

Fear Not Little Flock

Luke 12:32, Reformation Sunday

October 29, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....There are times in life, when a lone voice must stand up to the bullies of the world. There are times when the words and deeds of a single person can be of more power, might, and strength than all the armies of the nations. Consider David and Goliath. Goliath was a giant among men. He was nine feet nine inches tall. His coat of armor alone weighed 150 pounds. He was an experienced warrior, skilled in the methods of slaughter. Moreover, Goliath was a Philistine, a pagan idolater, a wicked and foul-mouthed blasphemer who openly mocked the true living God, the God of Israel. Every day, for forty days, Goliath would fearlessly walk down into the valley between the two armies, and challenge the Israelites in a hand to hand combat to the death. For forty days no one accepted his challenge. Every single soldier of Israel was deathly afraid of Goliath, including King Saul. All men were cowards before this giant. The Israelites feared man rather than God.

But there are times in life, when a lone voice must stand up to the bullies of the world. A youth named David had gone to visit his older brothers in the army. David wasn't a soldier, probably only a teenager at the time. In spite of all this, when David happened to hear the challenge of Goliath, it made him furious to hear this Philistine defy the True God of Israel! By faith, David accepted the challenge of this giant. Armed only with God's Spirit, and a crude slingshot, David walked out onto that battlefield and defiantly said to the Goliath, "You come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day will the LORD deliver you into my hand; and I will smite you, and take your head from you; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day to the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands." Little David, though small in stature, was larger than life in faith. He was so anxious to do the Lord's will that he literally ran toward Goliath, at the same time putting a stone in his sling. He threw that stone with such violent force that it hit Goliath like a rocket, sinking into his forehead. The mighty giant came crashing down to the earth dead. David then took Goliath's own sword, and cut off his head, and held it up for all of God's enemies to see. In the end, those who follow God are always victorious, no matter what the odds. We ought to fear God and not man.

There is another figure in Church history whose story is similar. His name was Martin Luther. The Goliath of Luther's day was Rome. This Goliath had defied the living

God by falsely teaching that man has the ability to earn his way into heaven by good works. This Goliath also taught that all must submit to the power of the papacy, and all outside her church would be damned. The papacy claimed all power and authority on earth, as if he were Christ. Rome thrived upon what Luther called the "monster of uncertainty". In Rome no one could ever be certain they would go to heaven, because Jesus Christ was never taught to be a perfect and complete Savior. The common people knew of Christ, but most did not know Christ by faith.....they did not know the love of Jesus. And so they always lived in horrible doubt concerning their own salvation. Rome cast a dark shadow upon their trembling hearts. Even worse, anyone who dared to stand up to this Goliath, was excommunicated. Many were burned at the stake. Rome ruled by fear.

But once again, in the course of time, God provided another David to fight against Goliath. The little voice which stood up for the Gospel Truth was Martin Luther. Though Luther had been a devout Catholic monk, Luther became convinced from the Scriptures that man is saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law. Luther stood up to Goliath. In the end, by God's power, Luther was victorious in that many precious souls separated themselves from Rome. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ they were saved! The Lutheran Church was born. Today, we Lutherans are named after Martin Luther in the sense that we believe we are saved by grace alone, without the deeds of the law. No true Lutheran believes that he is saved by grace AND works. We know that it is only the blood of Jesus Christ which has power to cleanse us from all sin. This is the Lutheran faith. Good works follow. As Lutherans we should remember that we follow Christ, not Luther. We are Lutheran simply because we believe what Luther also believed, namely that we are saved by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ.

I. Fear Him who has power to cast into hell. For a moment, let us consider again David and Goliath. We know that David did not fear Goliath, but David feared God. On the other hand, King Saul and the Israelite army feared Goliath. They didn't fear God. But in Luke 12:4 Jesus makes it clear who we should NOT fear. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." So God commands us not to fear man. Why? Does this mean any time someone challenges or threatens us, we must fight? No, it doesn't mean that. While there are times we must fight to protect loved ones, or we must fight for the truth, to go beyond this is sin. Proverbs 30:33 says, "Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife." Those who like to fight and argue will soon get a beating either from man or from God. God will punish those who take pleasure in fighting and hurting one another. The fifth

commandment says, "We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need."

So what then does Jesus mean when He teaches we are not to fear those who kill the body? He means that if someone threatens to kill us unless we deny Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we should prefer death over life. For to deny Christ in this life, is to forever suffer the consequences in the next. Jesus said, "But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." Lk 12 God is far more powerful than any man who might be able to murder you. For God has power after death, to cast your soul into hell. Therefore if we are captured by wicked Muslims and told to convert to Allah or else be beheaded, we are to fear God more than man. To be murdered in the faith is better than to deny Christ and live in unbelief.

Consider the persecution of Christians in Luther's day by Rome. In the year 1523 two Augustinian monks who believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, were captured and burned to death at the stake because they would not deny Jesus Christ as their Savior. Luther said of these two men, "Henry and John, have held their lives of no account in Brussels in order that Christ and his Word might be glorified. O how contemptuously were those two souls condemned, but how gloriously and with what eternal joy will they return with Christ to judge justly those by whom they were here unjustly condemned." Burned at the stake, their souls entered immediately into the joy of their Savior. They did not fear man, but they feared God. Both David and Luther had a similar faith. We then must learn that we would rather die a thousand deaths, than ever once deny our blessed Savior who gave His life for all. For the Bible says, "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." 2 Cor. 5 Why not live for Jesus? Truly that is a life worth living!

II. Fear not little flock. And so our blessed and dearest Savior says, "Fear not little flock." He tells us not to be afraid if the world hates us, for it hated Him before it hated us. He says, "Fear not", because He is your Savior who has conquered sin, death, and the devil himself. You need not fear the devil because Christ crushed Satan under His heel by way of the cross! The power which Satan held over us was removed when God justified the whole world for the sake of Christ. Now when the devil or our flesh accuses us saying, "There is no way you will ever make it into heaven! You are a wicked sinner whose sins are too great and God knows all that you have done", we can boldly defy this Goliath and say, "It is true devil, that I am a wicked sinner unworthy of heaven and very worthy of hell because of my sins, but I have Christ, I have my Savior who died for me and rose again!.....And He has already delivered me by way of the cross. Because of

Jesus, I am forgiven and life everlasting awaits my soul! And what do you have devil? When Judgment Day comes you have nothing to keep God's burning anger from you! When my Savior returns in all His glory, you and your demonic hoard will be damned eternally in the fires of hell. The Bible teaches this! You've already been defeated and even now you are under the heel of Christ!"

And so, Christ Jesus, our dear Lord and Savior says to us here gathered today, "Fear not little flock!" And why should we fear though we be little? Though we be infinitely small compared to the mega-churches of the world, what does it matter? Was little David afraid of Goliath who towered above him? Isn't God bigger than Goliath? What about little Luther? When the Goliath of Rome excommunicated little Luther and told him there was no power on earth which could protect him from death, where did Luther put His trust? The hymn *A Mighty Fortress is our God* tells us! Luther writes, *Tho devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still, Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him!* That little word which fells Satan is CHRIST! That little word which fells the powers of Rome is also CHRIST! That little word which conquers and defeats all the powers of death is CHRIST! Therefore "Fear not little flock, for it is you Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"

Indeed the kingdom is yours even now, for the forgiveness of sins has already been purchased by the blood of God's own Son Jesus Christ! Therefore your Lord Jesus does not want you to fear or be afraid. If you are to fear anyone, fear God in the sense that you stand in awe of Him. This is a fear of respect, for there is only One God, the Lord our God, there is no other. He is such a large and mighty God, that He has delivered you from sin, death, and the power of the devil. You have no enemy, that He has not already conquered through His infinite power. Though indeed we are a little flock, and this world hates us and persecutes us daily, we still have Christ, we still have His forgiveness, and that is enough. Indeed it is all we need. Therefore "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Heaven is your permanent and everlasting home. Its pearly gates are already open unto you by the blood of the Lamb. "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The anger of God the Father has been removed from you, by the blood of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. He is now at perfect peace with you, waiting for you to join Him in heaven. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. "Fear not little flock." Amen.