

“The In-Between Man”

Introduction: I heard about an archaeologist who came upon a casket while on a dig in Israel’s Negev Desert. After examining it he called the curator of a local natural-history museum. “I have just discovered a 3,000-year-old mummy who died of heart failure,” he exclaimed. The curator picked the mummy up and after doing further tests, affirmed the archaeologist’s discovery. “You were right about the mummy’s age and cause of death,” the curator informed the archaeologist. “How in the world did you know?” “Easy,” the archaeologist replied. “He was clinging to a piece of paper that said, ‘10,000 Shekels on Goliath.’”

We began looking at this encounter of David with Goliath last week. We considered how the hearts of Saul and the army had been shaped by a story of fear, one spun by Goliath, and how the heart of Eliab had been shaped by resentment, one that he spun for himself. Both of these stories left their “hearers” immobile, unable to move forward against the giant. Then, we considered how David’s heart had been shaped by the story of God, how the story of the living God fighting alongside David had given him the confidence to stand up to the giant that was Goliath.

In actual fact, we’re no strangers to the stories of fear or resentment. There is much in the world that overwhelms us or makes us angry. But, if we’re to overcome these stories, if we’re to receive the love God has for us and participate well in what God is doing in the world, the answer is not to try harder and to somehow be brave like David. In point of fact, the only way we can really become like David is if we have a David who fights for us, and even as us. We are not, as the song goes, “the champions of the world;” we actually need a champion, a word we find a couple of times in this chapter. It means one who represents us, or, literally, “the in-between man.” David points us to the champion we need, Jesus.

I. The Two Champions in the Valley

A. Initially, the word champion is applied to Goliath. In vv. 4 and 23, he is referred to as “a champion named Goliath” and “the Philistine champion from Gath.” Goliath is the in-between man in that we find him standing in the valley between the Philistines and Israel, dressed in armor that looked like scales (v. 5). He was one, big, snake. As he does so, he represents the Philistines, for, recall the terms of the battle? If he wins the man on man battle with Israel’s champion, all of the Philistines will win; the Israelites will serve them, and vice versa (vv. 8-9). We could say that as their representative, what would be true of Goliath would then be true of the Philistines.

B. When David enters that same valley, he assumes the role of Israel’s champion, their representative, their in-between man. The future of Israel stood on his shoulders. What would become true of David would become true of them. In many ways, he is a curious, and almost comical champion. He is not tall and muscular like his oldest brother, Eliab. In the eyes of Goliath, he was “little more than a boy” one who was planning to come at him with sticks (vv. 42f). He refuses to wear Saul’s armor, most likely because it was way too big. And instead of taking up a sword, he knelt (probably) by a stream and took up five smooth stones to fit his slingshot. How silly does all that seem? As David stood in-between, on one side was the arrogance of Goliath and his followers, and on the other the demoralized and fearful people of Israel. If you were a betting man, 10,000 Shekels on Goliath seemed like a sure thing! The forces of evil were just too gigantic.

C. But David entered that valley with a God-shaped, not a Goliath-shaped, story. He came not shaped by fear of Goliath but by trust in the faithfulness of God. The presence of God, as he had meditated on God's word and experienced God's help, was far more real to him than the roar of the lion or bear had been, or the giant's curses were now. With the sling of one stone, providentially guided, it seems, by the LORD, the giant was defeated. Certain death for God's people had turned into life.

II. Looking to the Champion that Is Jesus

A. In many ways, this scene is not much different than seeing Jesus, hungry, thirsty, stripped naked, beaten, and armed with a cross, against the might of the Roman Empire and the influence of the Jewish leaders. But he entered his valley, the valley of the shadow of death, not with a Satan-shaped fear, but with a God-shaped vision, entrusting himself to his heavenly Father. He stood between us and judgment, between us and death. We could not face that giant on our own so Jesus came as our champion, our representative. He came from the lineage of David, as a branch from the stump of Jesse (Isa. 11). He came to fight for us and as us. What would become true of him would become true of us. For three days his defeat seemed certain. His followers were demoralized and hid in fear. But when he burst from the tomb, he turned an apparent defeat into an incredible victory. He was affirmed as the one who reigns on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness . . . forever (Isa. 9:7; Lk. 1:32). By faith in him, his victory becomes ours (cf. Ro. 5:15-19).

B. When we're faced with fear, resentment, or anything else that seems like it will overwhelm us, how does this help us? Consider, for a moment, Psalm 3, our Call to Worship. Written by David, it is what is known as a psalm of lament, a genre found in the collection of psalms in which we hear the writer crying out to God with longing and frustration and even anger because life is not going as he had thought. But through their cries, the psalmists often are moved to remember the past activity of God on their behalf, and his promises for the future. The note that accompanies this psalm indicates it comes from a time when David's son Absalom had turned on him and was leading a conspiracy to take over his father's throne (2 Sam. 15-16). After David cries out, his heart is then shaped by recalling how God had been his "shield" in the past. And perhaps, when he cries out for God to strike his enemies on the jaw and break the teeth of the wicked, he is recalling how, as a shepherd, when a lion or bear came and carried off one of his sheep from the flock that it was God who had helped him go after the lion and rescue "the sheep from its mouth" (1 Sam. 17:35, 37), breaking its death grip and saving the life of its victim. And possibly this memory then led him to recall how that same God had led him to break the death grip, and achieve an incredible victory over, Goliath. Therefore, he could trust the LORD to sustain him in the challenging circumstances he was now facing.

What story are you telling yourself and living in? Where might Psalm 3 lead you? Do you need to get back in touch with the power and provision of God? Do you need to go back and recall some of the great things God has done for you? Where do you need to remember that you have a champion who fought for you and as you and is now, by his Spirit, fighting with you?

Illustration: Last Sunday afternoon Rama and I had lunch up in Newburyport with a dear friend who we had not seen in several years. Her name is Vaneetha, of Indian descent, and is a beautiful, bright, and articulate woman. She went to the University of Virginia for her BA and Stanford for her MBA. We know her from our Bank of Boston and Park Street Church days. By any standard, life has been extremely difficult for Van. She contracted polio as an infant in India, not having received the proper vaccination. The wrong treatment was then prescribed

by a doctor who had never seen the disease and Van was totally paralyzed within a day. Her doctors in India told her family to go west for treatment and so began, between the ages of 2-13, 21 surgeries in England, Canada, and then the US. Finally, she stopped living in hospitals and was able to walk a bit, but she was bullied throughout her school days. Eventually she married a Stanford classmate. They had a daughter and then a son, but the son was born with a heart defect, needed surgery, and as a result of a doctor's mistake, died at the age of two months. Several years later, Van developed post-polio syndrome, a disease which involves increasing pain and weakness and will probably result in quadriplegia. Unable to cope, her husband left her. Amazingly, she met another man, a delightful guy, and they were married three years ago. But despite that ray of light, just watching Van try to hold a fork and eat last week and you know her life will not get any easier.

A couple of years ago, Van wrote a book: *The Scars that have Shaped Me: How God Meets Us in Suffering*. In it, she writes about how she has learned to lean on God in prayer and to offer God her honest lament—her anger and grief, as she puts it, “poured out unedited.” When she gets in this place, she writes how important, like David in Psalm 3, the discipline of remembering is.

In a chapter entitled, “Talking Myself through Suffering,” Van writes: “I can’t carry my plate to the table. Not long ago, I could do it easily. But with post-polio, my health is constantly deteriorating. Every week, I face new challenges, discover things I can no longer do, give up more things I love. The doctors told me this would happen. But as a young mother, there were other things to worry about. I assumed the real struggle would be decades away. Back then I could easily talk about it, write about it, and even philosophize about it. But now, as it’s happening, I’m angry.

“I sit at the counter, tears streaming down my face, flooded with emotion. I scream into my empty house, ‘God, how could you do this to me? Don’t you love me? I’ve been faithful. Doesn’t that count for something? Why don’t you fix this?’ Then I finish my tantrum with God and sink into self-pity. I decide that God answers other people’s prayers but not mine. That he is unconcerned about my pain. That my suffering is meaningless. Of course, these are the lies of Satan.”

And so to move from Satan’s story back into God’s story, Van describes how she engages in the practice of remembering, remembering how much God does love her, how he understands her suffering, how he weeps with her in her pain, how he will never fail her or forsake her, all as evidenced by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. She recalls her “Ebenezers” (1 Sa. 7:12), those times when God had rescued her, sustained her, and had been intimately present to her. And she anticipates her future, that in the blink of an eye real life will begin, life without any tears or death or crying or pain.

As she puts it: “As I review these truths, I sense God’s overwhelming peace. He will walk with me through this trial, as he has every other one, patiently bearing with my weakness, lovingly speaking through his word, consistently giving me strength. These truths remind me that God loves me fiercely, cares for me tenderly, has purpose in my pain, and will one day make all things new. I am comforted knowing that my suffering now is not worth comparing with the weight of glory to come.”

Van has come to know the champion that fought for her, and as her, and now fights alongside her, the one that has defeated the death grip of evil and sin and death, and is using all things for her good and his glory. David had a story. Van has a story. What is your story? How might you use the story of David and Goliath to think about, and then tell your story about your

champion, to others? We'll start there next week. Now, let us go to the table of the Lord where Jesus calls us to remember why and how the Lord is our shield, the one who lifts our head high, and the one through whom deliverance comes.