
Ministry Meeting

1 Samuel 17 -- Zechariah 1 -- Revelation 17 -- Genesis 24

December 29, 2018

Opening Reading -- 1 Samuel 17:48-51

1 Samuel 17:48-51

And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose and came in advance to meet David, that David hasted and ran towards the ranks to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand into the bag and took thence a stone and slung it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. So David overcame the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and smote the Philistine, and killed him; and there was no sword in the hand of David. And David ran and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of its sheath, and killed him outright, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they fled.

Heroes, Not Superheroes

The entertainment industry in our day is occupied with superheroes -- persons who mystically acquire superhuman powers and save the day by applying those powers to whatever problem presents itself. There are no superheroes in Scripture. But there are heroes. The Philistines called their man Goliath a hero, and Scripture uses that word of him. David was a hero too. And heroes do not appear one day with magical powers. This seventeenth chapter is really the beginning of David's exploits and history. To understand it rightly, we need to

look at the sixteenth chapter, which gives us David's character before we get to this point.

The Lord Looks Upon the Heart: 1 Samuel 16

God told Samuel to find another king, for He had rejected Saul. Samuel came to the house of Jesse, and Jesse paraded his sons before him -- beginning with the eldest, who looked like king material. But God said to Samuel in verse 7: 'Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him. For it is not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh upon the heart.'

When Samuel asked whether these were all Jesse's sons, Jesse said: there is yet the youngest remaining -- he is keeping the sheep. David was the last person anyone thought of when a king was to be selected. He had the lowest place. And yet when he came in -- ruddy, of a lovely countenance and beautiful appearance -- the Lord said: arise, anoint him, for this is he. That description in verse 12 had more to do with the inner spirit of David showing through in his countenance and deportment than with outward looks. There is a difference between a plastic-looking model and a person whose inner energy and character come through in their face and bearing. The Lord was looking at what was inside, and what was inside came out in how David conducted himself.

Chosen: The Spirit of Jehovah Came Upon David

From the day of his anointing the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David. Before David ever appeared in the army camp to face Goliath, he had been chosen. That is a key element of his character: he had been chosen of God, and the Spirit of God rested upon him. We may think we are particularly suited to deal with some enemy or problem -- because of our training, our position, our natural gifts. But David was chosen. And so are we: chosen in Christ before the foundation of the

world (Ephesians 1:4), sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), indwelt by the life of Christ. Out of obscurity, like David, we have been plucked by the grace of God to receive what we have. David's chosenness out of obscurity is a picture for us of what God has done.

A Testimony Before Any Exploit: 1 Samuel 16:18

1 Samuel 16:18

And one of the young men answered and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and Jehovah is with him.

This was not David presenting his own resume. This was the testimony that others rendered of him before any great exploit was connected with his name. A valiant man, a man of war, prudent in matters, of good presence -- and Jehovah is with him. That last phrase is the most remarkable of all. If the people around us who observe our daily conduct were asked to give an account of us, would they say 'Jehovah is with him'? What would produce such a testimony? How one conducts himself, what one says, what one is occupied with -- all of those things constitute the testimony. David had that testimony before Goliath.

Sent, Not Self-Sent

David did not put himself forward. He had been anointed -- chosen of God for a position -- but he was not immediately made king. He went to Saul's house and served there, sent by his father. In chapter 17, Jesse sent him to the camp with bread and cheese for his brothers. He did not devise this plan himself and ask his father's blessing on it. He was sent. That is how he got onto the road that led to Goliath: by being sent on a humble errand.

When his eldest brother Eliab challenged him -- 'I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thy heart, thou art come to see the battle' -- David had a quiet and complete answer: 'What have I now done? Was it not a matter?' He could say with full confidence that he was there according to his father's will, not his own scheme. If he had pressed his father to send him there, hoping to see the battle, Eliab's accusation would have had some force. But he was sent. That made all the difference.

The Shepherd's Heart: Lion, Bear, and Sheep

1 Samuel 17:34-37

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant fed his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and also a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth... Thy servant smote both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, because he hath defied the armies of the living God. And David said, Jehovah that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.

The list of David's mighty men in 2 Samuel 23 includes Benaiah, who killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day -- a remarkable exploit. But there were no sheep in that lion's mouth. Here, David pursued the lion and the bear because they had taken lambs from the flock. He had spent years in the wilderness protecting those sheep, caring for them, guiding them. He was a type of the Lord, who said: 'Not one of my sheep have I lost.' That was not in David's mind -- he was simply living out his shepherd's character. But that character was real, formed over years, and it was that shepherd's heart that he brought to the meeting with Goliath.

The lion perhaps speaks of power and terror -- the Lord is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The bear perhaps speaks of a greedy, unsatisfied desire to devour prey, a different kind of terror. Both are enemies of the sheep, and together they may encompass all the terror of Satan who goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. David looked at both as having been defeated -- not by his own strength, but by the Lord. His answer to Saul is full of humility: 'The Lord delivered me out of the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear. He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.' Not my agility, not my training -- the Lord.

Armed with the Shepherd's Tools

Saul wanted to dress David in full armor with a sword. David could not use those things -- they were not his. He took his staff, five smooth stones from the brook, and his sling. He was not unarmed; but he was armed with the tools he had already been using to defend the sheep. He did not take any new instruments of war. The enemy was a little bigger, but the principle was the same.

The result made plain whose deliverance it was. A stone finding a chink in the forehead of a man with an armor-bearer holding a great shield before him -- that is not a story of human skill. The Lord made it unmistakably His own work. Using a sling well takes years of practice, and David had that practice -- defending the sheep. If we want to be available for God to send us to help His people, we need armor and we need practice: the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6), put on not when we decide to go out and do something, but worn as a daily thing. David did not just show up one day. He had been chosen, anointed, sent, proven humble, and practiced.

Zechariah 1: The Man Among the Myrtle Trees

Zechariah 1:7-11

Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah unto Zechariah... I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, bay, and white. And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these be. And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom Jehovah hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth.

The date of Zechariah's prophecy was the second year of Darius, an emperor of the Medo-Persian Empire. By that time one of the four great empires -- Babylon -- had already been swept away. Before Zechariah stood the remaining three: the Medo-Persian (red horses, still riding when this vision was given), the Greek (bay), and the Roman (white). This connects with Daniel chapter 2, where four and only four empires of significance are shown: Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman.

The four horns of verse 18 are the four powers that scattered Judah, and the four craftsmen of verse 20 are those raised up to cast them out. One craftsman was already at work: the Medo-Persians had destroyed Babylon. The Greeks would follow to destroy the Medo-Persians. The Romans would destroy the Greeks. And the fourth craftsman -- the Lord Jesus, who spent His years on earth learning the trade of a carpenter -- will destroy the Roman Empire in its revived form and set up His kingdom for a thousand years. That is what the Scripture sets before us as the final resolution of the Gentile powers.

The man riding the red horse stands among the myrtle trees in the low valley. The myrtle grows in low places, near rivers and streams, and it bears fruit. This is the Angel of Jehovah -- the Lord Jesus in one of His pre-incarnate appearances, as the expression 'the Angel of Jehovah' almost invariably indicates in the Old Testament. For the comfort of the small and despised remnant in Jerusalem, surrounded by enemies and struggling to rebuild the temple, the word was: the

Angel of Jehovah is riding. He is not absent. He stands among the growing things in the low place, with the fruit-bearing trees.

Revelation 17: The Woman Who Rides the Beast

Revelation 17:3-4, 16

And he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication... And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

Revelation 17 gives us a vision of a great religious and governmental power having worldwide influence in the last days -- just before the Lord sets up His kingdom. It is called a beast in its inward character. The woman riding the beast controls where the beast goes -- not by physical strength or weaponry, but by influence. There are always powers behind thrones.

Notice what she wears: purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones, and pearls. There is no fine linen, because fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints (Revelation 19:8) -- and this is not the bride. There is no silver, because silver in Scripture speaks of redemption -- and she knows nothing of being redeemed. Her golden cup is full of abominations. She is drunk with the blood of the saints.

How does she get off the beast? The ten kings -- the ten horns of the beast itself -- will burn her off. The very power she rode will turn against her and destroy her. That is the end appointed for the religious system that has claimed to guide the course of the world. She does not spring off; she is burned off.

How to Get Off: Three Contrasts

We have seen three ways of being on, and three ways of getting off. In Zechariah 1, the man was riding the red horse -- a picture of One who governs the affairs of the world's empires. He got off the horse not in judgment and fire but quietly: he stood among the myrtle trees. He simply dismounted and stood in the low place with the fruit-bearing things. There is no drama in that. It is simply the Lord taking His place among His own in humility.

Rebekah rode a camel from Mesopotamia all the way to Canaan to meet the one to whom she had been betrothed. The camel is an unclean animal -- a picture of the world we travel through on our way to meet the one who is to be our Bridegroom. Genesis 24:64 tells us how she got off the camel: 'And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel' -- or, in Darby's rendering, she sprang off the camel. She saw Isaac, and that was enough. She did not need a burning, she did not need a slow and considered dismount. She saw the one she loved and sprang.

That is the way for us. We could attempt to steer the beast of this world's affairs -- to ride it and control it -- but that would be to occupy the position of the woman of Revelation 17, and we know what her end is. We cannot be like the Angel of Jehovah in Zechariah, who alone has the right to govern the horse of world empire. Our way of getting off is Rebekah's way: we lift up our eyes. We look upward. And when we see Him to whom we are betrothed -- the one who is coming for us -- we spring off. Love and faith together, looking upward, are what separate us from this present world and its systems. It is time, beloved, to be like Rebekah.

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Lord willing.