

Eye On The Prize 2015

This is the last of my Pastor's choice sermons. This is one of those sermons and passages I love to preach from. I've called it Keep Your Eye On The Prize, Maintaining Perspective in Troubled Times and other things I don't even remember over the past thirty years.

I don't know how many times I've preached from this passage of Scripture but the truth is still powerful and important for us. It's something I need to hear often.

The first time I preached this years ago, using this idea, I had seen a documentary on the civil rights movement and heard the protestors singing this song, "I know one thing I did right was the day I started to fight, keep your eye on the prize, hold on." It struck me so powerfully when I heard them singing. You've got to keep your eye on the prize. There is everything to be gained and everything to lose. We've got to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and fixed on heaven. In the face of all that is happening in our world and in our culture, we need to make sure we keep a heavenly perspective. I want to make sure we keep life here on earth in perspective and the only way to do that is to see our life from the perspective of heaven. It's not all about this life. This isn't all there is. We mustn't lose sight of eternity! Those of you who were present Wednesday night, we talked a bit about the uncertainty of the hour in which we live. I said then that judgment was coming. Jesus said "when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away...Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom...earthquakes, famines and pestilences...fearful events...great signs from heaven..men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world..." Luke 21:9-11, 26.

Some asked Wednesday night after service about the blood moon. Is this a sign of Jesus coming? What if he comes in September? That will be great. Be ready. And if he doesn't come this fall, what will you do? The answer is, regardless of when he comes, live like he is coming today! I'm going to fix my eyes on Jesus and live for him. I'm keeping my eye on the prize and I'm going to press on.

With that said, I want to use this wonderful story of David and Goliath to show you the importance of keeping your eyes on the prize and maintaining a heavenly perspective. Turn with me to 1 Samuel 17 and let's walk through part of this story.

The bible tells us the Israelite army had assembled on one hill and the Philistine army on

another with the Valley of Elah between them. Goliath was the Philistine champion, a giant who stood over nine feet tall. He wore a coat of armour that weighed more than 125 pounds. He carried a bronze javelin with an iron point on it that weighed about 15 pounds. This giant of a man had challenged King Saul and the army of Israel to choose a man to represent them and send him out to do battle against Goliath – winner take all. (This was an Arab way of fighting up through the time of Muhammad, challenging the best fighters to come out and fight.)

Look at verse 11. **“On hearing the Philistine’s words Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.” 1 Samuel 17:11** I know the feeling don’t you? Life has quite an arsenal of terrifying things. Sickness, disease, depression, loss of independence, wars, violence, terrorist attacks, “men’s hearts failing them for fear,” Jesus said. It goes with the age in which we live. No way out! Overwhelmed by life. You know that feeling.

Everyone was dismayed but an unexpected deliverer was about to burst onto the scene. David was the youngest son of Jesse. His three oldest brothers (Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah) had joined the army and followed Saul to war while David was home tending his father’s sheep in Bethlehem.

According to verse 16, Goliath had been terrorizing the Israelites for 40 days when Jesse sent David to the front lines to take supplies to the three oldest sons and to see how the battle was going. Just as David arrived the Israelites were lining up in their battle positions as once again the daily challenge was issued from Goliath and the Philistines.

David left the supplies with the supply sergeant and ran to the battle lines to greet his brothers and see what was happening. While there he gets the scoop on Goliath(v25) and then overhears there is a bounty on Goliath’s head. King Saul will make wealthy the man who kills Goliath, plus, he will make him a prince by giving him the hand of his daughter and he and his father’s family will never have to pay taxes again. Wow! What a deal! Of course it doesn’t matter how rich you are if you are dead and it doesn’t matter how pretty the princess is if Goliath is about to squash you like a bug.

David says, “Excuse me. I didn’t mean to be eavesdropping but I couldn’t help overhearing. What did you say will be offered to the man who kills this giant? **V26-27 “David asked the men standing hear him, ‘What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel?’ They repeated to him what they had been saying**

and told him, ‘This is what will be done for the man who kills him.’”

When Eliab, the oldest brother overhears David talking to the men, he gets angry and yells at David. “Who do you think you are?” I think Eliab was embarrassed because David didn’t act afraid of the giant and he and the older brothers were. Being a younger brother myself, I love David’s response to Eliab. **V29 “Now what have I done? Can’t I even speak?”**

And notice what David does now. **V30 “He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before.”** Once again David asks someone, “Now what did you say would be done for the man who kills Goliath?” He has heard it three times now. Wealth, wife, no taxes. Riches, a Jewish princess no less, and no taxes for all your father’s family, forever.

King Saul hears that someone is talking about facing Goliath and sends for him. Saul is shocked or a better word might be amused when he sees this young teenager saying he will face the giant. David tells the king, **V32 “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”**

David found out what would be done for the man who killed the giant. After you find out the prize, then you ask the question: Is it worth it? Is it worth the risk? Is it worth pressing on...continuing on? You see, David had to weigh the cost, the risk versus the prize. But after he did, he decided it was worth the battle, worth the fight because of what he found out.

I imagine him asking “How much wealth? What does the princess look like? Remember the Andy Griffith episode where Barney and Andy were fixing up Gomer with Thelma Lou’s cousin, Mary Grace? Gomer kept asking, “Is she pretty?” “Well she’s nice...” “But is she pretty?” “Well she’s just so nice.” I can hear David asking “Is she pretty?” “Well, she’s nice. But is she pretty. If I’m going to fight a giant, I need to know she’s pretty. I need to know she’s worth the battle and the risk. Is it worth it?”

Let me make it clear this morning, we are in a battle. There is a giant shouting at us. The devil is a terrorist and he wants to defeat us. He wants to frighten us. He wants us to lose focus. He challenges us to fight or he will try to lull us to sleep or deceive us into compromise and sin. He wants to discourage us, to defeat us. He wants us to take our eyes off of the prize and lock onto the enemy that is coming against us. We have to decide: is it worth it? What is

promised to the one who defeats this giant? Well what does the bible say?

Jesus said **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”** John 14:1-3. He has prepared a place for us where we can be with him forever. Is fighting the devil and serving Jesus worth it?

Paul said, **“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him...”** 1 Corinthians 2:9. He also said, **“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!”** Philippians 3:20-4:1.

We haven’t been able to really conceive of what he has in store for us. But Jesus said “to him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God”. He promised the crown of life to us if we would be faithful and not quit. “He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death...to him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna. ...to him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations...he who overcomes will be dressed in white...I will...acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels...” He promised to make the overcomer a pillar in the temple of God. I will write on him the name of my God and I will write on him my new name... He promised to give the right to sit with him on his throne to all those who overcome. Is it worth it?

The idea of all this is we are going to be with him, identified with him, ruling with him, sharing the glory of heaven with him, we will be a confidante of his, forever. That’s what is promised. Is it worth the struggle? Is it worth the battle? Read Revelation 21:1-8. Here is what is promised....Revelation 21:10-14, 22-27. 22:1-7, 12-13.

We are talking about eternity with Jesus in heaven. No more night, no more pain, no more devil, no more disease and being with the one who saved us by his grace. With Jesus forever.

You tell me. Is it worth it? The sacrifice? The struggle? But the world, the flesh and the devil wants us to take our eyes off of the reward, off of the prize. It's too hard. Too difficult.

The devil and the world shout at us, "Forget the prize – look at the problem! Look at the giant! Nine foot tall! You can't make it. You can't last. You can't succeed. You can't live for God." The enemy will use any means he can to get your eyes off of the prize and onto the problem in order to defeat you.

He will use others - friends and associates. He'll use family like he did in our story. In verse 28, David's brother questions his motives and belittles him. Imagine how hurt he must have been by his own brothers, someone he looked up to. Imagine if David had said, "I might as well give up and go home. Eliab is right, I can't do this." But David would have to decide whether it was worth the rejection of family to obey God and go after the prize.

In verse 33, King Saul tried to get David's eyes off of the prize. He told him he was too young, too small. There may be times when significant people in your life inadvertently try to get your eyes off of the prize.

You have to decide. Is it worth it, to keep fighting the good fight of faith, to keep trusting and serving God? The battle is intense. The storms are heavy. It is frightening. But then you have to consider the view from heaven's perspective. Grab hold of that eternal perspective.

David could have been so frightened of that giant, but he remembered how God had provided for him. He told King Saul, **V36 "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them."** David remembered the faithfulness of God. He figures a battle is a battle.

But isn't this worse than ever? Isn't this Goliath bigger and badder than a lion and a bear? The size of the problem gets multiplied in our minds. It is frightening. But listen to me. The problem can't overwhelm you when you maintain that eternal, heavenly perspective. David's confidence didn't stem from his ability or the size of the problem, it came from his relationship with God. Look at verse 36-37.

"Goliath will be like the lion and the bear...not because I am so great, but because he has defied the armies of the living God." **V37 "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."**

When you look at your problems from a heavenly perspective, then it doesn't matter if it is a lion or a bear or a nine foot tall giant or a thirty foot tall giant or a terrorist with chemical weapons or a blood clot or a brain tumor or Alzheimers or cancer or depression or addiction, because the Lord who delivered us from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear can deliver us from the hand of whatever this is that is coming against us!

Think like a pilot rather than an infantry man. From heaven's perspective, from a pilot's perspective, Goliath doesn't look all that big. In light of eternity, these are just light and momentary afflictions, they don't amount to much compared to what is waiting for us.

Fix your eyes on the prize! Paul said **“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:8.**

Saul decided that David should wear his armor to face Goliath. David tried walking around in the armor and gave it back to the King. “I can't go in these” he told him. David learned this simple truth: Go with what you know. Life gets difficult, all I know to do is go with what I know. All I know is to trust Jesus. All I know is to keep my eye on the prize. Jesus is coming. Heaven is real. We are told to lift up our heads because our redemption is drawing near so I'm going to stay with what I know. I plan to overcome, but not for wealth, not for the hand of a princess (I've already got my princess), not so I don't have to pay taxes, but so I can finish this journey in a way that is pleasing to Jesus and then I'm going to spend eternity with him. He has prepared a place for me and I'm going home!.

Keep your eyes on the prize. Don't let anyone or anything blind you or shift your focus away from Jesus and your home in heaven. Keep that heavenly perspective. You can make it. That giant is no more of a challenge than the lion and the bear because God is your refuge and your strength in good times and bad. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Times are difficult. You are in a struggle. Giants are facing you. Go with what you know. Stay true to Jesus. Face the giant with confidence in the Lord. Look him in the eye and tell him what David told Goliath. V45-51

The battle is the Lord's. Keep your eye on the prize. Victory is ahead!

