

## 1 Samuel 17:31-37

Easter 4, April 30, 2023  
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*<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>33</sup> And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." <sup>34</sup> But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, <sup>35</sup> I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. <sup>36</sup> Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." <sup>37</sup> And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"*

Have you ever heard of the phenomenon known as “sheep worrying”? It’s a condition that sheep have because of which if they are overwhelmed with worry or fear, say if a coyote is chasing them, they may just drop down dead. The worst recorded case of sheep worrying happened about seven years ago in West Sussex, England. 116 sheep were discovered dead in their field, all of them untouched and unharmed in any physical way. And yet, all 116 of them died, due to what was hypothesized to be a couple of dogs that got loose in their pen, chasing them until they all dropped lifeless to the earth. Those sheep were so scared, they simply died on the spot.

This Sunday is Good Shepherd Sunday, the implication of course being that we are sheep. And as such, “sheep worrying” is a condition we need to be aware of for ourselves as well. Not that you’ll drop down dead if you worry too much, but it is true that worry, fear, anxiety, and the like can lead us to dropping down dead in our hearts, falling away from faith. And for that reason, these mindsets are what the old evil foe wants for us. He wants to scare us into submission, to distract us from the fact that we have a Good Shepherd, one who lays down His life for the sheep.

This was something that the men of Israel forgot that day as they stood there lined up across from the Philistines and their champion, the giant Goliath. Those men had forgotten about the Good Shepherd who had gathered them into His fold, who had protected them all along the way. They were paralyzed by fear and worry and doubt, but there *was* one who had not forgotten. That was a young shepherd boy, by the name of David. It was not misguided arrogance that led him to charging at his enemy, but rather confident faith that the One who stood *with* him was far greater than any who stood in front of him. Let’s take a lesson from that little shepherd boy today as we learn about *our* Good Shepherd. The theme we’ll be considering is: **“Go, and the LORD Be with You!”**

**I. Without a shepherd, fear leads to death**

**II. With our Good Shepherd, faith leads to life**

If those 116 sheep in England had had a shepherd on duty that day, they would not have died from worry. A couple of dogs could have ventured into the fields, and just the presence of the shepherd alone could have buoyed the sheep’s spirits—as well as drive the dogs away. But there was no shepherd that day, and **without a shepherd, fear led to death**. The same could be said of *David’s* flocks. In speaking to Saul, he describes how ***“your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And***

**when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him.**" If David had not been there as shepherd, then certainly his flocks would have been a dinner buffet for the local predators.

The soldiers of Israel were in a related predicament. They *had* a Shepherd, a *Good* Shepherd, the same as you and I have. But sadly, this was one of those time periods when the people of God seemed to forget that they were the people *belonging* to *God*. As often was the case in Israel's history, this was a trickle-down effect stemming from a king who had forgotten the same. When God called for Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king over Israel, the position came with the directive to **"Save [God's] people from the hand of the Philistines."** (1 Samuel 9:16) Samuel anointed Saul in a private ceremony and gave him the same message along with a promise, **"Do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you."** (1 Samuel 10:7) Yet, Saul did not act. Even with a garrison of Philistines in his hometown of Gibeah, he was *wary* of moving forward against his enemies.

A little while later, Samuel gathered the people of Israel together for the *public* anointing of Saul as King, as he had told Saul he would do, and after moving through all the people of Israel and arriving at Saul's household, Saul was nowhere to be found. At that point, the *Lord* Himself spoke up as he told Samuel, **"Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage."** (1 Samuel 10:22) Saul, a grown man, was hiding—fear overwhelming his heart. Still, Saul was anointed as King to protect the people of Israel from Philistia. And *still*, Saul consistently portrayed a hesitancy to ever listen to the Lord.

By the time Israel has finally begun a campaign against the Philistines, it was not Saul who initiated it. It was his youthful son Jonathan who attacked a Philistine garrison at Gibeah, (cf. 1 Samuel 13) and again it was Jonathan who defeated the Philistines at Michmash. (cf. 1 Samuel 13-14) Later on, it would be *David* who would lead the armies of the Lord against their enemies, being sent out by Saul to do Saul's dirty work. (1 Samuel 18) Before the final battle of Saul's career, **"Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly."** (1 Samuel 28:5) And despairing of any help from the Lord, Saul turned to servants of Satan, a medium, or a witch, asking *her* for help.

Yes, Saul had, time and again, forgotten about his Shepherd, the One of whom he had been promised, **"God is with you."** (1 Samuel 10:7) And following his example, the people had forgotten as well. They went into battle against the Philistines on this occasion as sheep without a shepherd, plagued by fear that could only lead to death. The Philistines—and particularly Goliath—taunted the people of God, and **"when Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid."** (1 Samuel 17:11)

But the really sad thing is that I'm not sure we have much room to talk. What is it that causes us to be dismayed and to be greatly afraid? I don't think those things that cause us to lose hope are *nearly* as formidable as a giant like Goliath. The things that cause me to worry, that cause me to lose sleep—I worry about the future of our small congregation. I think *too* far ahead and become dismayed about the possibilities that I dream up. I lose sleep when I wonder how we can get more young men to serve as Pastors in our synod. What does this show about me? Doesn't it prove that I often forget that the Lord is with us? That we have a great Good Shepherd that cares about the health of His flock?

What else causes us to worry? Strained finances, the political future of our nation, bodily safety for us and our loved ones, matters of health? While we fret over these things, are we *truly* remembering that by God ***“all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him”***?

(Colossians 1:16) Are we *thinking* about *that* fact? As we lose sleep over these things, are we *calling to mind* that ***“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, [will also] with him graciously give us all things”***? (Romans 8:32) Do we *think* about that? Or do we simply huddle together with our collective worries as sheep *without* a Shepherd? We’re no different than the armies of Israel under Saul’s direction. As they huddled in their tents with nothing but fear in their hearts, forgetting God was with them, so often we huddle in fear, failing to acknowledge the Lord with *us*.

Thankfully, there was *one* who had never forgotten that he had a Good Shepherd who was always there to guide him. His example is a lesson that we can learn from. He was a young shepherd boy, by the name of David, who had been sent by his father to bring food and supplies to his older brothers on the front lines of battle. And seeing the Philistines lined up opposite, and hearing Goliath’s taunts, David asked the armies of Israel, ***“Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”*** (1 Samuel 17:26) And he was met with anger in response, criticized for what the people took as arrogance. “Who does this boy think he is?”

That was when he was summoned to King Saul’s tent, where we find him in our sermon text. He speaks up again, ***“Do not let anyone lose heart because of this Philistine! Your servant will go and fight him.”*** And you know what happened next. After a bit of discussion, David goes out with nothing but a staff, a sling, five smooth stones, and not a piece of armor on him. The stone meets its mark, settling into the giant’s head, and the armies of the Philistines flee, pursued by a re-invigorated Israel.

David and Goliath. That’s the account our sermon text is taken from. The *ultimate* underdog story. It’s an account that you and I both know so very well. And if you were to leave these doors and mention the names David and Goliath to just about anyone, most often they will know, in general, what you are talking about. That’s because the names David and Goliath are frequently invoked to describe the great underdog stories from baseball, from basketball, from football, from boxing, from the Olympics. “David and Goliath” is used to describe wars like the one between Ukraine and Russia. It’s a theme that carries great significance in movies like *Hoosiers*, *The Karate Kid*—Rocky Balboa facing down Apollo Creed. “David and Goliath”—the ultimate underdog story where the little guy wins.

And yet, none of any of that has anything to do at all with the real reason why David defeated Goliath. If David really went into battle alone—armed with a sling and five stones—and stood face to face with that 9-foot-tall champion of Philistia with his great sword and his heavy armor and his thick shield, then no one would invoke the names David and Goliath. *That* battle would have ended up far different. Thankfully, David did not go into battle alone. No, the Lord was with him. **And accompanied by his Good Shepherd through faith, *life was the end of this story for David.***

The presence of the Good Shepherd was a fact that David knew very well. You see, what the army of Israel mistook as insolence and arrogance was actually faith in the Good Shepherd. We can see this truth in David’s words throughout our text. David says, ***“Your servant has struck down both lions and***

**bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.**" When he calls Goliath "uncircumcised," it wasn't an *insult*. He's recalling the LORD's gracious promise of blessing to Abraham and his descendants, when God said, **"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:2-3) It was a contract that was sealed with the act of circumcision upon every male child born in Israel on their eighth day of life, an enduring sign that would set them apart from the world, and a reminder *that* they were the people of God. Calling Goliath "uncircumcised" then was David's way of saying that Goliath was outside of that covenant promise, excluded from that blessing. David knew that the Lord was with *him*, and He was not with Goliath.

So also, when David debates with King Saul, detailing his own personal victories against lions and bears that attacked his flocks, he does not take credit for himself, *nor* is he using this to argue that he's strong enough and seasoned enough in battle to defeat Goliath! No, the conclusion of his argument is this: **"The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."** Again, he knew that the Lord of Hosts was with him, so it did not matter who his opponent was. David clung to God's Words of promise, the promise to him through Abraham and God's personal promises to him that he would be the next king in Israel.

*And* so, in faith, David faced his enemy in *God's* strength. So *also*, did David's greater Son and David's Lord, the great Good Shepherd of the sheep. And how alike they were! David stood on God's Word against Goliath. Jesus stood on God's Word against the devil. David gathered five stones in preparation for battle. In *His* battle, Jesus suffered five wounds—two in his hands, two in his feet, and one in the side. David's victory over the Goliath was the victory of Israel over the Philistines. And Jesus' victory over the devil was the victory of His people over all the powers of hell.

Yes, *Jesus* was *your* Champion. He fought in your place, and He has placed on your shoulders the robes of victory, His own righteousness. And in addition to that, He has given you *promises*, His own Word. He invites you to cling to *this*: **"That all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."** (Romans 8:38) He assures you of His enduring care, as He proclaims through Isaiah: **"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."** (Isaiah 49:15) He invites you to lean on Him, to depend on Him, **"For the LORD God is a sun and a shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."** (Psalm 84:11) And as you *are* those who walk uprightly, having been washed clean of your sins in your Savior's blood, that means that the Lord will never withhold His goodness from you.

So, what could cause you to worry? What could drive us to fear? The enemies of Christ's church *may* loom large in this world, they may boast in their strength, and we might look like children in comparison. Yet, we stand with David, claiming no strength within ourselves but only Christ for us. And because of your Savior's enduring love and care, you can sing together with David, **"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. . . Surely goodness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."** (Psalm 23:4,6) So **"Go, and the LORD Be with You!"** Amen.