

**Watching and Trusting from the Sidelines
and then Gaining Courage to Join the Battle
based on 1 Sam. 17, David Jahnke, 6/5/16**

So the Israelites had been battling the Philistines on and off for some time and King Saul had not been able to finish them off. So prior to another battle, a giant Philistine steps forward and challenges the Israelites to a one on one battle. After so many battles won and lost, everyone, including David's older stronger brothers, all wanted nothing to do with Goliath.

This is how we get quite understandably. We have so many battles at work and at home and in the world; we win some, lose others and usually end up somewhere in between with little visible progress. And we get weary and just want to be done with it. And/or we look at how big our opponent is and we shrink away.

I thought of the great Martin Luther who was so dismayed and discouraged by his own weakness, and how big his church's and the world's problems were; dismayed that is, until he remembered the power of God. Luther wrote the great hymn which we sang last week:

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.

We are no equal to the evils that prevail upon us. And when we are facing a giant, sometimes God is just fine with us refusing to fight, at least for a time. I heard a popular contemporary song this week that speaks to this. Let's enjoy a couple of minutes of it:

Hold it all together
Everybody needs you strong
But life hits you out of nowhere
And barely leaves you holding on
And when you're tired of fighting
Chained by your control
There's freedom in surrender
Lay it down and let it go

So when you're on your knees and answers seem so far away
You're not alone, stop holding on and just be held
Your world's not falling apart, it's falling into place
I'm on the throne, stop holding on and just be held; Just be held, just be held

If your eyes are on the storm, You'll wonder if I love you still
But if your eyes are on the cross, You'll know I always have and I always will
[Just be Held by Casting Crowns]

Three things here: 1. we should not rely upon our own strength; we rely instead upon God. 2. We can step away from the battle any time and trust that God will resolve things in his time. 3. We should keep our eyes on Jesus, rather than the giant-- Jesus who was also small and weak in the manger and in the garden and yet God gave him the strength to endure the cross and the grave. Let's keep our eyes on Jesus, who, instead of battling people (which is where so much of our energy wrongly goes), battled evil powers and principalities; keep our eyes on the one who defeated every Goliath he encountered on earth, and, in the end defeated the greatest enemy, death.

So while we tend to let our minds go to the Goliaths in life, Jesus comes up from the background just like little David did and reminds us that a living God is on our side and has won the battle in eternity; and is winning the battle in time.

We have to trust this because otherwise the taunts and threats and lies of Goliath can sink in and become realities for us. Goliath said, "If I overcome you, you will serve me." That can happen because sometimes the giants do overcome us! We succumb to temptation. But we do not have to let past defeats define us. We do not have to acquiesce to the voice that tells us we are weak and that the world belongs to the strong and so we cannot succeed or overcome; the voice that says that we and the world are irreparably broken and cannot be fixed.

That was the state of the defeated, dismayed and frightened Israelites. But after little David stepped forward and with one fling of his slingshot fell Goliath, then the Israelites took courage. They rose up, charged and drove away their enemies.

That is where we are now. Jesus came alongside the children of Israel and taught the world with every word and deed that our God is alive! So remember this and remember Jesus and take courage and follow his lead in driving out the remnants of evil within and without.

I watched a great documentary this week about a Giant killer named Harold Evans. Harold was an average kid who did not go far in school. But he was a fighter. And he got into journalism and eventually rose up to be the editor of the London Times. And the first giant he took on there was a liquor company that marketed and distributed a drug to pregnant women that led to thousands of babies born with birth defects between 1959-1961.

Since the British legal system prohibited virtually all information regarding a lawsuit from getting out into the public, Evans had to base his newspaper campaign not on the negligence of the company or even arguments about causality but rather on the morality of the matter. He persisted in this moral campaign, which along with a boycott of the company finally led to a just decision for the families and the reform of the legal system in favor of more public information.

The first point is that we are all like little David and average Harold. They were weak in the eyes of the world but they had courage and trusted in God and the good and the right. Taking courage from Jesus, we can do the same. When we worry that we are not smart or articulate enough, we can remember that Jesus told the mostly uneducated disciples to not be worried about their words; that the Spirit would speak through them.

The second point is that the Word and Spirit of God are out there and spreading. Just as the newspaper argued from the grounds of morality, so the Spirit is breaking new ground by way of moral engagement within people's conscience. We join that engagement with the conscience of others through good works.

When the newspaper argued for the dissemination of the truth, they joined the dissemination of the Word which is truth and life. And because our battle is about and for the good and true and life-giving, we are on God's higher ground because these are the things of the Kingdom of Heaven. And from such a position, not only we win but our opponents can as well. Because the light of truth and peace and goodness shines upon them as well.

But we all only sense this heavenly light as we embody and express all of these Kingdom things not only with our words but with our actions. In other words, Christian battles must always be non-violent. Whether our battle is in the home, church or nation, we absolutely reject violent words and emotions and deeds. We resist and denounce at every turn the violent spirit which has been unleashed in our nation and which is front and center in the politics of our day. We enter into the fray from a Christ-centered point-of-view as bold truth-tellers, yes, but also as meek and gentle peace-makers.

So a few summations and charges in conclusion: 1. you cannot fight every giant or every battle. So rest assured that God is living and in control and let go of your fear and anxiety. 2. Second, you are a subject of King Jesus and his love so never let the taunts and threats and lies of the enemy get to you. 3. Third, when you sense the Spirit of Jesus coming to the fore regarding something important; or when you see a trustworthy leader taking on a just, loving and peaceful cause, follow those leads. Every week here you are sent out with a charge— literally a “charge” out into the world-- followed by a blessing from Jesus. So look for opportunities to follow that charge and be that blessing. 4. And as you do so, always keep the higher ground in the battle through an absolute commitment to love, peace, goodness and truth. Through the one who can do far more

abundantly in us than all we can ask or imagine; to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore.