoffed at him. David showed up carrying his shepherd’s staff and his sling. Goliath thought it was a joke. In verse 43 he said, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” He’s saying, “Where’s your weapon, little boy? What are you going to do, beat me with your stick?” Then he went on in the next verse to say, “Come here, and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals.” He’s trash talking. But look at David’s response. “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” He gives it right back to Goliath in verse 46, “This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and **the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.**”

That last statement was what most motivated David. He wanted the whole world to know that there is a God in Israel, and that God is Almighty God. In his mind that was the main thing at stake in this situation. How would people think about God? David wanted God to be honored for the majestic, almighty God that he is, deserving of praise and worship. David put himself in harm’s way because that was what mattered to him most. It mattered to him more than his own safety. He wanted God to be honored, and he couldn’t stand seeing God dishonored by this man and by the fear of the army of Israel.

Our fear is rooted in the thought that the most important thing is my safety, my comfort and that I continue to live. Those things trump everything else. Fear happens when we encounter something that threatens one of those highest of priorities. I see something that might hurt me, or even cause my life to end, and fear is the result. The only thing that can break that cycle is if there is something that is more important to me than my safety, comfort and continued existence. In other words, I have to have a mission that is more important to me than any of those things, than even my own life.

Another stirring story in the Old Testament is that of the 3 Jewish men in Babylon who refused to bow down to a huge idol that the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had set up. Their names were John, Michael and Ezra. Well, actually, you might know them as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but in English the meanings of their Hebrew names are the same as John, Michael and Ezra. Theirs was also a well known story where, because of their refusal, the king told them he was going to throw them into a blast furnace. We see their response in Daniel 3:17-18. “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

They were committed to serving and worshiping God. That was more important to them than their own safety, even their lives. Their mission was to honor and serve God, and it came before taking care of themselves. It was the same thing that gave David courage.

You can see David’s heart in Psalm 34:1-3. “I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.” David lived to glorify God. He lived for his praise. This was his mission, the most important thing in his life. That mission was the ground and the source of his courage.

Jack Groppel is a speaker, professor and co-founder of the Human Performance Institute. That institute trains people in leadership and performance at their facility in Orlando. He tells a story of something that happened when they had 4 NFL players come to their institute. These guys were powerful men, averaging 6 feet 5 inches tall and 300 pounds. As part of their training they gave them a mission one day. They were to run one mile to the white fence that was the perimeter of the facility, then run the mile back, taking 9 minutes each way. For elite athletes like these guys this was easy. However, they warned them they would be running through a swamp where there would be alligators, so to be aware of them. Also there were snakes, so if they saw one on the trail, avoid it. Just as they were about to leave they said, “Oh, one more thing. Some wild boar were seen in the area in the past few days. They are big, 400 pounds, they have razor sharp tusks, and they will attack without provocation. If you see one of them give them a very wide berth.” The 4 set off on the mission. The trainers at the institute had a little surprise for them. Two of the staff members hid in the brush in the swamp. One of them had a video camera trained on the men coming down the trail. The other waited until they came close, then he shook a bush and snorted like a boar. The 4 huge, elite athletes yelled and immediately turned around and sprinted back toward the headquarters. Forget the mission, their safety was at stake! Exactly a week later they had 4 members of the FBI SWAT team at their facility for training. They gave them the exact same instruction and pulled the same stunt on them. Only when these guys heard the pretend boar, all 4 of them stopped and took a combat stance, ready to fight. They had a mission that was bigger than themselves. That mission took precedence even over safety.

A big factor in being able to have courage to face the fearsome things in life is knowing and being dedicated to a mission. We are called to the same mission that David had, to extol the Lord, to glorify him at all times.

DAVID KNEW GOD WAS WITH HIM

Verse 47 is huge. David told Goliath, “All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves, for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” The battle is the Lord’s. Believing that makes all the difference. David believed that God was with him and that he could, and would, act in this world. Perhaps Goliath is a behemoth, much bigger and stronger than David, maybe he is the most fearsome fighter on the planet. But Goliath was not bigger or stronger than Almighty God.

Best selling author, Malcolm Gladwell, wrote a book titled *David and Goliath* a few years back. In it he suggested that maybe David wasn’t as much of an underdog as he appears to be. His reason was that David did what smart underdogs do, something that today is called asymmetric warfare. Don’t fight the enemy on his terms, where he is clearly superior, but do so on your terms where you might use what seems to be a deficit to give you an unexpected advantage.

In a way, Gladwell is right, but not quite for the reasons he presents in his book. He maintains that Goliath had a weakness, that he had poor eyesight, and that he never expected a slingshot attack. I don’t believe he’s correct about the eyesight. There is no evidence for that. If he couldn’t see his opponents very well he would not have been considered a fierce fighter, because he wouldn’t have been very good at it. Also the slingshot strategy wasn’t as much of an advantage as Gladwell suggests. If it were, it would have become a commonly used weapon. Armies would have formed slingshot regiments, and that never happened.

David didn’t fight Goliath on his terms, for sure. We see that in verses 38-40 where Saul tried to arm David for the battle with his armor, and David said, “Thanks, but no thanks. I can’t use this.” He knew if he went up against Goliath armor for armor, weapon for weapon, he would lose. He had to use what he knew and was comfortable with. But the larger point in this story is, David attributed his victory not to his awesome skill with a sling shot, but to the Lord. It was the Lord who made sure that stone hit at just the right place with enough force to knock Goliath out, so David could then finish him. Yes, it was asymmetric warfare, but what made it asymmetric was not David’s skill or strategy, but the Lord being with him.

There is a message here for us. We will never defeat the Goliaths we fear by using Goliath’s weapons. We must do what Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 10:4 when he said, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” We fight with the weapons of faith, love, humility, grace, and truth. We let the Holy Spirit take the battle.

Romans 8:9 says of believers in Jesus that the Holy Spirit is in them. Acts 1:8 says we will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. The Spirit of God, the one to whom the battle belongs, is in us, and he brings the power to win that battle. Pastor and writer, Francis Chan, says, “I may be the one guy telling you to believe in the power that is in you – the Holy Spirit… Followers of Yahweh are marked by this confidence, that my God will come through.”

It is all too easy and common for us to give lip service to the idea that the Spirit of Jesus is in us, but then to think and live as though that is absolutely not true. I suspect that’s because we typically focus on the wrong things. We define God coming through for us as him giving us the circumstances we want. But God frequently does not do that, he gives us what is best, not what we want. But we are disappointed because we didn’t get what we wanted. After that happens a few times we start thinking we can’t count on God, so we don’t look for him to come through.

Or we think having the power of the Spirit means that he is going to perform some miracle through us. We get focused on that, and when we don’t experience dramatic miracles we sort default to expecting nothing and getting it. I submit to you that the Holy Spirit is very real, and that he is very much in us. He can and will give us the power not so much to do miracles, as to stand firm. As we seek to wield the weapons of faith, love, grace, humility and truth he will establish us, make us about to defeat the fears that we have and live in his triumph. He will give us the strength to live with that humility, with love, with grace for others, with kindness, bringing glory to God regardless of how the circumstance may go.

When we think about what we fear, what we most need to do is remember the battle belongs to the Lord. We don’t have to fight it and win with our own great strategies or abilities. What we need to do is give the battle to him to fight in whatever way he sees fit, to trust in him, and to ask him to give us by the power of the Holy Spirit, to stand firm in faith, wielding the weapons of faith, love, humility and grace.

DAVID CHOSE TO BE COURAGEOUS

David could see how fearsome Goliath was as well as anyone else. He could see how the odds were stacked against him. He had every reason to just walk away. He wasn’t in the army. His brothers criticized him for even being there. He could have said, “This is not my problem” and left it to the military commanders, including Saul. Instead, he chose to do what no one else in all Israel would do. There were no grizzled veterans of combat that would take this on. There were no well trained and well armed soldiers who would step forward. There was only David. Despite the odds against him, despite the mismatch, he chose to do something that everybody else thought was crazy.

There are repeated commands in the Bible to be courageous. That only makes sense if it is up to us whether we have courage or not. I’ve looked diligently and I have not found a single hint anywhere in the Bible of God commanding me to be younger. I’ve not found that command where God says I should become 40 years old again. Why do you suppose that is? It is because I cannot control that. That’s not something I can do anything about. God doesn’t command us to do things that are totally out of our control.

That tells me that I do control whether I have courage or not. That is a decision I can make. We have a tendency to think that courage is kind of like singing ability. Some people have it and some people don’t. It doesn’t help to command me to sing beautifully. I would if I could, but I can’t. But courage is not like that. Courage is a choice. It is a choice we can make.

But I don’t feel courageous. Let’s notice that the Bible says nothing about feeling courageous. It only talks about being courageous. It’s a little bit like love. The Bible tells us to love people, even our enemies. It doesn’t tell us to feel loving toward them, just to love them. You all know that we’ve been doing live stream worship music from our garage on Sunday mornings. We’ve had a very positive response to that from our neighbors, almost across the board. Almost. There is one who has complained and been a problem. We’ve pretty much dealt with that by changing how we do things. But recently one day we had to do some testing to make sure that our system was going to work right when we changed some things. So just Laurie and I went in our garage and tested to make sure it was working. It was Wednesday afternoon about 2 PM, and we were working on it for all of about 6 or 7 minutes. Just as we were finishing, the problem woman showed up. She wanted us to stop because her daughter was studying and she felt the music was disturbing her. This woman doesn’t live on our street. We have checked by going across the street to listen and make sure that our sounds are not too loud, and they absolutely are not. And here was this woman telling us in the middle of a week day, when there were gardeners around blasting their leaf blowers way louder than anything we were doing, another house had a jackhammer breaking up concrete, but oh, our music was disturbing her daughter. I have to tell you that I did not *feel* loving toward that woman. I felt like asking her, “So am I correct in assuming you’re asking the gardeners to stop and the guy with the jackhammer to all quit?” That’s what I felt like. Instead, I chose to love her. I simply said, “We are all done.” I tried to say it with patience and kindness, because that is what love does. Love is patient and love is kind. In other words, though I may not have felt especially loving toward her, I chose to love her.

The same thing happens with courage. Courage is not about what we feel, it is about choosing to do what is right and what God calls us to be and to do regardless of the fears we may feel. You can only be courageous if you are afraid of something. Eddie Rickenbacker, World War I air ace and Medal of Honor winner, said, “Courage is doing what you’re afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you’re scared.” It doesn’t take any courage for me to take Laurie to Chick-Fil-A and have dinner there, because I’m not afraid of Chick-Fil-A, nor am I afraid of Laurie. To be courageous requires fear. It means you have fear, you feel it, and you choose to act anyway. You choose not to be ruled by the fear. Courage is not about what we *feel*, it is about what we *do*.

Miguel de Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote* and regarded as the greatest writer in the Spanish language, said, “He who loses wealth loses much. He who loses a friend loses more. He who loses courage, loses all.” In 180 A.D. early church leader, Tertullian, said God, “wants those who belong to him to be brave and fearless.” If by fearless he means acting fearlessly, I agree. God wants us to be brave in the face of our fears, and to act as though we are fearless, because God is with us.

CONCLUSION

In years past I was called upon periodically to serve as part of ordination councils for me who were seeking either to be licensed or ordained for ministry. I did quite a few of those. I’ve forgotten almost of all them, but one clearly stands out in my memory. It was for a man named Steve Weik. He had served in several parachurch ministries, but now wished to be ordained as he was serving in a church. He was married with two children. We went through the usual grilling process, asking questions about theology, life and practice of ministry. But that all ground to a halt at one point when it came out that not long before he had been diagnosed with a rare blood disease for which there is no treatment. We learned that he was going to die from this disease and had no more than a year or two to live. At that point no one wanted to ask him any questions. We were all humbled by his faith, his strength and his calm in the face of a terrible prognosis. After a long delay one man asked, “How are you dealing with this so calmly?” Steve said he was not afraid of what lie ahead. He was only said for his wife and children, but he looked forward eagerly to being in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Another guy asked the question I was wondering about. “Why are you even here? Given that you may have so little time why are you taking it to do this?” Steve said, “I want more than anything to serve God, to honor him with my life, to help other people know him. Why wouldn’t I want to do all I can to keep ministering as long as I am alive?” Needless to say, the council unanimously endorsed him. Steve is no longer with us. He served his Lord until the end of his life.

Whatever it is you face that you fear, follow David’s example. Live for a mission that is eternally meaningful, living for the glory of God. Look to the Holy Spirit to give you the power to stand firm. Trust that God determines the outcome of the battle and know that he will come through. Choose courage, even as you feel the fear.