

Victory is Wearing the Right Armor 2021
1 Samuel 17:32-33, 36-40, 44-45 Ephesians 6:10-18

1 Samuel 17:32-33, 36-40, 44-45 (New Revised Standard Version)

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!" Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them.

Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

Ephesians 6:10-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

I was sitting with a seminary friend in his apartment one time,
and one of his two little boys came charging in from a back bedroom,
sobbing, "Jacob hit me with the breastplate of righteousness."
Then Jacob came running out, also in tears, complaining,
"But Dad, he hit me first with the shield of faith and the belt of truth."

Noting my confused and quizzical look, Frank explained,
that the boys' grandmother had given each of them
a plastic Ephesians 6 "armor of God" play set,
and they'd been fighting "**spiritual battles**" ever since.

I'm pretty sure there was some questionable theology involved,

along with a significant misunderstanding of put on the armor of God,
similar to when the King urged David to fight Goliath in his armor,
failing to understand and appreciate that the battle
was really not about the size and ferocity of Goliath.

The story that we read in 1st Samuel involves the Philistines,
a powerful enemy and overwhelming problem that threatened Israel.
In this passage,
the problem that threatened Israel had a name, and it was Goliath,
who was a huge, arrogant & mighty warrior, a 7-9 foot tall giant.

Every morning and every evening for forty days,
Goliath had stood out in the valley between the two armies,
shouting threats and insults against Israel and their God,
and challenging the commanders of Israel
to send their best champion out to fight him.

But no one was eager or willing to fight a warrior the size of Goliath.
King Saul offered a cash reward and even his daughter in marriage,
-- but still there were no takers...

... until one day, David, a teenage shepherd boy was at the encampment
to deliver groceries to his older brothers serving as soldiers.
David was shocked by Israel's collective cowardice,
and that no one was eager to take up Saul's offer.

Eventually King Saul heard that David, though young & inexperienced
was eager, willing and wanted to accept the Goliath challenge.
But when King Saul meets David, a teenage shepherd boy
it's obvious that he has no chance against
such an experienced, gigantic & powerful warrior.

But David remembered and explained that he'd protected his flock
against bears, lions and other deadly predators
because God had strengthened & enabled him to do so---
and surely that same principle and truth would also apply
to Goliath's threat and challenge against the God of Israel.

David didn't define the problem based on Goliath's size advantage,
but that Goliath had insulted, threatened and challenged the Lord
could certainly handle a bully like Goliath... and that God

... so the question was not how big Goliath is, but how big is our God?

David recognized that his battle really wasn't against the giant.
His battle was to stand, to remain faithful and trust in the Lord,
because Goliath had taken on the God of Israel,
and against the Lord, **Goliath never stood a chance.**

Now David was not saying,
that since God is in control, I can just sit back and do nothing.
Saul and his army tried that all month, and that wasn't working.

And it's also not saying,
that it all depends on us, as if maybe God really can't help us,

which is why Saul and his army were so afraid of Goliath.

We see in David's perspective, that yes, the Lord is in control,
and so David has trust and confidence **to participate with God,**
and **actively** to be used by God according to the Lord's purpose,

**- so that God accomplishes his plan and will, in and through us,
something far beyond & above outward appearances & expectations.**

That represents a very different and **well-balanced perspective**

that is beautifully illustrated in this story

when King Saul tries to help David prepare for battle: vs. 37-38

Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them.

Saul sees the Goliath situation and threat as a military problem,
which could be resolved with military might and power,
such as wearing the right armor and using the best weapons...
... and of course, David can barely move with all that stuff,
demonstrating the utter futility of Saul's perspective.

**That is the central truth and critical core of this Bible story,
that wearing the armor of God, David didn't need the armor of Saul.**

Everybody except David saw Goliath's threats and challenge
in terms of flesh and blood, military strength and prowess.
But David saw it from a theological-faith perspective,
and as we all know **theology is mightier than the sword.**

To win, David had to trust in God, God's wisdom, power and promises,
which precluded fighting Goliath's way. David had to fight his way
relying on the gifts that God have given to him.

by

**Our call is to be no more and no less than who we truly are,
each of us created unique, loved and equipped to serve ...**

... exactly as God graciously, deliberately and uniquely created us,
trusting that the Lord
will give us the courage, wisdom and strength that we need,
and that it will be God who does the fighting for us.

So don't try to serve wearing someone else's armor,
but instead trust the Lord, and put on the armor of God.

**All through Scripture we are reminded again and again,
that God's power, promises and presence,
these are our sure and certain pathway toward victory...
... which is the same message as the Ephesians 6 passage.**

**The Christians in Ephesus were feeling discouraged and hopeless,
while facing severe persecution, the power and might of Rome ...**

...for at that time, there was an intense and concerted effort
to wipe out Christianity entirely by persecuting the church ...

... and it was a very discouraging and difficult time for believers,
who were trying to be faithful amid a very hostile pagan culture,
and trying to proclaim the Gospel against the power of Rome.

And for Paul, his situation was also difficult and disappointing,
for instead of preaching, teaching and proclaiming God's word,
the Apostle finds himself imprisoned in a dank, dark dungeon.
It's not looking promising or hopeful for the Apostle or the Church.

It is out of a sense of defeat and hopelessness of the situation,
and the absolute impossibility of fighting harder to win victory,
that the true power, promise and hope become crystal clear. vs. 10~12

... **be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.** Put on the whole armor of God, ...
For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but ... against the spiritual forces of evil ...

Perhaps the guard's armor led Paul to think about God's protection
which inspires a more faithful perspective of hope & optimism. vs. 13

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that
evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

The Apostle recognizes and proclaims,
that we cannot possibly defeat the forces of evil on our own.
It is only through God's gracious care, love and goodness
that we're protected & enabled to stand fast and persevere...

... just as he sees the parts of armor protecting the guard, vs. 14-17

Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the
breastplate of righteousness. ... take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the
flaming arrows of the evil one. ... take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the
word of God.

'fasten the belt of truth around your waist'
A Roman soldier wore a wide leather belt
that held all the other pieces of armor together...

...just as our Christian life is held together by **God's truth,**
that Truth which is, that God loves us and seeks to bless us,
and everything else about our faith and how we live,
builds on the Truth of God's love and gracious purpose.

'and put on the breastplate of righteousness'
The breastplate was the important armor that covered the chest.
But it is not **our** righteousness that protects us from harm,
rather it is entirely God's righteousness that protects us,
which we receive by faith, by grace through Jesus Christ...
... **God's grace toward righteousness, that is our true protection.**

'take the shield of faith'

There are specific words in the Greek
that each refer to and describe different kinds of shields.

This particular one, was a large rectangular leather shield
that would be soaked in water before a battle
so it could defend against the enemy's flaming arrows.

The frame of each shield could also interlock with the one next to it,
and by placing their shields together,
the soldiers could form a wall or a shell,
that together, protected them from all harm.

Though of course we do make an individual faith-decision about
responding to God's love & grace as offered & given through Jesus,
that faith decision to receive also,
simultaneously, connects us by that faith to all other believers
truly making us a part of the community of faith – the Church,
where we combine our shields of faith with others.

Haven't we all had the experience of reaching the end of our rope,
and amid feeling defeated, weary and failing, ready to give up,
God sends someone to strengthen, encourage and uphold...
... someone to hold up their shield of faith beside us, to support us
against the fiery arrows of distress and woe of this world?

And so it goes that with all of the pieces of armor mentioned,
we are not to attack anyone or fight by our own strength,
for the battle isn't won on our own terms or by our hard work...

... for there is always far more going on than what we can perceive ---
-- and so it is with grace, it's all God's grace,
for putting on the armor is putting on Jesus Christ,
uniting with Christ through the work & presence of the Holy Spirit.

So as we continue to face disappointments and unending challenges,
and as we work through the ongoing uncertainties of transition,
the way ahead won't always be clear, familiar or easy,
and we could slip into overwhelming fear and panic.

So our call is not to fight the battle by attacking evil on our own,
but by seeking a growing and deepening relationship with God,
by trying to discern and keep up with whatever God is doing.

The victory happens when we are in alignment with the Lord's will.

If you come by my office, I have an unusual paperweight on my desk.
It is a #M88048 axle bearing from one of our church vans.

Several years ago the mechanic found a problem with that van,
and the estimated the cost to make the necessary repair
was way more than it made sense to spend fixing an old vehicle.

It looked like a pretty hopeless and discouraging situation.

Then one of our elders had another mechanic look at the van,

who found that the problem was really just a worn bearing,
which was a fairly inexpensive part to replace.

I've kept that old and worn-out wheel bearing on my desk ever since,
because I hope seeing that paperweight will remind me
to pray, trust and wait upon God, **before I go into panic mode.**

**I don't want to forget that things are not always as they appear,
and that God may be up to something mysteriously more wonderful,
that is way beyond and above my expectations and understanding.**

Sometimes when our problems seem most impossible, crushing and daunting,
it turns out that God is **most present**, in full control and at work
and accomplishing way more than we think possible...
... such as repairing a van back into useful service.

Our battles and our struggles and problems, as we read in Ephesians
are not about flesh and blood, nor about defeating other people,
but always, it's to stand with the Lord in faithfulness,
bold humility, strong in the armor of God's righteousness.

As we're promised by God, Lam. 3:22-23 and Eph 6:10-11, 18

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new
every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Therefore, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of
God, so that you may be able to stand ... pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.
To that end keep alert and always persevere...