

“Courage Like David’s”

(The Great Story of the Bible, Chapter 77)

1 Samuel 17

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Today we return to the story of David and Goliath. I preached on this passage about four years ago; I called the sermon, “Fighting Your Goliath.” I’ve re-posted that one on the website for those of you who want to revisit it. One of the beauties of the scriptures is that you can come back to familiar passages and discover something new and different each time. My message today is not going to be a repeat of what I said four years ago. God gave me something different to talk about today.

So David the shepherd boy has been anointed King of Israel by Samuel, Israel’s spiritual leader. But he’s not king yet. Saul is still king, and will be for a while. Saul doesn’t know God’s plans for David.

Most of us are familiar with the story. Those pesky Philistines are invading Israel again. The Israelite army has gone out to meet them, and there’s a standoff. The Philistines have a ten-foot giant named Goliath, covered in bronze armor and wielding a bronze javelin and an iron-tipped spear. Goliath taunts the Israelites every day for forty days. When David arrives to bring provisions to his three brothers who are in Saul’s army, he hears Goliath’s taunts and sees the Israelites cowering in fear. David says to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go out and fight him.” (1 Samuel 17.32) Saul sends David out in Saul’s armor, which is way too big. David takes it off and faces Goliath with just a staff, a sling, and five small stones. Goliath thinks David will be an easy kill, but with one shot from one sling, Goliath tumbles to the ground. David takes Goliath’s sword and slays the giant.

David’s courage is remarkable. Thousands of Israelite soldiers *petrified* because of Goliath, yet David takes one look at the situation and *immediately* steps into action. No hesitation. *Courage*. Unflinching courage. Courage that the king and all the men in his army lacked. I want courage like that.

We need courage in life. We need courage when our doctor gives us the bad news. We need courage when there’s a stumbling block in our marriage. We need courage when there’s a daunting task at work or at school. We need courage when we know we have to make a major change in how we’re living life. We need courage when the world is telling us to go one way, and we know in our heart that we need to go another. We need courage whenever we feel *afraid*. Who among us never feels afraid?

I had a significant debate with myself as I was preparing this sermon. *How much am I willing to*

expose myself? How vulnerable am I willing to be up here? God made it clear that I needed to make this *real ...* to share with you some things I've never shared. I get up here week after week, and the truth of the matter is, *I am often afraid*. I may look confident and prepared, but honestly, I have *fear*. I'm afraid I'm going to be misinterpreted. I'm afraid I'm going to get something important wrong. I'm afraid I'm going to make someone really mad because I said something wrong. I'm afraid I'm going to make someone really mad because I said something *right*. I'm afraid I'm going to let God down or sell Jesus short. You graduate from seminary and you think you know how to do this job. But you get a dozen years under your belt, and you've been misunderstood and argued with and shot at, sometimes with good reason and sometimes for no good reason at all, and you look back at sermons you gave earlier on and you wonder why you ever said *that*, and you see errors you've made, and you're painfully aware of your own shortcomings and sin, and you wonder what God was thinking when he chose *you*, and why on earth anybody would listen to *you* week after week. Yet you know that God has given you the responsibility of sharing *his Word* with *these people*, and he is *not* letting you off the hook. So you have to keep going, fully aware of the *magnitude* of this work, the *divine* nature of what we do here, coupled with the reality that *you* are merely human. I stand up here week after week, in that precious position between *these* holy scriptures and *this* human interaction, and *I feel afraid*. There are so many ways I could do this *wrong*. I look at David and I think, *I want courage like that*. Unflinching courage, the ability to stand before the giant when everyone else is paralyzed by fear. *I want courage like that* – and I don't have it. How did *David* get it? That's where I'm going today. *How did David get that kind of courage?*

David had two things going for him. First: before he ever saw Goliath, David already had acquired a lot of *rugged experience*. The life of a shepherd was far from peaceful. He wasn't just leaning on his staff out there in the fields, whistling a tune while the clouds passed overhead and the sheep "*baa*"ed in the background. No, David describes it like this: "When a lion or bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it." (1 Samuel 17.34-36) This young lad has fought and killed lions and bears *on his own*, with *no help from anybody*. His mom, his dad, his seven older brothers – they were all somewhere else. David could have *died* out there. He had to learn how to defend himself, how to protect his sheep from the beasts that wanted to devour them. Helicopter parents, *take note*. If you are constantly coming to your children's rescue, keeping them safe from all harm, basically conveying the message "you don't have what it takes to handle this on your own," you are not giving them the opportunity to build *courage*. Your kids will be stronger in the long run if you're not always coming to their rescue, if they get some *rugged experience*. David gained a lot of that out in the field – and what he learned there equipped him to be able to face Goliath, when nobody else could.

You can get rugged experience in a lot of ways: at school, at work, in your hobbies. I've gained a lot from the training and racing I've been doing the last eight years. When you're on a twenty-five mile bike course that's really hilly, and your shifter cable breaks, and 18 of your 20 gears no longer work, and you've got eight miles to go, and a six-mile run after that, you learn a thing or two about courage. When you dash into Lake Michigan, and it's *freezing* cold, and you've got nearly a mile to swim, and you're giving serious thought to heading back to shore, and you resolve that you are *not* going to just *quit*, you learn a thing or two about courage. Both times, I finished the race; both times, I gained some *rugged*

experience that helped build courage. You're going to need courage, when it's your turn to face Goliath.

But rugged experience is not enough. David had a second thing going for him: *unshakable* and *unwavering faith* in the Lord God Almighty. He says to Goliath: "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. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands.... This very day ... the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel." (1 Samuel 17.45-46) Unshakable, unwavering faith. How did he get it? It had something to do with those bears and lions. David says to Saul: "The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the Philistine." (1 Samuel 17.37) Out there in those fields, David learned how to *ask God for help*. 73 of the Psalms are attributed to David. Many of them begin with words like this: "Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer." (Psalm 4.1) "LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me." (Psalm 7.1) "Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge." (Psalm 16.1) "The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27.1) "To you, LORD, I call; you are my Rock." (Psalm 28.1) David learned how to *ask the Lord for help and strength and rescue and protection*. By the time he faced Goliath, David had seen God deliver him time and time again. Do we know how to ask God for help? Do we know – *really know* – that God will deliver?

Thursday afternoon my training schedule called for a hard run: an hour long, with twenty minutes of hard three-minute intervals that would take my heart rate into the upper 170s. It was cold and windy. My legs were tired from a couple challenging bike workouts earlier in the week. I didn't think I'd be able to do it. I forced myself out the door, with fear in my heart. As I did warmup laps in the cemetery I realized – not for the first time – that I still rely too much on my *own* strength, and that I need to be more willing to ask God for help. *We can't do this life on our own*. God is willing to give us strength and courage ... but we have to *ask* for it. Paul says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4.13) *David* knew how to ask for strength. I'm still learning.

I swallowed my pride. I acknowledged my weakness to God. I looked up toward the bright blue sky and I just started talking to Jesus. Basically, I rambled. The words were not polished, but they were honest. I asked for help ... and he gave it to me. An assurance came over me, a peace of mind, an awareness that *with his help*, I could make it through those intervals. Twenty minutes later, breathless and jubilant, I thanked God for what he had given me. But then, unbidden, God gave me something else. He gave me a charge. *You gotta tell people about this on Sunday*. I protested. I didn't want to do that. I'm afraid enough on Sunday mornings as it is – do I have to share this very personal struggle too? *Yep. You do*. But I'm afraid! *Exactly. You're talking about courage on Sunday. You need to model it*.

I don't have David's courage. At least, I don't feel like I do. But I *do* know that when God asks me to do something, I need to *find* the courage. I may not have it in me. But I know where I can *get* it.

When you're facing your Goliath – that cancer, that challenge, that change you need to make in your life – where will you get your *courage*? *God is willing to give it to you!!!* But are you willing to ask?

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