

Winning the Head

Game I - Fear

Running to Victory:

1 Samuel 17:4-11, 20-24

September 21, 2008

Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

As a congregation, we are reading through the New Testament this year: five chapters a week. Rochester Covenant and Calvary Evangelical Free Church are joining us in this. This past week in the fourth chapter assigned to us, we read this verse (let's read it together):

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, NIV)

According to the Bible, who is sanctifying you, who is making you holy? God. Who is working to keep your whole spirit, soul and body blameless? God. Who calls you to this destiny? God. Who is faithful to do it? God. You are being purified and trained to win in life. You are being healed, treated and taught to run to victory. The issue is do you respond with faith or turn away in unbelief. The Spirit of God is even addressing our unbelief and fear that feeds it. Do you struggle with fear? Are you battling some fears?

When I was 7 years old, my family was involved in an automobile. My father was following two cars that suddenly passed a tractor with a mower blade. Oncoming traffic prevented him from passing, and he could not slow our 1963 Rambler station wagon quickly enough to avoid hitting the mower. Our physical injuries were minor, but my 7-year-old soul

was traumatized. For many years I was riveted with fear when we traveled. It plagued me every time I climbed into a car. I felt vulnerable and scared.

When I was in seminary, I met a woman who was involved in 30 automobile accidents. Some of them were serious, and some of them happened while we enjoyed a close friendship with the couple. At one point, the woman was proud because she had overcome her fear enough to walk to her mailbox.

Fear shuts down our reasoning. It inhibits our ability to see accurately, think clearly and act appropriately. An individual or group dominated by fear will act only to minimize their immediate risk whether it is reasonable or not.

Some people won't go to the doctor because of fear. Some people won't step on the scale because of fear. Some people won't interview for jobs because of fear. Some people won't go to school because of fear. We become fear-inhibited, fear-guided and even fear-driven people.

The only fear applauded in the Bible is the fear that recognizes God as our Creator and Judge. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"* (Proverbs 1:7). *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"* (Psalm 111:10). Does your respect for God's work, word and presence carry more weight with you than all other forces? The fear of the Lord is a liberating fear. It means that God in his love and power is a greater factor than any other force in every situation you face. King David as both a young shepherd and anointed king exhibited the fear of the Lord and an amazing courage as a result.

When David was young, he became known for his skill with the harp, and for his courage, speech and warrior skills. I wonder if he wrestled and fenced with his older brothers and held his own. Anyway, Saul, the king at the time, had bouts of depression, and David was called to brighten his mood with the harp. David also conversed with the king and impressed

him so much that David took a turn now and then carrying the king's shield as his armor-bearer. When it came to battle, however, it appeared other men had the job, for David stayed at home when the Philistine army threatened Israel.

The Bible reports, "*All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines*" (1 Samuel 14:52). This suggests that Israel's conflict and battles with the Philistines were terribly painful and greatly stressed the nation. It suggests that many, if not the whole nation, were traumatized by the struggle. Perhaps, that is why one large man named Goliath would evoke so much fear. The Israelite army that lined up to protect its people already had suffered great loss and when they saw Goliath, they felt like an infantry unit fighting an enemy tank. Listen to this description of Goliath.

Goliath was between 9 and 11 feet tall. He wore a bronze helmet. He wore 125 pounds of shiny bronze scale-armor over his clothes. What an imposing strong figure! He wore bronze leg armor, and he carried a bronze javelin strapped to his back. Just imagine the sunlight dancing off all of that bronze, even blinding the Israelites. The shaft of the javelin was the size of a weaver's beam and its iron tip weighed 15 pounds. The guy was a walking tank, and an assistant carried his shield.

Now consider the reaction of the courageous, experienced, intelligent Israelite army.

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified. (1 Samuel 17:8-11, NIV)

This challenge and Israelite paralysis lasted 40 days. It wore on the soldiers and their families. David's three oldest brothers were caught in this paralysis, and David's father longed for news. He sent the young teen David with gifts for his brothers' commander and goodies for the boys. When David arrived at camp, the Israelite's gave their war cry of courage and marched to their battle positions. David left his gifts with the supply sergeant and ran to the battle line to greet his brothers. While he was visiting with them, Goliath stepped forward and shouted like he usually did. The Bible says:

When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear. (1 Samuel 17:24, NIV)

David did not cower. The group fear did not seize his heart. He did not focus on the height of Goliath. He did not focus on his strength or his shiny, massive armor and weapons. His mind and soul were not captured by the threat. His vision was not on what everybody talks about. Neither was Jesus. Jesus never focused on what people deliberated about. Consequently, he rarely acted like people expected. He did not fear what people feared. He did not focus on circumstances. He focused on his standing and calling from God.

We see that with David. In our Bible reading, we see David do two things.

First, David asked about opportunity. What was the reward for fighting this guy? Was fighting Goliath worth the effort and risk? Have you looked for the opportunity in your circumstances? Have you looked for a payoff? Is there some way that you can benefit by moving forward? Is there some reward for you if you act in faith rather than move according to your fears? In a meeting, what is the payoff if you speak up? What is the reward if you interview for a different job? What is the opportunity in your circumstance? Just asking that question changes your focus from fear to faith.

Second, David focused on his identity. This challenge was an opportunity, not because David was so big, but because Goliath was uncircumcised and defying the armies of the living God. What did those words mean to David? David understood that he was a child of Abraham. He was a child of promise. As a circumcised citizen of Israel, he was the focus of God's love, power and promise. Goliath was not attacking just another person. This man was defying God and God's soldiers. Do you realize that whoever and whatever intimidates you is messing with God's appointed child? You are God's child appointed to this time. God is grooming you for victory. God is calling you to address that which causes you fear and win.

In Israel, everyone believed that God could beat Goliath. Only David, however, believed that God could and would beat Goliath through him. All the courageous were driven by fear, but David was carried by faith. What are you doing because of fear, and what are you doing because of faith? Do you believe that God will beat Goliath through you? Isn't that your call?

All of us contend with ungodly fears. Fears infest our community and infect our church. Sometimes, we fear not going along with others, and sometimes, we fear stepping out of line. In the Israelite community God taught his people that they often would be different. They had to learn: "Others may, I will not." Others may eat this food, I will not. Others may touch this thing, I will not. Others may speak this way, I will not. Others may date this way, I will not. I belong to the Lord. God's people also had to learn, "Other won't, I must step up." They had to step up in justice, they had to step up in mercy, they had to step up in hospitality and generosity.

Will you allow Christ Jesus to minister to your hurting heart and heal it? Will you believe that you are God's forgiven child, Jesus' commissioned saint, the world's physical expression of the living Jesus? Today, God is grooming you, coaching you, teaching you, and healing you to run to victory. If you respond to Christ in faith, you will overcome all fear.