

## Courageous Faith

### 1Samuel 17:33-41

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-14-2010

## Introduction

We have been seeing that this whole chapter deals with the subject of faith. In the first sermon we saw faith manifested in *faithfulness*; faithfulness in the ordinary things of life. Faith is a lifestyle – not just intended for the battlefields. Romans says that whatever is not of faith is sin. Every day we must live by faith. That’s what it means to be a steward – doing everything as unto the Lord. Then last week we saw his faith manifested in vision – the ability to see what others cannot see. Hebrews 11:6 says that without such visionary faith we cannot please God. And today I want to look at his faith manifested in courage. And yes, you guessed it – this too is an essential ingredient of faith. One of the reasons Revelation 21:8 lists cowardice as the first of the sins that bar men from heaven is because cowardice is the antithesis of faith. In fact just as faith is always rewarded by God, fear is almost a reverse faith that demands to be fulfilled. It’s amazing how frequently people receive the things that they fear. Even that great man Job said, “**For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me**” (Job 3:25). Fear is like faith. It almost demands to be fulfilled. And so a courageous faith is something that everyone of us should strive to possess. Lack of courage is evidence that our faith is faltering.

### **I. The challenge to his faith (v. 33). Note that the challenges to David’s faith did not just come from circumstances or enemies; it came from God’s people.**

And the first thing that I want to point out in this passage is that there will inevitably be challenges to your faith. Even when God has given you a strong faith to believe something, you will get an Eliab who comes along and through mocking, character assassination and tearing apart of your vision will succeed in taking the wind out of your sails and making your faith start to falter. You will see fear creeping in. Well, Eliab wasn’t successful with David. But Satan doesn’t give up so quickly. If a close relative can’t stop David faith, and the enemy Goliath can’t stop his faith, maybe an authority figure that loves him and is concerned for him can crush his faith. Let’s start reading in verse 32:

**1Samuel 17:32 Then David said to Saul, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.”**

**1 Samuel 17:33** And Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you *are* a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.”

David, you’re naïve; you’re inexperienced; you’re a youth. You need to put such craziness out of your mind. I sometimes wonder how many of you young people feel like you can’t stretch your wings of faith because your loved ones fear for you. Now I am convinced that these were very well-meant words. Saul values his little armor bearer. He hasn’t had him for very long and he doesn’t want to lose him. But they were words that Satan no doubt hoped would make David give up his faith and give in to fear. And one of the things that I have found over the years is that the most devastating challenges to our faith do not tend to come from the world out there. They come from our loved ones and those within the church. They are the ones who question our theology. They are the ones who try to get us to play it safe and to achieve lower goals. They are the ones who try to keep us from taking risks. And their arguments on a horizontal level make perfectly good common sense. But here’s the point: faith *transcends* common sense, doesn’t it? God’s kingdom transcends common sense. In fact, there isn’t anything about God’s kingdom that makes common sense because it is seen with eyes of faith. Remember what we said about visionary faith last week? When we have visionary faith we are able to see what others cannot. Everything about the kingdom is living by faith and not by sight. I like the definition of the kingdom that Tim Keller gives. He says,

The kingdom is the renewal of the whole world [so we are talking about tangible things that we can see – “The kingdom is the renewal of the whole world”] through the entrance of supernatural forces. As things are brought back under Christ’s rule and authority, they are restored to health, beauty, and freedom.<sup>1</sup>

It takes faith to see that. “The kingdom is the renewal of the whole world through the entrance of supernatural forces.” Isn’t that what the Lord’s Prayer says? “**Thy kingdom come.**” That is asking for a supernatural invasion of earth. “**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**” The kingdom is the supernatural power of heaven transforming earth through our efforts. Martin Luther was a man who could see that. Many people told Martin Luther that he couldn’t go to the Diet of Worms – that he would be killed; that he ought to think of his safety and the safety of his church in Germany. He was receiving the same challenge that David received. They were saying, “You can’t do it. You are not match for them.” But Luther

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), pp. 52-53.

responded, “You can expect from me everything save fear or recantation. I shall not flee, much less recant. I will go to Worms if there were as many devils there as there are tiles on the roofs of the houses.” Luther knew that he had to try if Germany was going to be held together as a Protestant nation. But he sometimes found it extremely hard to maintain a courageous faith when his own friends were trying to dissuade him from it. In Acts 21:13 Paul told his friends who had been trying to keep him from going to Jerusalem, “**What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.**” He realized that Satan could use even his close friends to be a challenge to his courageous faith.

And the same can be true for you. When the world tells you that you can’t succeed, you can usually handle that. But when your loved ones say it, it’s much harder. And so there is a real sense in which the family and church is an ideal place to stretch and grow your muscles of faith (as it were). But it’s just important to be prepared by realizing that Satan will always challenge your faith. Samuel Johnson once said, “Nothing will ever be accomplished if every objection must be overcome.” You will not always be able to give answers that will satisfy your detractors. (Now there are some objections that are Biblical objections – you better listen to those.)

## **II. The preparation of his faith (vv. 34-36). Note that past adversities were used by God to strengthen David’s faith.**

The second thing we see in this passage is how God prepared David’s faith to be able to stand up on this day. And he prepared David by bringing adversity. Adversity many times teaches us how to depend upon God, and often God uses adversity to lead people to salvation in the first place.

In early America there was a farmer with three sons: Jim, John, and Sam. No one in the family ever attended church or had any time for God. The pastor and the others in the church had tried for years to reach out to them, but with no impact. Then one day a rattlesnake bit Sam. The doctor was called and he did all he could to help Sam, but the outlook was not good. So the family called the pastor to pray for Sam. They thought he was dying. The pastor came in, and after some brief greetings he prayed these words:

O wise and righteous Father, we thank Thee that in Thy wisdom though didst send this rattlesnake to bite Sam. He has never been inside the church and it is doubtful that he has, in all this time, ever prayed or even acknowledged Thine

existence. Now we trust that this experience will be a valuable lesson to him and will lead to his genuine repentance.

And now, O Father, wilt thou send another rattlesnake to bite Jim, and another to bite John, and another really big one to bite the old man. For years we have done everything we know to get them to turn to Thee, but all in vain. It seems, therefore, that what all our combined efforts could not do, this rattlesnake has done. We thus conclude that the only thing that will do this family any real good is rattlesnakes; so, Lord, send us bigger and better rattlesnakes. Amen.

Sometimes God has to send proverbial rattlesnakes to cause people to come to faith. But sometimes He has to send proverbial rattlesnakes, or lions, or bears, to cause us to grow in faith. And He usually has to do this because we like the status quo and prefer not to grow. And how we handle those lions and bears will make a big difference as to how many more adversities God has to bring. Let's read verses 34-36.

**1Samuel 17:34** ¶ But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock,

**1Samuel 17:35** I went out after it and struck it, and delivered *the lamb* from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught *it* by its beard, and struck and killed it.

I need to kill some myths that have sprung up around this Goliath story and David’s sling. It would not have been thought strange that a shepherd could kill a lion or bear with his sling. This is not anything like these rubber slingshots that I grew up with. You could kill a bird with those, but not a wild beast. These are the slings that are made with two long cords attached to a leather pouch. I’ve got a book on slings, and they are amazing weapons. Judges 20:16 says that the Benjamite army had “**seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair’s breadth and not miss.**” That’s pretty good aim – hitting a hair’s breadth target every time. Those slings were accurate and they were deadly. Slingers usually slung stones ranging in size from that of a billiard ball to the far more common size that was about as big as a tennis ball. Most of the slingstones that have been unburied by archeologists in Israel were tennis ball sized.

My book says that in two hours of practice almost anybody will be able to consistently hit a tree at 50 yards (or 150 feet). It’s much easier to learn than shooting a bow and arrow. And you can fairly quickly increase your velocity from 60 mph to more than 100 miles per hour without too much practice. But expert slingers can throw stones more than 1500 feet at speeds exceeding 250 miles per hour. For example, back in 2006, Jerzy Gasperowicz threw a lead shot via a Sidearm throw 505 meters, or 1656 feet.

That's a long ways. And when those stones struck, the weight of that stone was deadly. In that first battle, the Benjamites killed 22,000 men. I just happened to read a report of the Conquistadors in Peru and they said that the Peruvian soldiers could throw stones with their slings with such force that it instantly killed one of their horses. So it is not at all surprising that David would attempt to kill a lion or a bear with the sling. It was a deadly weapon. Do not think that David was foolishly going up with a little sling shot.

But David must have also had some strength. Apparently there was at least one lion that David did not kill when he struck it, and it turned on him. David, by God's help grabbed the lion by the beard and finished him off with something; we aren't told with what. The next verse indicates that David had been used to fighting animals. This was not a one-time event. Though the New King James is not quite as clear, the Hebrew says literally, "**Your servant has killed both lions and bears.**" It is plural. He killed at least two of each. So he had had testings. He had had practice. And he goes on... "**and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.**" His God-given impulse to protect his sheep as a shepherd is stirring him up to protect the metaphorical sheep of Israel. And I think the author is bringing this together in a way that shows that even this battle with Goliath would be a preparation for David to later on be the shepherd of Israel.

But it is how we handle our lions and bears that will determine whether we have the courage to take on a Goliath. Your lion may be a besetting sin that keeps pulling powerfully at your flesh and trying to take you captive. And it is easy to grow tired and weary and to give up the fight. But God does not want you to do that. He wants you to take this wild animal on. Hebrews 12:4 says, "**You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.**" He says that you need to be in that battle so seriously that it is either your blood or that wild animal's blood. He doesn't want half-hearted battles with sin.

Now it is highly unlikely that you will meet identical trials to the ones that prepared David. But God does bring trials and testings into every one of our lives to prepare us to walk by faith. It's guaranteed. When someone asked George Mueller how to grow strong in faith, he answered, "The only way to know strong faith is to endure great trials. I have learned my faith by standing firm through severe testings." We don't like that news. We want to be able to take on our Goliaths without having succeeded in taking on our lions and bears or other testings that the Lord may bring. Every time we respond sinfully to our testings, we weaken our faith. Every time we respond properly to those testings, our faith grows. But faith is either going backward

or it is growing. And a lot of the growth of our faith comes out of the miserable battles that we daily make in responding in a godly way to sickness, and headaches, and screaming children, and financial loss, disappointments, angry words of a coworker, or other testings. Many of you have battle scars from your proverbial lions and bears. And some of you can't see why God has allowed you to go through those battles. But they are essential preparations for your future victories. And it is critical that we learn how to be more than arm-chair warriors. I love the admonition to the nation of Teddy Roosevelt. He said,

It is not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

If you have been holding off on striving for a worthy cause; if you have been giving up the fight against sin without hardly a fight; if you have been running from your lions and bears, I urge you to reconsider. These trials are great preparations to grow in faith. And if we are to have a courageous faith that pleases God, we must be willing to accept the battlefield that God has given us today.

### **III. The object of his faith (v. 37a). Note that David did not put faith in himself; He put his faith in God.**

There is a third principle that I see in this courageous faith. And if you are trying to fill out your crossword puzzle, there is a word here. David did not have a faith in himself or even a faith in faith. The object of his faith was God Himself. Verse 37 begins by saying, **“Moreover David said, ‘The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hands of this Philistine.’”** We saw last week that David had been given assurances from God that he would be king and would succeed Saul. That meant that David was invincible on this field of battle. And you might think: it would be nice to know that I was invincible. Then I could be courageous. But you can know that nothing can happen to you that is not for your good or for God's glory. That's enough. One theologian wisely said, “I am immortal until my work is done.” And when you can have that kind of faith, you will be courageous.

And this is true for any stage of our faith. When I was a kid I lacked assurance of my salvation. And I kept coming forward to “get saved” over

and over again. And people tried to get me to sign a card so that any time I doubted I could look at the card and know that I had believed. But I still had doubts. I wondered, “Was that a genuine faith?” I was always wondering if my faith back then was good enough, or if my repentance was genuine. And finally someone told me to quit having faith in my faith. He said that it really doesn’t matter whether your faith was genuine back then. True faith always looks to God. The question is, “Are you trusting God right now.” Saving faith is a faith that continues to trust God moment by moment. It’s not a faith in our faith. It’s a faith in God. Sanctifying faith and victorious faith is the same. It is a faith in God alone. These are the last words of Martin Luther’s wife, Katherine von Bora. Just before she died she said, “I will stick to Christ as a burr to a topcoat!” Great words for those who want to walk by faith.

#### **IV. The unleashing of his faith (v. 37b). Note that faith must result in action.**

The fourth principle is that faith must be unleashed into action. It is a dead faith, or at least a sick faith if it is not unleashed into action. It’s in the action that the courage is really tested. In the last part of verse 37 it says, “**And Saul said to David, ‘Go, and the LORD be with you!’**” He gave David permission to represent Israel and to fight for Israel. But I love those words, ‘**Go, and the LORD be with you!**’ Faith does not trust God without action; nor does it engage in action without leaning on God’s power. Courageous faith is going into action fully aware that God’s presence is empowering you to go and do. Oliver Cromwell tried to capture this aspect of faith by telling his troops, “Trust God and keep your powder dry.”

And we too must always allow our faith to result in action if we are to grow from faith to faith and from strength to strength. Every example of faith Hebrews 11, the great chapter on faith, is a faith that was unleashed in action. In James it says that your faith is a dead faith if there is no action. So if you are trying to trust God for your finances, Scripture would say, “Go, and the LORD be with you!” In other words, do everything in your power to make a budget, cut costs, work hard, and then trust God to bless every move that you make. We cannot claim to have faith if we are not allowing it to be unleashed in action. It is presumption if you have “faith” but no action; it is not faith at all.

#### **V. The equipping of his courageous faith (vv. 38-41). Note that David has patience to work within the limits of his**

**current training, but he is responsible to use the means at his disposal.**

The last principle on faith that I want to look at today is that faith never despises being fully equipped, but it is patient to work within the limits of what has allowed to date. For example, godly Israelites always went into battle with weapons. But God forbade them to have massive amounts of horses and chariots. They were fully equipped, but they didn't use what God forbade.

***A. He does not prematurely take the royal garments***

We will look first at equipment that he refuses to take. Verse 38 says, **“So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail.”** I wonder if Saul knew the full significance of this symbolism? Most commentaries say that in the ancient world this was an acknowledgement that David would be heir to the throne. Somehow I suspect that Saul wasn't doing that self-consciously. But according to commentators, Jonathan definitely did. Perhaps Jonathan was imitating what his dad had done earlier, but this time he was clearly thinking it through. Take a look at 1 Samuel 18:4. It says, **“And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David; with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.”** Using ancient near eastern symbolism, this was an acknowledgment from Jonathan that David would rule in his place – and he was OK with that. And at some point I hope to preach on what a wonderful heart Jonathan had. But here it is possible that Saul does it unwittingly. Or, as Youngblood suggests, Saul was binding the two together in a way that would make it possible for Saul to get the credit. But God providentially had it happen as a testimony that David would one day be king.

Now here is the interesting thing. David refuses to take the clothing, the armor, or the weapons. First of all, he doesn't want to prematurely take the royal garments until he is ready. This was not God's timing and he was not going to run ahead of God. And this shows incredible maturity. Too many times people allow themselves to be elevated to a position before they are ready for it. The “Peter principle.” And it takes them out of their element and it makes them miserable. David submitted to God's will and God's timing. He's only willing to take the robes and the equipment when it is God's timing.



***B. He puts off what he has not tested***

Second, David is not willing to fight with what he has not tested. Verse 39 says, **“David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, ‘I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them.’ So David took them off.”** David believes in being equipped, but he does not try to wear equipment that God has not yet trained him in.

This is another thing that distinguishes faith from presumption. Faith never despises the use of means; but neither does it trust itself to means. Faith uses the means that God has chosen for us, and with those means goes forth in God’s strength. If you are trusting means rather than the God who works through those means, you are not exercising your faith properly.

***C. He fully prepares himself with his tested weapons***

But let’s look next at the means that faith was indeed willing to use. In verse 40 we see that David is not opposed to means. He uses the means that *he* had been trained in. **“Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand.”** David has everything he will need to kill the giant (those are the means) and he has trained himself to use those means. So again, faith never goes out naked. It is willing to equip itself with all the means that God has put at our disposal. I had a guy that we gave some food to because he hadn’t eaten in a while. And he told me that he was a Christian who just decided that he wanted to travel across the States by faith. He didn’t have a dime in his pocket. He had some gas in the car, but he started driving, and when he ran out of gas was bumming his way through handouts. I tried to give him a lesson on the difference between faith and presumption, and encouraged him that we could help him find a job. But no, he was going to go out on naked faith. That’s not Biblical. When Jesus sent His disciples out without knapsack, gold, or weapons, He taught them that He could provide for them in every situation. But they went without those means *at His command*. He was saying, “If you don’t have the means, don’t worry about it; I can provide.” But in Luke 22:36 Jesus said that now that He was leaving them, He was going to give them an abiding principle. He didn’t want them to be presumptuous, but to use all the means at their disposal. Let me read that passage:

**Luke 22:35 And He said to them, “When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?” So they said, “Nothing.”**

**Luke 22:36** Then He said to them, “**But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.**”

He is saying that faith is not presumptuous. When Satan told Christ to trust God by jumping off the temple wall, Jesus responded, “**You shall not tempt the Lord your God.**” Satan was tempting Jesus to be presumptuous. Faith is willing to be fully equipped. But it is only willing to be equipped with the tools that God Himself has authorized. It is not faith when you use tools that God has forbidden, and it is not faith when you refuse to use tools or means that God has put at your disposal.

#### *D. He stands fast in the arena*

And the last evidence of this human responsibility is seen in the last phrase of verse 40 and in verse 41: “**And he drew near to the Philistine. So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield went before him.**” He got into the arena, and he stood fast even when danger approached. He definitely didn’t seem like much to Goliath, and he definitely didn’t seem like much to the Israelites. But unlike the Israelites, he was willing to go into the arena and get dirty doing something.

It’s easy for an Eliab to criticize David as not having what it takes to be a soldier. It’s easy for a Saul to say that David cannot do it. It’s easy for you as a Reformed person to criticize an Arminian for doing evangelism improperly. But God would say, “At least that guy is doing evangelism.” Faith stands fast in the arena; it doesn’t criticize from the sidelines.

### **Conclusion**

Let me end by reading that quote from Teddy Roosevelt once again:

It is not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

My charge to you is that you not be timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. Instead, get into the arena with a courageous faith, knowing that if God is for you, who can be against you. Amen



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- III. The object of his faith (v. 37a). Note that David did not put faith in himself; He put his faith in God.
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