

## The Quest for Character: Courage

We are in a series called *The Quest for Character* and anchor verse for this series is Romans 8:29: *For those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* God is at work in your character and mine, making us more like Jesus.

The character trait I want us to look at this morning is courage. Last night at about 6:30 we got a text that Walt Bieser was going to ride his first bull at the local rodeo so Janice and I hurried over and got there in time to watch Walt ride his first bull. So this morning, when I think of courage, Walt comes to mind. Now if I was preaching on the character trait of wisdom – maybe not so much. We don't hear many sermons on courage but it's an incredibly important character trait. CS Lewis once said, "*Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.*" We might think that courage is an absence of fear but courage isn't having no fear, courage is not letting fear stop us from doing what we're supposed to do. As John Wayne put it, "*Courage is being scared to death, and saddling up anyway.*"

In the Bible when God's about to launch His servant into a new adventure of faith He often encourages them to "be strong and courageous". One of the clearest examples of courage in the Bible is found in the familiar story of David and Goliath. Let's turn to 1 Sam. 17.

While you're turning there, we want to remember that while the David and Goliath story holds lessons for us in courage and faith the primary spiritual lesson of this biblical story isn't "have faith like David" or "have courage like David". David isn't a picture of us, he's a picture of Jesus. When all of God's people were cowering before an enemy they couldn't defeat, David was their champion. Jesus is our champion, defeating sin and death in our place – he defeated sin by paying the full price for our sin on the cross. And he defeated death when he rose again on the third day. Jesus is our David, our champion! As long as we understand that is the big take home of David and Goliath, we can then learn from David's example of faith and courage. Let's read a portion of 1 Sam. 17

1 Sam. 17:1-11, 19-27

### Five lessons about courage:

#### I. Courage comes from trusting God

What is it about David that he has the courage to fight Goliath when all the experienced soldiers of Israel are quaking in their boots? We can understand their fear: Goliath was an incredibly intimidating warrior – a mountain of a man, an experienced warrior, and a cruel killer. And he was challenging the armies of Israel to send one man out to face him. It's one thing to go into battle with your brothers beside you, it's another thing to step out onto the field of battle alone knowing everything is on your shoulders – you lose and your people lose. Your wife, your kids, everyone you love and hold dear loses. No wonder these hardened warriors were shaking in their boots. The question is why wasn't this teenage shepherd boy afraid? What was the source of his courage?

The answer is David had a strong and deep trust in God. He looks at Goliath and where the Israelites see a man too big to fight, David sees a man too small to insult God and get away with it. You can hear the contempt in David's voice when he says, "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy*

*the armies of the living God?*” Who does this puny man think he is? Faith gave David a different perspective on everything: God is bigger than any challenge and any problem.

Once again we are reminded how important it is to have a growing, deepening faith. When we struggle with fear, especially the kind of fear that paralyzes us from doing what God is calling us to do, God wants to give us the courage that comes from faith. That’s why when God launches His servants into a new and scary venture He says to them, “be strong and of good courage... for I am with you.” Trusting that God is with us and will help us gives us courage. Courage comes from trusting God.

Young people – God is looking for a generation of young people who aren’t afraid to step out and stand for God. Think of all the young people – many of them teenagers- in the Bible who had the courage to make a difference: David, Daniel, Shadrach, Mishach, and Abednego, Ruth, Esther, Jeremiah, Timothy, Mary and many others. God is looking for young men and women courageous enough to be different. Who care more about God’s name and honor than fitting in with their peers. A thousand people walking in lock step of conformity won’t make one tenth of the difference that one young man or woman can make who stand up and stand out like David. Courage isn’t not being afraid, it’s being scared to death but saddling up to do what God’s called us to do anyway. Young man or young woman, will you answer the call? Courage comes from trusting God.

## II. **Courage acts!**

Think about it: David didn’t have to get involved. He could have distributed the food and went home. He chose to step forward and volunteer to step out on the battlefield with Goliath. He chose to run towards Goliath when everyone else was running away. Courage takes a lot of forms but one common theme is courage acts!

- It takes courage to do something new. David had fought a lion and a bear before, but he had never stepped onto a battlefield to take on a battle-hardened soldier before – especially not a nine foot one! When God calls us to step onto a new battlefield and take on new challenges, there will always be fear involved. It takes courage to do new things.
- It takes courage to change. All David’s life he had been the youngest brother and the shepherd boy – that was his identity. But Samuel had anointed him as the next king of Israel and he knew that if he stepped forward to be Israel’s champion that everything would change – he would need to change. Go from shepherd to champion to king. It took courage for David to embrace change.

Over time we all develop habits and attitude ruts. We get comfortable with the same old same old. But God isn’t about comfortable, He’s about *conforming* us into the image of His Son – that means change! To become more loving, more disciplined, more involved, more compassionate, more patient, more like Jesus in any way, it takes courage to break old habits and change.

- It takes courage to stand. Even as David was running towards Goliath he was standing for something: he was standing for God’s honor. He was standing for God’s people. He was standing his ground in the face of mocking and intimidation. It takes courage to stand for right even when it may cost you friends or reputation. It takes courage to stand for the truth of God’s word when our culture mocks those truths as untrue and outdated.

When we see God's name being mocked or someone being wronged or some evil being perpetrated, there is always the option of acting like we didn't see it or that it has nothing to do with us. Like the men of Israel, we can always hide behind the tents and no one will be any the wiser. It takes courage to stand for God's truth and for what's right. God wants to give us that courage!

- It takes courage to run towards what we fear instead of away from what we fear. Hardened soldiers ran behind their tents, David took five smooth stones and ran towards Goliath. Sometimes courage means running towards a challenge or a need. Someone is in need and we run towards meeting that need as best we can. God calls us to grow in openness and vulnerability in our friendships, but we've been hurt in the past. Do we run away from deeper friendships or run towards deeper friendships and greater openness and risk getting hurt again?

The hardest step will usually be the first step. David was in the background and had no skin in the game until he stepped forward and said, "what will be done for the man who kills Goliath?" That first step, breaking that sound barrier, must have been the hardest step cause now he was committed.

God doesn't expect us to step out onto every battlefield or take on every Goliath there is. David didn't go on a "fighting Goliaths tour". He was in the right place at the right time and knew this was a fight God was calling him to join, a battlefield God was calling him to step out on. We can't get involved in everything. We need to be able to say, "not the fight God's called me to." But when God says "get involved" we want to be ready to act. When we sense that God is nudging us forward, don't let fear stop us. We might be scared to death but trust God, take courage, and saddle up anyway. Let's continue with verse 28...

*<sup>28</sup> Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." <sup>29</sup> And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" <sup>30</sup> And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before. (vv. 28-30)*

### **III. Courage helps us throw stones at the right target**

David's older brother Eliab had every opportunity to step out on that field for the 40 days leading up to David's visit, but he hid behind his tent just like everyone else. Now he's jealous of David's courage. He didn't have courage to take on Goliath but now he's big and brave enough to belittle David for having courage. "Your only job is to watch sheep...and you can't even do that right! You're an evil, proud person!"

He wanted to fight with David, he's throwing verbal stones at David but this was a battle David wasn't going to get sucked into. He responds, "what have I done wrong? Can't I even ask a question?" Eliab is throwing stones at David, but David reserves his stones for Goliath. Courage helps us throw stones at the right target.

I've noticed a strange thing that happens when someone runs from the Goliaths God calls them to fight: they often end up throwing stones at the wrong people. It's like the guy who gets bullied by his boss at work and takes it timidly, then goes home and takes it out on his wife or kids. We are called to fight

righteous battles and defeat true enemies, but if we cower from taking those on, we will try to compensate by throwing stones at the wrong targets. Like Eliab we'll try to prove our courage in all the wrong places and throw stones at all the wrong targets.

Don't become that person who is frustrated inside cause you're running from the God-given battles and trying to feel important by throwing stones at other people. Small people try to feel bigger by cutting others down. Don't be that person. And don't get sucked into a verbal battle with that person. David was respectful to his brother, asked a sincere question, and kept moving forward. God has enough for us to do and enough Goliaths for us to fight that we need to get caught up in petty squabbles and stone-throwing. Courage helps us throw stones at the right target.

#### **IV. Courage frees us to be who God has made us to be**

*<sup>31</sup> When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. <sup>32</sup> And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."*

*<sup>38</sup> Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, <sup>39</sup> and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off. <sup>40</sup> Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. 1 Sam. 17:31-32, 38-40*

Once David says, "I'll fight Goliath" Saul tries to outfit him in the armor that all the soldiers wore. But it wasn't a good fit for David. He said, This armor doesn't feel right, I'm not used to fighting with all this stuff on me. I'm going to fight the way God has gifted me to fight."

It was natural for Saul to want David to be as well prepared for the battle as possible – all Israel's hopes were pinned on him. If David lost they all lost. But David knew who he was and who he wasn't. See, in those days you had three types of fighters: heavy infantry, cavalry (men on horses) and artillery, also known as slingers. Slingers would put a projectile into a leather pouch with two long chords, they would whirl the projectile around, let one chord go and hurl the projectile at the target. David wasn't a heavy infantry kind of guy. Goliath was – he liked hand to hand combat because at that he was pretty invincible. That wasn't David. He was a slinger.

Slingers could be accurate from up to 200 yards away and when a slinger released the projectile, that stone was moving faster than a fastball thrown by a Major League pitcher. David had learned the art of slinging while tending sheep and he got really good at it. David trusted God to help him win the battle, but he wasn't being foolhardy. David was strategically using the gift God had developed in him.

God has shaped and gifted you to serve Him in a very specific way. Have the courage to be the person God made you to be. That doesn't mean we shouldn't learn from others or take counsel and advice from others. But be who God called you to be, serve God the way He calls you to serve Him with the gifts He has given you. Don't wear someone else's armor just cause it's what's expected. Do what God's gifted you to do best and pray He makes your aim straight and true!

## **V. Courage in one field often leads us to the next field**

Read 1 Sam. 17:41-51

David had the courage to stand for his convictions and fight for the honor of his God and his people, and this battlefield would be an important stepping stone to his path to becoming king. He didn't need to make anything happen, he just followed God's leading and God had him in the right place at the right time.

Courage on one battlefield often leads us to the next. If we run and hide, we will probably miss opportunities that God has waiting for us. When we trace the paths our lives have taken, we will often see how the decision to step onto this field (often scary at the time) led to that field, which led to the next field.

Is there a battlefield, a Goliath, God is calling you to fight?

- Something new
- Embracing change in some area of your life or character
- Standing up for Jesus and for what's right

Like David, we never know what God is going to use for His purposes in our lives. God is conforming us into the images – the character – of Jesus. Courage is one of the character traits God is engraving into us. So when you find fear knocking at your heart, trust God, take courage, and saddle up anyway. Let's pray.