

Lent #4: The Stones Would Shout
A Fearsome Foe: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

March 18, 2009
Pastor Michael Cofer

In modern American English, people tend to equate “Champion” with “Victor” or “Winner.” That is fitting, I suppose, but there is another way the word can be used. Perhaps you’ve heard of someone championing a cause, like world hunger or environmental preservation. The notion here is that a Champion is one who fights for and defends someone else who can’t fight for themselves.

In the medieval world, knights often served as champions for their rulers, and when a dispute could only be settled through combat, it was the knight’s job to fight for the king. And, it doesn’t take a genius of a king to figure out that you want to be championed by the strongest, best trained, battle-ready warrior you can find.

The Philistines in David’s day were quite fond of this notion of championing. It’s brilliant, really. I imagine that wars conducted this way had death tolls small enough to count on one hand. Their challenge was reasonable, right? “Pick your best fighter, he’ll fight our best fighter, and whichever side loses the fight loses the war.”

Puts a lot of pressure on the champion, and by extension it puts a lot of pressure on the king to choose the right guy for the job. Well, for the philistines it was a no-brainer. They picked the 9 foot tall guy, and they trotted him out in his full armor just as often as they could because, let’s face it, he was terrifying.

Saul, on the other hand, had quite a conundrum. Who should he send? Well, if you remember, Saul was chosen as king because he was the biggest guy around – a full head taller than everyone else. Nevertheless, Saul isn’t rushing to the scrimmage line, is he?

Enter David. David was just a kid, probably a teenager, and he's had no war-training at all. He had no business being there, except that he was running errands, delivering a care-package to his deployed brothers. But when he gets there, what does he find? Some big gentile mocking his God!

Now, I know that teenagers are at times impulsive, and their hormones can make them do stupid things. But today, I want to tell you, that God can use impulsive kids and hormones too. Well, you all know the story. David talks Saul into letting him be the Champion of Israel. He can't make any use of Saul's armor or sword, so he falls back on the only implements of war he had experience with: a sling and a staff.

So, David trots down to the riverbed and picks out a few aerodynamic rocks, then he steels himself and squares off with Goliath. David loads his sling and lets the stone fly. And as it soared through the air, no one could hear it speak, but as it struck Goliath, the words sunk in. The stone testified to him, "**The battle belongs to the Lord!**" As Goliath fell to the ground, and as the earth under the philistines shook, everyone there Jew and Gentile alike heard the stone crying out, "**The battle belongs to the Lord!**"

Jesus well understood the significance of the story of David and Goliath. There is a warfare that goes on well beyond what our eyes can see. If there were bookies at that battlefield, odds on David winning would have been a million to one. But there is something deeper at play than the physical world.

As we read about Jesus' temptation in the desert, we can begin to grasp the importance of the exchange. Jesus had been fasting for forty days, which is about thirty nine and a half more than I could do. He was hungry, and tired, and I would imagine that his willpower was probably at a low point.

So, Satan slinks up to Jesus and makes what to me sounds like a reasonable suggestion. “If you are the Son of God, why don’t you just turn these stones into bread?” Hey, why not? If I could do it, I would have.

But Jesus holds it all in perspective. He, like David, understood that his survival was not dependent simply on the things he could see. Like David, He had a champion fighting for Him, protecting and defending Him: His Father in Heaven.

The question for Jesus was not about taking what He wanted, but about receiving what God the Father wanted for him. Those stones – dry, hard, nutrition-less though they were – shouted just as loudly as the stone that struck Goliath down, “**The Battle belongs to the Lord!**” And if the battle is His to fight, then the glory of victory is His as well.

In our lives, we all face Goliaths. We all have dry and hungry times – in our body as well as our spirit. And yet, we stand our ground, and speak with those ancient stones, “The battle belongs to the Lord!”

I think that Martin Luther said it well in the words of “A Mighty Fortress:”

*With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is.
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.
AMEN.*