

1 Samuel 17

September 1, 2024

What do you expect from today's sermon? I'll tell you what I expected before I studied this text. I expected to tell you that we all have Goliaths in our lives, big, scary fears and we need to be courageous like David, and if we trust in the Lord like him, then we can conquer our fears, too! That's what I expected to get out of this text, and maybe you did too. *I was wrong*. That is not the meaning of this text, not even close. Yes, we are going to talk about fear and courage, but I'm not going to tell you that you should all dare to be a David- because even David himself would say, "I'm not the hero, and neither are you. God delivered me, here's how." **Today's point is that God delivers us from evil, and therefore we can have true courage. First, we'll talk about counterfeit courage, second, we'll talk about Christian courage.**

1. Counterfeit courage. The year is about 1000 BC. About fourteen miles from Bethlehem is the valley of Elah, a beautiful fertile green valley that was a battlefield between Israel and the Philistines. The Philistines were an advanced, but bloodthirsty nation that lived in modern day Gaza- along the Mediterranean coast, and they were constantly terrorizing Israelite villages, looting, pillaging, enslaving, constantly at war with Israel- but this battle was unique. With the two opposing armies camped opposite of each other with the battlefield in the middle, one Philistine emerges: Goliath. He makes an offer to the Israelites that they can't refuse: instead of having so much needless bloodshed, one Israelite can come fight one Philistine. A champion- someone who would represent his people and his victory or defeat would be imputed or put on his people. If he wins, they win. Small problem. Goliath is six cubits- and depending on how much a cubit is, he is anywhere from seven feet to nine feet tall. His armor weighs between 115 and 120 pounds- he's incredibly strong. His spear, which he would use to throw and impale anyone who charged at him, was like a weaver's rod- at least 2 ½ inches thick- think about this- most spears used for throwing are skinny so that a hand can fit around it and throw it far- his was more like pickle jar in thickness- that's how big his hands were and how strong he was- the tip of his spear was 15 pounds- which meant that all together his spear would be at least 30 pounds. His armor was bronze, which was at the time the most technologically advanced armor anyone could buy, and he's been training to shred grown men apart since he was a child. And there he stands- laughing at that Israelite army, daring them to attack, calling them cowards, and rightly so. Israel was trapped. Either they watch one of their own get impaled by this giant, or they all face the Philistines in battle and he kills 50 of them and they lose, and King Saul, who probably should have been the one to stand up and fight, is known as a coward- because he is.

The Israelites are shaking in their armor, and I don't blame them. That eight-foot tall monstrosity is a culmination of their worst fears. Their farms, shops, villages and cities being destroyed by these evil men. Their wives and children being captured, enslaved, or worse. Their heads being cut off and used as trophies. Their nation being destroyed. Their God who promised them that he'd never leave them or forsake them being weak. These Israelites are afraid and if anyone

could relate to a group of people paralyzed by fear, I think it would be us Americans. One poll I found said that $\frac{2}{3}$ of Americans confess to be anxious and fearful about the future, and that their anxiety hasn't gotten better, but worse over the last year. And their fears are similar to the Israelites. Losing their livelihoods, losing their loved ones, losing their nation, losing their friends, losing their health, their lives, are all in the top ten of modern fears- the fears of the ancients and our fears are shockingly similar, and so are our attempts to overcome them. With so many fearful people, there are countless articles online meant to help you overcome your fears. Here's the steps given by Psychology.com- 1. Trust yourself- grow and become smarter so you can be confident. 2. Take ownership of your life- you're in charge! 3. Consider what you're afraid of, and realize that it's not that bad. 4. Build your self esteem, learn to be confident in yourself, you can do it. The promise is that if you do this, you'll overcome fear! There are some good, general principles here, but be honest- would that be helpful with Goliath in front of you? Would that help you when you have a doctor tell you bad news, when you get that phone call in the middle of the night? I'm not sure. This method also was employed by Goliath. Goliath has his fears like any human being, so he gets the most expensive armor and trains to be one of the greatest soldiers ever so he can be confident that he will never be defeated. He speaks of his victory- notice how much he talks trash- it wasn't just because he liked talking trash- he was speaking fear into the hearts of Israel, speaking his victory into existence. And he was very confident, very brash, very sure of his abilities, so sure that when he sees this boy David come, he's actually angry because he feels insulted- it's too easy of a victory. And in the end, that's actually what ends up killing him. His overconfidence, his lack of fear, his counterfeit courage actually blinded him to reality and killed him. It doesn't matter how confident and fearless you are, you and your loved ones still might get cancer. You still might be killed in a car crash. You still might get deathly ill with a virus. Denying it or pretending like it's not that bad won't help you! And Christians do this all the time: "If I pray enough, if I go to church enough, if I'm a good enough Christian, God will prevent something really bad from happening to me." God never says that- in fact his most faithful people- the prophets, John the Baptist, Paul, most of the disciples- all die violent deaths. Counterfeit courage- where your confidence over fear is based on yourself isn't enough. It turns into even more fear, or purposeful ignorance and foolishness. So how can we have true courage in this life filled with evil?

2. Christian Courage. I hope by now you see that in this narrative, we are the Israelites, not David. The Israelites wouldn't have been able to buck up and fight Goliath- they would have been immediately killed. What Israel needed was a Champion- someone to go on their behalf and defeat the snarling monster that scared them. And the funny thing is, God had already chosen him. In the chapter before this one, David, the youngest brother in his family, too young to actually be a part of the army, a shepherd boy, was anointed the next king of Israel- God chose him to be the leader and king and protector of his people. But he wasn't king at the time, so he waited for Saul, the actual king, to step up and fight, but he didn't. After forty days, David stands up and says "enough." This Philistine is mocking our people, he's mocking our God, he needs to be silenced! I'll do it! I'll fight him. I'll kill him. How does he know that? Not because he is so

awesome, but because God chose him- he knows that when he was anointed, God was choosing him to lead, and God doesn't lie. And he realizes- God had been training him his entire life. He had been faced with snarling animals that wanted to kill him, and he killed them time after time with his sling. Now, the sling that David had wasn't a child's toy. It was used pretty often in warfare- the Romans, Greeks, Israelites, and many ancient people used them. They were devastatingly effective weapons. Someone with enough training and practice, like David would have had in the field, could easily sling a stone up to sixty miles per hour with deadly accuracy. So David decides that he's not going to wear Saul's armor- he'd be too slow. And he approaches Goliath, and he looks like a fool! Goliath doesn't take him seriously, the Philistines don't take him seriously, and the Israelites here David's cracking teenage voice declare that he's going to kill Goliath, cut off his head, and leave his body for the animals of the desert! But little did they know, David was the perfect champion. God chose him for this precise moment. And David hit Goliath right between the eyes- killing him. Do you see what happens here? David doesn't win despite his weakness, or by overcoming his weakness, but through his weakness. Because David is so small, so young, Goliath lets his guard down. Because David has spent so much time in the field training with the sling, he can hit Goliath right where his giant helmet doesn't cover. David rises up as God's chosen champion to save Israel from their fears. This, my friends, is how God works, and ultimately delivers us from evil.

I want you to think about what you're afraid of. Dying? Your loved ones getting sick or dying? Losing your children, your spouse, your friends? Being rejected and lonely? Being exposed as a liar and fraud? Losing everything you have? Do you fear those things? *You should!* They are the ultimate horror that humans fear! And we deserve them. Life, love, joy, happiness and friendship are all things that come from God, and we've rejected him in our way, and we face those fears knowing deep down that we deserve them- that's why we're so afraid of them! And what God offers to you is not advice on how to defeat your fears. He provides a champion to destroy them. Jesus Christ came not to teach us how to be like him, but to be our substitute- to fight on our behalf in a battle we could never win, and he does it similar to David. Through weakness. Jesus comes and defeats our ultimate fears, the loss, the illness, the shame, the rejection, the exposure, the death, really, Hell itself is the culmination of all our fears, and Jesus defeats it by suffering it in our place, as our substitute, as our champion, and his victory over it is imputed, is put on us as if we did it. We don't defeat our fears, we don't escape and conquer Hell by being good. Jesus conquered it, all of it, and is in control over all things and declares us to be his and has given us a promise- that nothing, no pain, no tragedy, no loss, no shame not even death, can defeat us or rob from us the joy he has in store for us. Death may come, but only as portal to eternal life. Pain may afflict you, but only as a temporary prick compared to the eternal pleasure of the new World. You may endure deep, painful loss, rejection, sadness in this world- but it is a controlled, temporary condition of living in a world that's not your home, and it's your eternal destiny. This, then, is courage. Courage is not the absence of fear- because let's be honest, there's a lot to fear

in this world. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the presence of joy that allows you to rejoice and face hardship and pain knowing that Jesus has conquered it all.

What does this look like? Well, look at God's people that we studied the last 7 weeks. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego face the fiery wrath of Nebuchadnezzar, but knew also the joy of the true God, and there was no way they were worshiping anything less. Paul and Silas knew the citizens of Philippi would possibly torture them, but they had joy because Jesus was saving people forever through their work. Esther knew her life would be at risk if she went to Xerxes- but she also knew the joy the God of Israel had in store for his people when he would deliver them, and it gave her courage to do what was right at the risk of her life. Joseph was traumatized by his brothers, but he knew the joy of having his own sins forgiven, so he could the hard work for forgiving his brothers. We need courage, and it's not bucking up and pretending pain doesn't exist and being confident in yourself. Courage is this: that you can forgive, share the Gospel, trust God with your life in complete joy, even in painful, uncertain times because your champion has won. Therefore, so have you. Amen.