



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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FORTY DAYS OF TERROR

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~ Scripture: I Samuel 17:34-37 ~

INTRODUCTION

How many of you believe in miracles? Do you believe God still unleashes His miracle working power in the lives of His people. . .OR, was that a thing of the past (only in Biblical times)?

I remember when JAY R. was diagnosed with cancer. He went in for surgery, but when they operated they found NO cancer.

Most of us do believe in the power of God to perform miracles (e.g.: miracles of healing, release from emotional bondage, release from the grip of an addiction)—the ability of God to step into our lives and do something supernatural that we couldn't do on our own. Our problem is not believing it can happen, but will it. Will we see miracles in our lives, our families, our church?

As I've studied God's Word, I think there is more than enough there that draws me to a God who at times chooses to intervene in human affairs in truly incredible, mind-boggling ways—to do the extraordinary, the miraculous.

I wonder if we might look to the Scriptures this morning—to the ancient, familiar story of DAVID & GOLIATH—to build up our confidence in a God who is more than an extension of our imagination. . .who is outside and beyond my mind. . .who can do “exceeding abundantly beyond all we ask or think” possible [*cf. Eph. 3:20*].

Why was God's Power unleashed in the life of this young man, David? Why did God perform through this man what seemed impossible? What gave this young upstart such confidence that God was going to act on his behalf? Maybe most importantly, is this sort of confidence possible for us as individuals, for our families, for the church in the battles and challenges we face?

The setting for the story is in I Samuel 17. The Philistines and the Israelites are at it again! They were perpetual enemies:

- The Philistines migrated to Palestine at about the same time the Israelites did (1100 B.C.)
- The Philistines occupied a strip of land along the coastal shores of the Mediterranean Sea—now known as the Gaza Strip. Israel's territory was more inland.
- For awhile, the Philistines did control Israel; but after this battle Israel broke free.

Battle lines are drawn. The armies of Israel + the Philistines are facing each other on two sides of a mountain, with a valley in between. Obviously, the Philistines are the aggressors. They want to send one man—their prize warrior, a hulk of a man 9.5 feet tall with bronze armor weighing 125 lbs and a javelin with a spear head weighing 15 lbs (enough to dislocate any normal man's shoulder)—to decide the war before it ever begins. This man was not only physically intimidating, but he had a loud mouth on him—with an

attitude to boot.

We've heard of 40 days campaigns, haven't we:

- 40 Days of Purpose / Community
- 40 Days of Fasting & Prayer (the Lenten season)

Well, this was *40 DAYS OF TERROR*. Every day for 40 days Goliath stands out in the open, defying Israel's army and mocking the God of Israel. It was 40 days of non-stop threats, humiliation, blasphemy, and bullying.

Who is going to step up to the plate? Obviously, David does. And we know how it comes out. But there's a particular portion of the story I want to draw out. It's found in **vv. 34-37**. David has just stepped forward and though the odds seem so stacked against his being successful, he makes this case to King Saul. He says:

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

He recounts the time when he was tending his sheep and a LION came upon them. He didn't spend time wondering if he should or could take him on. He just did it! When the BEAR came and was about to take one of his lambs, he didn't ruminate over it. He reacted immediately—and then thought about it. ☺ Now he hears the name of his God blasphemed and drug through the mud. He hears a defiance and a taunting. And he burns with a holy rage. He makes up his mind that just as *bears & lions* die when they meddle with *sheep*, so must Goliath fall now that he has dared to attack the Lord his God and His people.

Not that God couldn't take care of Himself. Of course, God could easily silence his critics and foes. But it was common in that day for the strongest member (or champion) of two parties that were enemies and at war to fight each other until one fell at the hand of the other. Whoever won such a duel essentially won the war for the entire army, which in turn determined who would control the whole region (cf. **v. 9**). So a lot was at stake here.

That practice was predicated on the belief that behind the scenes (where flesh-n-blood couldn't see), the real battle was going on between the gods of each army. It is they who decided the outcome.

So, David and Goliath faced each other and called upon their respective gods. Actually, Goliath didn't have a "god" to call upon—he had to fight in his own strength. Of course, David trusted in God's might rather than his own and was victorious.

David's confidence in the Lord is amazing. He says to the Philistine (in **vv. 45-46**):

"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head."

Makes you wonder who's the colossal giant and who's the pigmy here. How do you account for such bravery? What gave David such confidence?

I. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

David had a history with God. David had seen God's hand at work in his life before. Where?

His everyday duties included tending sheep. A big part of tending sheep is protecting them from wild animals. David had had to do that a few times. We just read about two instances:

- In my mind's eye, I can see him pulling back the jaws of the **lion**. . .the lamb falling free (and running for cover). . .then bending those jaws back until they were broken.
- Then on another occasion, I can see him thrashing about with a **bear**. . .slaying him so he wouldn't frighten the sheep or take any prey.

Yes, those were extraordinary moments, but that's where David gained his confidence in God (i.e.: in the course of everyday life).

How about us? Do we experience God in the day-to-day? You see, passionate spirituality is everyday spirituality, not the spectacular mountain-top moments or the dessert experiences. That's where you gain your confidence in God—in everyday life, in the course of the "ordinary". As you meet the challenges that come along. As you learn to trust Him, not just your own ability or ingenuity. As your faith is challenged, tested, stretched.

How do you slay those "lions & bears"? By getting on your knees. . .digging into God's Word... making some tough decisions. . .taking some uncompromising stands. . .forging ahead with some resolute actions.

I'll tell you something else: As you kill off the lions & bears in your life, God is getting you ready to face even greater challenges. He's always getting you ready for "what's next"—whatever that is. As you find Him faithful to empower you to deal with the lions & bears, just know He'll be there for you when the Philistine comes along.

Some of us need experience badly. We need to get out of our comfort zones, our neatly packed boxes—and trust God to enable us to do something, to try something, to be something we've not been before. May we all serve God with our whole heart, so that when the time comes to stand for Christ OR take on a challenge to our faith (e.g.: perhaps endure a trial or take on a new ministry that seems overwhelming), we will be steadfast and unmovable and do it in a way that brings honor to His name.

David grew strong in his confidence by trusting God when he dealt with what was put in front of him in his everyday life. Confidence comes from experience. But now, let's go deeper. Notice, secondly, that in David's confidence there is a

II. BLENDING OF THE HUMAN WITH THE DIVINE

There are two parts to this:

- ***"I (Your servant) killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them."*** [v. 36] That's the human side!
- ***"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."*** [v. 37] That's the God side!

That's the two tracks we run our spiritual lives on.

This is a mystery. Is it God? Or is it me? Well, it's both!

I study and prepare for a sermon. You would almost think its success depended on me. But, believe me, when it's all said & done, I trust God as if I had nothing to do with it at all.

I follow St. Ignatius of Loyola on this one: *"Pray as if everything depended on God; but work as if everything depended on you."*

A farmer must plant. . .the soil will do its part. . .but only God gives the increase! My favorite STORY is about a farmer who had bumper crops year after year. His friends and neighbors envied him and often said to him, “My, how God has blessed you.” The farmer would say, “Yes indeed, He has—beyond anything I have deserved. But, you should’ve seen this place when God had it all by himself.” ☺

How was that Philistine to be killed? *“By God”, of course. But not without David.*
Turn it around: How was that Philistine to be killed? *“By David!” “But not without God!”*

You see: *“Without God, you cannot. Without you, God will not.”*

David went with his sling & stone—in the name of the Lord of Hosts. It was an unbeatable combination. Nothing could defend Goliath’s forehead! If you & I will go in the name of the Lord God to do what He calls us to do, YOU will see the hand of the Lord working within and through you—and so will OTHERS. How marvelous, that God would use poor weak creatures like you & me to manifest His glory. Yet that’s when He is glorified the most—when others can see that God is at work within us when we are bearing something or doing something impossible.

One more thing. If no one else but me showed up for church this morning, this message still would have found a target (i.e.: ME). Here is the BEST but MOST DIFFICULT part.

III. THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

Big word! Means *“unchanging”*. **“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.” [v. 37]**

David had an unwavering belief in the faithfulness of God. He knew God to be *“the same yesterday, today, and forever” [Hebrews 13:8]*. He knew the more you walk with Him, the more you can trust Him—even though you don’t always know how or when He will act; even though it doesn’t always mean one escapes death (Jesus didn’t). This is the hard to embrace.

There’s all this backlog of experience. Then comes a new, tougher trial—and we start shaking with fear all over again—not sure if He will be faithful or if we will make it through.

How short our memory! That’s why we come to the Table of the Lord monthly. We need to remember-remember-remember what God has done for us. Somehow, we keep forgetting.

A cancer survivor has a re-occurrence. A recovering addict has a relapse. One loss has occurred . . .now another, even more tragic loss is occurring. ILLUSTRATION> I remember my aunt just getting through losing my uncle to lung cancer, only to be diagnosed herself with ovarian cancer. Can it get any bleaker? We’ve had waves of trouble like that here in our own church.

Now what?

Let’s be sure we get the picture:

- A lion and a believing man—God gives that believing man victory over the lion.
- A bear and a believing man—God again helps that believing man get victory.
- A huge giant and the same believing man—well, what do you think?

If God has blessed & helped you in the past, don’t you think He will bless & help you still!

Yes, maybe this is a different kind of trial, just as Goliath is different from a bear or lion. Yet this is no time to lose heart, to forget the former victory. Here is another crisis / another difficulty / another challenge that’s bigger than you. Maybe it’s the betrayal of a husband or wife; the rebellion of a son or daughter; the onset of a terminal disease; the loss of a dream. But the ways of God—have you not learned it yet? They are higher than your ways. If He helped you then, and then, and then—He will surely help you now! Let that fill you with HOPE!

I want you to go out of here this morning with the confidence, with the conviction that the Immutable God who has been with you in the past will be with you this day and in the days to come. *“My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in (your) weakness”* said God to the Apostle Paul [II Cor. 12:9] Paul went so far as to say he even “delighted” in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties—for that is when Christ’s power was made manifest.

We hear, *“God will never give me more than I can bear.”* Baloney! We’ll often have more than we can bear alone. But our sufficiency is not in ourselves. It is in Him! You gotta do what you gotta do (we saw that in points #1 & #2); but you gotta let God do what only God can do—so that we can come out *“more than conquerors through Him that loves us” [Romans 8:37].*

CONCLUSION

Now, here’s what I want you to do this week. This is the take-away. I want you to start putting things—the tough things in your life—in perspective. Think about the most troubling, challenging issue facing you just now. How can you look at it differently this week?

All the troubles / sorrow / grief & pain, et.al. are—what did Paul call them?

- *“light and momentary troubles that are achieving eternal glory for us” [II Cor. 4:17]*
- *“not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. . .when one day we are liberated from bondage to decay and brought into glorious freedom” [Romans 8:18,21].*

Is that your perspective? Is that your outlook?

- Or do you look at the circumstances & problems and make GIANTS out of them?
- Do you worry about things that have happened, or have not happened (but might)?

Goodness knows there’s enough going on around us to drag us down, discourage and defeat us. When we start to lose our faith-perspective, we become afraid of what we can’t see. . .things that aren’t even a reality (yet. . .maybe never will be). . .things beyond our control.

What a difference perspective can make.

DAVID & SAUL were both looking at the same thing. They both knew the same history of God’s dealings with Israel. Yet when Saul looked across the battlefield, he saw a Giant + all the troops—and allowed himself to become paralyzed with fear. Who will you be like:

- SAUL: Who saw the littleness of David. . .the bigness of the Giant (i.e.: problem)?
- DAVID: Who saw the littleness of Goliath in comparison to the bigness of God?

It’s all a matter of perspective!

David knew he would not be alone when he faced Goliath—he knew this from past experience. He let his past experience shape how he viewed this situation. Viewing impossible situations from God’s point of view helps us put giant problems in perspective. Once we see clearly, we can fight more effectively—knowing that somehow somehow, He will deliver us from the paw of the lion and of the bear!

STUDY GUIDE

As you read this study guide, pray while you read through the passages.

Monday—1 Samuel 24. (David spares the King) Saul makes a tactical blunder and is trapped in a cave. David could easily destroy this man who wants to kill him. What does David do? How does David feel afterward? Why wouldn't David take Saul's life? How should we treat those whom God lifts up in leadership? What was Saul's response? What does this teach us about diplomacy?

Tuesday—1 Samuel 25 (David Insulted and Rebuffed by Nabal, Marriage to Abigail) In David's story we can identify with various characters, even though our worlds are very different. David is insulted and refused by Nabal—a man whose wealth had been obtained by David. Notice David's response. Even David lacked mercy and forgiveness that Jesus calls us to. Read 1 Sam. 25. Describe Abigail's character—what do you learn from her life? At this time in the near east some men had multiple wives, but in the beginning of the Bible we don't find polygamy, and by New Testament times polygamy was no longer seen as appropriate for God's people.

Wednesday—1 Samuel 26 (David spares Saul's life—again!)

This is a great story! Read 1 Samuel 26. What do you learn about David's character in this passage? The laws of this time would have given David the right to take Saul's life—but David doesn't. He showed him mercy. What impact did David's mercy have on Saul? How can we respond to our enemies, and what effect do you think mercy would have on them? On us?

Thursday—1 Samuel 27—28 (David's Life among the Philistines, Saul and the Witch of Endor)

Though reconciliation did occur with Saul, David was still concerned for his safety. Are there people who have hurt you, apologized, and hurt you again? Can you show both mercy and caution? David is welcomed among his enemies because he is now a foe of the king of Israel. Note the warfare that was accepted in this time. Read 1 Samuel 28. In Leviticus 19:26, the Law prohibits divination. Note this story does point to the reality of the afterlife. Samuel's words frighten Saul. The Bible condemns the using mediums to tell the future, including things we call harmless: tarot cards, ouiji boards, psychic hotlines, and horoscopes. Instead, we are to invite God's Holy Spirit to guide us and seek the knowledge God wishes for us to have. Saul is falling further and further from God. When we begin to wander away from God we step deeper and deeper into sin. What spiritual truth from these chapters do you need to hear?

Friday—1 Samuel 29 & Psalm 31 (The Philistines at War, David Dismissed) Read 1 Samuel 29. This chapter again resonates with today. Have you ever been wrongly accused of something, or had your character or loyalty questioned? David sure did. Notice the blessing in David's dismissal. How does David respond? Pray for wisdom, humility, and courage. Read Psalm 31. David's words capture his faith and passionate heart. Use these words to shape your own prayer to God.