

The Shepherd of the Sheep Overcomes!

- I. Physical Challenges
- II. Spiritual Challenges
- III. Emotional Challenges

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, 35 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. 36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. 37 The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

Just for a minute, I want you to think about what you would consider to be your greatest challenge in life. What is it that you are working really hard to accomplish, or working hard to avoid? Maybe for you, it's something physical, a particular task you want to accomplish. You want to lose 10 pounds or find a new job, or move into your own home.

Or maybe the challenge you face in life is not so much a physical one. It's a spiritual one. The battle you're fighting is on the inside. During these days of coronavirus, you've really had to struggle to maintain the right attitude and not to revert to behaviors that are harmful to yourself and others.

Or maybe the challenge that you are up against these days is more in the realm of your emotions. The whole covid-19 has you feeling anxious, and worried, and afraid about what's going to happen to you, what's going to happen to your loved ones, how many things you were planning to enjoy this spring are going to be cancelled. If you think about it, we all face challenges in one form or another. Challenges that often feel a lot bigger than we are. Challenges that have the potential to overpower us.

In our text for today, we meet a man who faced just such a challenge, a huge challenge, in fact, a giant challenge. Literally, it was a giant who stood opposed to a young shepherd boy named David. You think you have challenges you're trying to overcome? How about facing a 9 ft. giant, armed to the hilt, who is determined to take your head off and feed your carcass to the vultures? Now there is a physical, spiritual and emotional challenge all wrapped up in one! But here's the thing. David had someone on his side that allowed him to fell that giant. And the same thing is true for you and me today.

This morning, we want to draw some parallels between the challenges we face in life and the giant that stood before David. And as we do that, we're going to want to remember that the shepherd David, who ultimately became King David, is described in scripture as a type of Christ. In other words, in many ways, David foreshadowed what the Messiah would do and be. In fact, that's one of the reasons why this account of David and Goliath is included as one of the readings on Good Shepherd Sunday. We see here that the actions of this Shepherd David remind us of the actions of an even greater Shepherd, yes, the perfect Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ.

And so, today we want to do more than draw a parallel between what we're going through and what David went through. We also want to look ahead to what to what Jesus went through,

what Jesus accomplished. Ultimately, Jesus overcame every challenge. He defeated his greatest enemy, an enemy far stronger than Goliath. And because Jesus was Victorious, in the end, so are we. The theme for the day is simply this:

The Shepherd of the Sheep Overcomes.

Now, a few moments ago, I asked you to think about your greatest challenge in life. We kind of divided them into three categories: physical challenges, spiritual challenges, and emotional challenges. I want you to go back to those. Let's start with physical challenges. Often that means some kind of task that you want to accomplish. Something that you know needs to be done. I don't know, maybe your greatest challenge in life is making your bed every morning, or doing the dishes every night, or making sure that your assignments are finished to the best of your abilities. Maybe it's a much bigger task like paying off all your credit cards, or starting a new career, or finally writing out your will. Sometimes these tasks can seem a little overwhelming.

Tell me, do you think the shepherd David ever faced a task that felt a little overwhelming, a task that he was convinced had to be done? You bet he did. In the verses leading up to our text for the day, we have the whole account of how Goliath repeatedly came out and taunted the armies of Israel. He blasphemed the true God over and over again. When young David came to visit his brothers on the battlefield and heard Goliath's taunts, what did he say? *"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the Living God? What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes the disgrace from Israel? (1 Samuel 17:26).* In other words, David is saying, "Hey, someone has got a job to do. No matter how big or how bad Goliath is, somebody's got to take him down." And when no one else would step up to the plate, what did David say to King Saul? *"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." (1 Samuel 17:32).* And make no mistake, David wasn't doing this for some kind of earthly gain. He did it for the sake of God's name and to rescue God's people. Does that sound at all familiar? Wasn't that exactly what motivated Jesus' actions? For the sake of God's name, to carry out God's plan, to rescue all mankind from the greatest enemy of all, Jesus stepped forward. He said to his father, "Not my will, but yours be done." He said, in effect, "Let no one lose heart, for I will crush the Serpent's head."

My friends, do you see why in a number of places in the Old Testament, God referred to the coming Messiah as "my servant David"? For example, in Ezekiel 34, we read, *This is what the Sovereign Lord says, "I will place over them (namely, over Israel) one Shepherd, my servant David, and he will feed them; my servant David will be Prince among them."* (Ezekiel 34: 23,24) Now, understand, those words were written centuries after King David was dead and buried. This "David" who would be Shepherd and Prince of God's people is a reference to the great descendent of David, the one born in the town of David. God is drawing a connection between the Old Testament David who willingly took up the task, met the challenge of rescuing Israel from its enemy, and Jesus, who overcame an even greater challenge that faced him, namely, the salvation of all mankind.

But if you think about it, the challenge that David and Jesus faced was not just a physical one. There was also a spiritual battle going on. Isn't that the same thing true in our lives as well? Maybe the greatest challenge you face in life is the internal one. That struggle between the good and evil inside of you. Maybe the stress and isolation of a global pandemic has you reaching for a bottle or trying to escape into the internet. Maybe you're facing the temptation to worry and stress over things you can't control, that you have to fight against on a daily basis. Or maybe being cooped up with the same people for weeks on end has brought out other expressions of

your dark side.

Tell me, do you think that David experienced any of that kind of spiritual struggle between Good and Evil? Absolutely. Remember, the two armies that were lined up against each other in the valley of Elah represented more than just two secular nations. They represented two vastly different cultures, yes, two vastly different religions. The god of the Philistines was Dagon. The Philistines worshipped their false god by offering human sacrifices and engaging in sexual immorality. Israel worshipped Jehovah, whose Ten Commandments clearly condemn such sinful behavior. That's why both sides saw this conflict as a type of spiritual war. Remember, when Goliath saw David coming out to meet him, Scripture says, *The Philistine cursed David by his gods*. That would be kind of like those Islamic extremists shouting, "Alahu Akbar," (that is, "Allah is great"), just before they slammed their planes into the Twin Towers on 9/11. For them, this was a jihad. So with Goliath. But just as Goliath called on the name of his god, so did David. When David confronted Goliath, he said to the Philistine, "*I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.*" (*1 Samuel 17:45*). Both combatants acknowledged that their conflict was, at least in part, a spiritual one.

Well, you know who won that conflict between good and evil, right? With one well-placed stone, launched from his sling shot, David drilled the giant in the forehead and the big man dropped like a sack of potatoes. David then used Goliath's own sword to administer the *coup de grace*, announcing for all Israel to see and hear, "Your enemy has been defeated!" Just like that, this unknown shepherd boy, who had been ridiculed by his brothers, the one who went into battle in place of all his countrymen, who in effect was their substitute, this Shepherd who would soon be their king—he was the one who defeated their enemy and in effect, won the victory for them.

Hmm. Does that sound at all familiar? Do you see why David is referred to as a type of Christ? In effect, what David did for his countrymen is a picture of what Jesus has done for us. Jesus took our place. He went into battle against our greatest enemy and came away victorious. By his perfect life, Jesus defeated every one of Satan's temptations. By his sacrificial death on the cross, he took away Satan's ability to accuse us of sin – our sins are paid in full. And by his resurrection from the grave, Jesus announced his victory over death itself.

Now, the question is, how does Jesus's victory over his enemies give us the victory over the spiritual struggles against sin in our lives? Well, look at it this way. When Jesus defeated the devil, he made us all victorious. How does St Paul put it? *If God is for us, who can be against us? In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* (*Romans 8:32,37*). It's a little like how David's victory over Goliath effected his fellow Israelites. When David took down Goliath, did the people all cower in fear and say, "We're going to get whooped by the Philistines!"? No, but just the opposite. They were filled with courage. They knew that they suddenly had the upper hand. They went charging after those Philistines as fast as they could because they knew that, as David put it, "*the battle is the Lord's.*" (*1 Samuel 17:47*)

My friends, isn't the same thing true for you and me? When Satan tries to drag us down into the dark pit of sin and evil, we need to say, "Wait a minute, Satan. You've been defeated by Jesus. You are now dead to me. You can't tell me what to do. In Christ, I'm a New Creation. In Christ I will live as the new person God has recreated me to be. When it comes to those spiritual battles in life, I will say with the Apostle Paul, *I can do everything through him (Christ) who gives me strength.* (*Philippians 4:13*) Jesus empowers us to win the spiritual battles in life.

But then again, maybe it's not so much a physical challenge or a spiritual challenge that

you are up against these days. Maybe it's what you might call an emotional challenge. This whole coronavirus thing has a lot of us kind of on edge. There is just a lot of anxiety, uncertainty, the feeling of dread. I recently saw that someone had posted that they were having so many more nightmares lately. I was amazed at how many people chimed in and said that they were experiencing the very same thing. It's as if the fears that we're dealing with throughout the day are now spilling over into our nights. Is it any wonder that when people are worried about their health or their jobs or their loved ones, that they experience a certain amount of emotional distress?

Again, do you think David maybe had reason to experience those same emotions? I think so. I mean, here he was going up against a professional fighting machine, the equivalent of today's M1 tank, and David's armed with what? A few rocks? The odds were not in his favor. But David wasn't counting on good luck or military prowess. He was trusting solely in his God. When King Saul said to David, "*You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy*" (1 Samuel 17:33), what was David's response? "*The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.*" (1 Samuel 17:37)

My friends, those are the words of a man of faith, a man who knew what God had done for him in the past, and therefore trusted what God would do for him in the future. Those are the words of a man who also wrote these words: *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* (Psalm 23:4). Tell me that when David wrote those words of the 23rd Psalm, he was not thinking of this event in his life, when he walked into in the valley of Elah, with a giant Goliath towering over him, with this life on the line, yet trusting in those powerful words, "The Lord is with me. The Lord is my shepherd. I will lack nothing."

My friends, isn't the same thing true for you and me today? We don't know what challenges we'll face in life. We don't know how many goliaths will confront us. But we know that we have a Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the Sheep, a Shepherd who went into battle for us, a Shepherd who has overcome sin, Satan and the grave. And because that Shepherd of the sheep has overcome, in the end, so will we. In Jesus' name. Amen.