

*The Covenant Pulpit*



PURSUING THE HEART OF GOD

*"David, a man after God's Heart"*

**"THE HEART OF A LION"**

1 Samuel 18:5-30

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The 1995 NBA Championship was one for the ages. The odds against the defending champion Houston Rockets repeating were astronomical. After a disappointing season, they barely made the playoffs seeded number six. No sixth-seeded team had ever won the title. But they defied the odds with the greatest run in playoff history.

They became the lowest seed ever to advance to the finals. No squad had ever faced four teams that had each won fifty or more games in the regular season—much less beat them. But the Rockets defeated all four, setting another NBA record. They won nine away games—yet another first for an NBA playoff team. In the finals they faced the invincible Orlando Magic who sported the best record in the NBA and was anchored by its intimidating superstar, Shaquille O’Neal. But this collection of aging overachievers swept the mighty Magic in four games. In the post game euphoria, Rockets coach Rudy Tomjanovich summed up the reason for his team’s improbable playoff run:

**“Never underestimate the heart of a champion.”**

After getting up off the canvas to win a fight, heavyweight champ Evander Holyfield said, “It’s not the size of a man but the size of his heart that matters.” David the giant killer would say “Amen!” to that. So would those visionaries who signed the Declaration of Independence. They knew that they were igniting a revolution that would pit thirteen tiny colonies against the most powerful superpower on planet earth. Benjamin Franklin said, “Gentlemen, we had better hang together or we will hang separately.” None of the 56 signers was hanged, but they all paid dearly for their courageous act.

Five were imprisoned and tortured to death. Twelve saw their homes looted and torched. Nine died on the battlefield. Two lost their only sons in battle. Another had two sons captured as prisoners of war.

At the Battle of Yorktown, when Thomas Nelson’s home and business was destroyed and he died a bankrupt man. When the British navy sank all of Carter Braxton’s ships, he had to sell off everything to pay off his debts. He died penniless. Just before he declared bankruptcy, French Lewis received word that his wife had died in a British prison.

But no one suffered more than John Hart. After living as a fugitive in forests and caves, he returned home to discover that his fields and gristmill had been destroyed. His wife had died from her illness and his thirteen children had vanished. Days later he died of a broken heart.

Yet these patriots did not give in to fear. They were the embodiment of George Patton’s dictum: “Courage is fear holding on a minute longer.” For them, courage was fear holding on for seven long years. When they

defeated the full might of the British Empire, they proved that it's not the size of people but the size of their hearts that matter most.

On July 4<sup>th</sup> it is fitting that this edition of *Pursuing the Heart of God* should focus on courage. The kingdom of God will never be advanced unless we are courageous. As we have already seen, our God delights when a shepherd boy with the heart of a lion bravely marches out to topple a giant. Today's principle for becoming people "after the heart of God" is a paraphrase from Rudy Tomjanovich:

### **Never underestimate the heart of a lion.**

Jesus is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. In a sense, David was the original lion who came from the tribe of Judah. A Turkish proverb says, "A lion sleeps in the heart of every brave man." David was more than a lion; he was a lion killer. When, David told Saul that he had once killed a lion that had tried to devour his flock, he reminds us that there are two lions: **Jesus**, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and **Satan**, the "roaring lion" who seeks to devour the flock. Unless we have the heart of the Lion of heaven, we will lose heart when the lion of hell attacks. But, if we possess the heart of *the* Lion, the lion of hell can never prevail.

Richard 1 of England was so courageous in battle that he was called *Richard the Lionhearted*. You could have called the slayer of Goliath *David the Lionhearted*. I want to be known as *Bob the Lionhearted*. Every one who possesses the heart of the Lion should have the same name: *Fred the Lionhearted* or *Sue the Lionhearted* or *Martha the Lionhearted*.

After he played his famous role as the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, Bert Lahr complained to a Hollywood reporter, "I have a hard time getting work in the movies. I've been typecast as a lion, and there isn't much demand for lions these days." But in the kingdom of God, lions are needed more than ever. David shows us three things about the heart of a lion in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Samuel.

#### **1. The lionhearted never have to prove their prowess.**

The battle in the Valley of Elah is over, and Goliath is dead. But the war with the Philistines will drag on for another quarter century. Saul sees that David is a young man of extraordinary courage and military genius. Rarely does history glimpse a leader like David. Alexander the Great said, "I am more afraid of 100 sheep led by a lion than a 100 lions led by a sheep." Saul knows that David is the kind of lion who can turn his army of sheep into an unbeatable force. Verse five says,

"Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people and Saul's officers as well."

At this point the green-eyed monster of envy rears its ugly head. As King Saul returns home in triumph, his young war hero at his side, the women of Israel come out with tambourines, dancing, and joyful songs. But it's that line in verse seven that casts a pall over the party:

"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

Verse eight says, "Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him." The Hebrew for "galled" could be translated, "It stabbed his guts." Saul's jealousy of David's popularity turns to paranoia in verse eight: "What more can David get but my throne." Verse nine adds, "And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David." Verse 15 says, "When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him."

If David has a lion's heart, Saul has the heart of a jackal. Jackals are wild dogs that prey on the weak and wounded; masters of stealth and cunning, specializing in vicious sneak attacks. But mostly they are scavengers who let the lions do the killing, and then feed on their scraps. So Saul keeps a jealous eye on the young lion, feeding on the leftovers of his victories and waiting for the chance to take him down.

But the lion from Bethlehem does his job with quiet courage. Saul has an insatiable thirst for the applause of others. It's important to him that the woman come out singing, "*Saul* has killed his thousands." Read the rest of 1 Samuel and you will see a king loudly complaining that he doesn't get enough credit, grouching that his children prefer David to him, and trying to make himself look bigger by belittling the giant killer.

The spirit of Saul is alive and well in our narcissistic age of self-promotion. Some of us remember when it was considered bad form to blow your own horn. After scoring a touchdown, a football player used to hand the ball to the referee, and modestly deflect the applause with an "Aw shucks, it was nothing." Now he bumps chests, does a victory dance, mugs for the cameras, and waves his arms to whip the crowd into cheering him even more—and that's just for making a simple tackle.

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams quietly went about their work. They promoted principles, not personalities. Today's politicians are too often self-promoters. Like old Saul, these politicians care more about their own welfare than the public welfare, eyeing public opinion polls as jealously as Saul watched David.

But celebrities and politicians are easy targets. If you and I were really honest, we would admit that there is a bit of Saul in us too. Someone else gets the limelight and we are jealous. No one applauds our efforts and we feel resentful. Too often we fish for compliments. Some of us hog too many conversations, interrupt others too often, and boast too much. We too often gossip about others, making ourselves feel superior

at their expense. There are so many subtle (and not so subtle) ways that we pick up the tambourines and sing praises to ourselves.

But lions walk through the savannah with quiet dignity and calm majesty. Lions never hold a press conference to inform gazelles and zebras that they are kings of the jungle. Gazelles already know that, and give the lions a wide berth. David didn't have to tell everyone that he was a giant killer. He just went out and killed giants. He didn't have to pick up a tambourine and sing his own praises. His actions did the talking for him. But, but when he did open his mouth, he gave all the credit and glory to God. Even a spiritually clueless man like Saul saw the obvious hand of God on David. Verse 12 says, "Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with him." If God's heart is in you, it will be evident to everyone watching. God says this about Jesus:

"I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout out or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets."  
(Isaiah 42:2&3)

Jesus didn't have to promote himself. He just went about the business of being the Lion from heaven. Isaiah says that he never shouted, cried out, or raised his voice in the streets. On the contrary, he told those he healed not to tell anyone. After he did miracles, he disappeared into the crowds. He taught his disciples, "The meek will inherit the earth." He proved that it was possible to have the courage of a lion with the humility of a lamb. Only the insecure like Saul have to boast, and belittle others, and beat their chests. Lions know who they are, and so do all those who watch them. The *real* lionhearted are even secure enough to tell others that they are only lambs that possess the heart of the Lion of the tribe of Judah—and are content to deflect all the praise to him!

## **2. The lionhearted walk with humble confidence.**

Now the jackal moves in for the kill. He sets the trap and baits it with his daughter Merab. If David will expose himself to the Philistines on the battlefield, he will give Merab to him as his wife. Verse 17 says, "For Saul said to himself, 'I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!'" Saul figures that David will jump at the chance to become his son-in-law in order to inch closer to the throne. But Saul is wrong. David responds in verse 18, "Who am I, and what is my family or my father's clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law."

Saul can't believe it. Cynical old politicians can never understand men and women of principle. Jackals fear lions. Comedian Woody Allen quipped, "The lion and the calf may lay down together, but the calf won't get much sleep." And Saul gets little sleep with the lion of Bethlehem in his life. So he dangles another daughter before David as bait. David replies in verse 23, "Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I am only a poor man and little known."

His humble refusal to take the bait drives the old jackal crazy. But the lion from Bethlehem is no predator. Though he has been chosen by God to be the next king of Israel, David refuses to run ahead of the LORD. Look at the contrast: though God has rejected him as king, Saul clings to the throne. Though God has chosen him as king, David resists the throne. Pride always seeks power. Humility doesn't need it.

The half-brother of Jesus says in James 4:6, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." God will oppose Saul every step of the way. At the same time, he will shower David with grace. That's why James 4:7 goes on to say, "Submit yourself, then, to God..." David will wait some 20 years, enduring most of that as a fugitive with a price on his head. But his humility will be rewarded. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up." In his early 40s David will be lifted up as king because God gives grace to the humble.

But the Philistines will smash Saul's army, and his sons will die on the battlefield before he commits suicide. The bodies of Saul and his sons will be nailed to a Philistine wall because God opposes the pride.

The lionhearted walk with humble confidence. I know that sounds like an oxymoron. Remember, David is both a warrior and shepherd. As a warrior he has the heart of a lion. As a shepherd he has the heart of a lamb. As a lion he is confident. As a lamb he is humble. Jesus alone makes this possible. He is both the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb of God—at the same time. When his fury is unleashed in his cleansing of the temple, he roars like a lion. When he goes meekly to the cross, he is "a lamb who is silent before his shearers."

How is it possible for David (and all the rest of us) to be both lion and lamb (confident and humble) at the same time? Isaiah 11:6 and 65:25 says that only in places where Jesus reigns can the lion and the lamb lie down together in peace. In Jesus himself, both lion and lamb operate in harmony. If Jesus rules in your life, a lamb and a lion will live together in harmony. You will be courageous enough to fight like a lion on the battlefield and humble enough not to seize power that doesn't belong to you. But it will only be if, like David, you possess the heart of God.

### **3. The lionhearted seize the prize and pay the price.**

Now the jackal makes a third offer—one that the young lion cannot refuse. In verse 25 a servant of Saul delivers this message: "The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins to take revenge on his enemies." This is one weird and gross offer. Saul is challenging David to go out and literally perform circumcision on 100 Philistines. The Philistines were gigantic people who were renowned as the most valiant and vicious warriors in the Middle East. To take on any Philistine in hand-to-hand combat was no small feat. To take him on

when he knew you were going to try to cut off his foreskin only made him a more dangerous opponent. After you cut down a few Philistines and then cut off their foreskins, the word would quickly spread. Every Philistine who saw you coming would fight all the more desperately. To think you could kill 100 Philistines that way would mean you are either crazy or suicidal. And David was neither. Why would he do it? He really *didn't* think that he was worthy of a king's daughter. No one would want Saul as a father-in-law. Imagine family reunions at Saul's house! David was no fool. He knew that Saul hated him. He was smart enough to know that he was walking into a deadly trap.

I believe that the answer is in the heart of David. Remember, his is a heart after God's heart. More than anything, this young lion from Bethlehem wants to bring glory to his awesome God. When he first met Saul, that old jackal told him that it was impossible for him to beat the Philistine giant Goliath. But David had said that the giant was nothing more than an *uncircumcised* Philistine. David was reminding Saul that circumcision is a potent thing for the Jews. It was the sign of a covenant that God had made with their father Abraham that he was their God and they were his people. He would protect his covenant people and give them victory with his presence and power. Goliath was a giant, but he was an uncircumcised giant. David was only a shepherd boy with a slingshot, but he was a circumcised boy with a slingshot. Because was going out in the power of his awesome covenant-keeping God, he would beat that *uncircumcised* Philistine who had no claim on the covenant.

If you think about it, that Bethlehem boy was pretty cheeky that day in the Valley of Elah. Some might see it as a major *fau paux* for a country bumpkin shepherd to give a king a lecture in theology. In way, it was a stinging rebuke of the king's cowardice and lack of faith. You can bet that it festered in the old jackal's heart. If you read between the lines, there's a certain irony in Saul's challenge to David: "You were so confident that you could beat the uncircumcised giant. Now let's see if you can go out and circumcise 100 Philistine warriors." Saul didn't believe that David could do it then, and he doesn't believe that he can do it now. When he says in verse 25 that he wants to take vengeance on his enemies the Philistines, he really wants revenge on his enemy David.

David understands that this is not a challenge to him, but to his covenant-keeping God. I believe that this young lion of God's kingdom takes up the challenge to show the cynical, faithless jackal that his God is as glorious today as he was in the Valley of Elah. If you rejoice when God shows himself great, you have to love verse 27: "Then David and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines. He brought their foreskins and presented their full number to the king..." As he lays those 200 foreskins one by one at the king's feet, he is giving a silent but powerful rebuke to this faithless old man: "My God is not only as powerful as you *didn't* think he is, he is twice as awesome!"

Convictions always exact a cost. Sometimes it will take every ounce of courage for you to pay the price. It would be a mistake for you to think that David went out and fought those 200 Philistines to pay a price for his bride. He was first of all paying the price to show that his God was great. The world is watching us today. They will evaluate the greatness of our God by watching whether or not we are willing to pay the cost for our beliefs—even to the point of laying down our lives so that our LORD would receive all the glory. The world will also hate us all the more for our courageous stand for God. Verse 29 says, “Saul became still more afraid of him and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.” But, if the heart of heaven’s possesses us, there is no challenge we can’t meet!

But verse 27 goes on to say that he presented those 200 foreskins, “...that he might become the king’s son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.” I know one thing for sure: Michal was a blood-bought bride. Saul had used her as bait to ensnare David. He used her the way he used all his daughters to advance his own ends. She couldn’t have felt loved by her daddy. Imagine how loved she now feels when she realizes that David put his life on the line 200 times to purchase her with the blood of the covenant! Isn’t Michal a picture of the redeemed who belong to the church? Like Michal, we were bait on a hook, used and abused by a world that didn’t really love us. But Jesus came and laid his life on the line. Like the foreskin of circumcision, he was cut, and bloodied, and ripped away from life in the most painful way. He was laid in the grave as dead piece of skin. The Church is a blood-bought bride. Like David, Jesus came back from death and entered the throne room of our heavenly Father. The One on heaven’s throne gave him the bride that he purchased with his blood. You will discover that Michal was no prize catch. She would bring David great sorrow. We are no prize catch either. But Jesus loves us anyway, and is about the business of turning sheep into lions who bring him glory.

David possessed the heart of the great Lion of Judah, Jesus. No wonder David fought courageously for the glory of his heavenly Father and a blood-bought bride. If we possess the heart of the Lion of Judah, our lives will be no different. Matthew 11:12 says, “Since the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.” Wimps and slackers don’t possess the kingdom of God. It doesn’t come to those who passively wait. It is seized by force and advanced by warriors. It is not for the fainthearted, but the lionhearted. Old cynics like Saul will tell you that it can’t be done. Like Saul, they will envy you for possessing a passion they lost long ago. They will be frustrated that you love God more than their kingdom. They will resent the power that comes with the God who is with you. Like Saul, they will try to compromise and then destroy you. But you don’t have to prove your prowess. You are a lion. You walk through this world with humble confidence in the majesty of the Lion who beats in your heart. You pay the cost because, when Saul has died

on the battlefield of his empty pride, you will claim the prize of your high calling. Above all, never underestimate the heart of a lion!

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