

# The Harder They Fall

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1 Samuel 17: 32-49

June 21, 2009

(THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST)

**God is for us a refuge and strength,  
a helper close at hand, in time of distress,  
so we shall not fear though the earth should rock,  
though the mountains fall into the depths of the sea;  
even though its waters rage and foam,  
even though the mountains be shaken by its waves.**

**The Lord of hosts is with us:  
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.**

He *is*, you know. *God is with us*. Really. So we shall not fear. Say, “**no fear!**” Good. Say it again. (**NO FEAR.**) We shall have... **NO FEAR.** Though the earth should rock, though mountains fall into the sea and the waters rage and foam, and the whole earth be shaken, we shall have ... What? **NO FEAR!**

That’s what it says in right there in the bible! Psalm 46.... But did you notice it doesn’t say *anything* about *mice*. And I don’t know why? And goodness knows it doesn’t even make sense. But I’d rather face anything than a mouse. *Anything*. My dad, Mr. Biology himself, had a tarantula in our house. He had a big, ugly, slithering salamander in a wash tub on the back porch ... even had a copperhead s in sack, once when I was a kid. And they were all scary. But none of them as scary as a mouse. I’m just horrified by them. They’re just miniature monsters in my opinion. Sinister little things. Full of evil and darkness. And whenever I see one, that’s it. I’m gone. I don’t want anything to do with the little devils. Isn’t that awful. I’m a grown man. A big man.

Fifty years old.... But if there's a mouse around, I scream like a little girl and run and hide behind Ann, who has ... **NO FEAR!**

So, it's a little embarrassing to do ... but I need to tell you a story this morning about one of the most frightening things that have ever happened to me in my life. And, sadly, this is all true.

I was watching TV upstairs in the parsonage at Beverly Hills, one night. (This was *about* six years ago.) It was *The X-Files*, I think. And all of a sudden, I felt something on my foot. And I looked down and it was a beast of the field, mind you. A little gray mouse. I felt it, saw it, and screamed. Like a little girl. And when I came down from the ceiling, it was still there. A little gray mouse with big ears. It had me cornered. I was in the chair and it was just sitting there staring at me. Creepiest thing I've ever seen in my life. The thing had ... **NO FEAR!** But I had plenty, mind you. And it took over my body. And I kind of leapt from the chair, over the mouse and toward the door. And I ran down the stairs and stayed there. Because *I* had fear. I was afraid.

I was so afraid, that I didn't want to go back up there. Ever. But Ann assured me that the beast was gone. "Where is it?" I said. "Oh, you probably scared it off," she said. "I'm sure it's gone. It's outside, I'm sure." And after she said that about ten more times, I went upstairs and went to bed. But the problem with living with people, like Ann, who have no fear is that they take huge, dangerous risks that a fearful person would never take. But she convinced me that all was well. And I fell asleep after awhile. And it did take a while, mind you. Because I kept imagining I could feel the thing on my toes. It's like your cell phone, I guess. You feel it vibrate sometimes when it's not even there. (That does happen to other people, doesn't it?) So I kept imagining this mouse was still there bullying me.

But I found out it wasn't my imagination... It was that mouse. He just wouldn't leave me alone. So I jumped out of bed, grabbed my blanket and ran downstairs to spend the night on the couch. Peace at last! And I had just fallen asleep when I felt something on my chest. And my eyes shot open and there it was! That demon-possessed little beast was sitting on my chest watching me. And I jumped and danced and hollered and woke the whole house if not the whole neighborhood! And it was still there! I started for the steps and so did the mouse. And I turned toward the kitchen and the mouse turned with me. And I didn't know what to do. I couldn't get away from it. And just before I bolted out the front door, the little monster reared up on its hind legs. Like a grizzly bear. And it roared. You could barely hear it, but it made a noise. A victory cry! As if it was David the shepherd boy and I was Goliath!

I ran out the front door and down the street. And I went into the pastor's study with my blanket in my hand. And I shut the door behind me, locked it tight, and spent the rest of the night in the big blue leather chair hoping and praying that that bully of a mouse had not followed me to the church.... And I can just see him, that little gray mouse with the big ears, up on the shoulders of all of his little mouse friends. And they're singing and shouting in their little mouse voices. Because *their little friend* (the one with the big ears) conquered the giant! And all because that little gray mouse had ...  
**NO FEAR!**

So you see, victory does not always belong to the swift, or the strong, or even the biggest. But sometimes the victor is the one who simply has ... **NO FEAR!** ❌

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The Lord of hosts is with us:  
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Well, I wanted to tell you that awful story this morning (against my better judgment, mind you) because that's kind of what this story in First Samuel is all about. It's about a giant of a man -- a big bully named Goliath, seven young warriors and their little brother, who just happened to be a kid with ... **NO FEAR!**

But you know that, already. It's a story you've heard from the time you were little ... in Sunday School, maybe, as a wee little child. And it goes something like this: There was a farmer named Jesse who had a whole house full of children -- and eight of them boys! Can you imagine? Eight little boys?! And yet, Jesse survived! Lived to *tell* about it, mind you! And the boys all grew up to be big and strong. Except for David. The baby. The runt of the litter, some people would say.... He was still just a boy. And he *looked* like a boy -- a scrawny little, rosy-cheeked, red-headed boy. (At least that's what it says in some really old versions of the bible.) And this youngest boy was a shepherd, it says. Stayed on the farm and took care of the sheep.

But his three oldest brothers left home "to be all they could be" in the army. And they went off to war against the Philistines, who were just bullies, all of them. They were mean, and ugly (at least, they acted that way). And they were big. And the biggest Philistine was a

giant! Really! He was ten feet tall and built like a wall, a big stone wall. And he walked around with a stick in his hand – the Rod of Goliath! Which weighed more than a hundred pounds. And he meant to use it. And he threatened to kill anyone who came near him.

One day Goliath went to the top of the hill and he shouted down to the people of Judah. [He] said, **“You pick one man and I’ll fight him. And if he wins, you win. And all the Philistines will be your servants. But if I win,”** he said, **“you can just call me Master. And you can serve us.”** And he stood there, waiting, with his stick in his hand. But no one from Judah was willing to fight him, not even the king. Because they were fearful -- they had fear and lots of it. I mean, they were just terrified of this giant, Goliath.

Now David, the shepherd boy, was back at the farm minding his business, tending his sheep. But Jesse, his father, was beginning to worry about David’s brothers. So he decided to make a little care package for them with roasted grain and some fresh baked bread. And he boxed it all up and told David to take it to them down at the war. So David took the care package and went right into the thick of the battle all the way to the front. And he found his brothers... who were surprised to see him there, I think. In fact, Eliab, the oldest, couldn’t believe it. **What are you doing here? This isn’t make believe, David. It’s real! And it’s no place for a kid!**

But David ignored him and he went to the king, and said, **“Don’t be discouraged, sir. I’ll fight the giant.”** Can you imagine? A shepherd-boy and a giant? It was just silly. How could the boy even think such a thing? The king said, **No. You’re just a kid. You can’t fight a giant!** But David said, **Sir, I may be small and I may be young, but I’m a shepherd. I’ve had to fight off lions and bears. And this Goliath**

person, whoever he is, will be like one of them. Because he may be big ... but God's even bigger!"

And King Saul was impressed. Impressed but still worried. So he had the boy suited up in *his* armor. But it was all so big and so bulky, the boy couldn't even walk in it. So he took off the armor, gave the sword back to the King. And he went down to the river and picked up some pebbles – five smooth stones, it says in the bible. And he took his sling. And he walked out to meet this giant, Goliath.

And when Goliath the Warrior saw this shepherd-kid standing there without a sword, or a shield, or even a helmet, he couldn't believe it. **"How dare you send a boy,"** he said, **"to do battle with me."** And he started toward him. But David said, **"Stop! Leave my people alone! Bring your stick and your sword and your weapons,"** he said. **"But I'm warning you, mister, they won't help you at all. Because I'm bringing the Lord. And the battle, sir, belongs to him."**

And you *know* the rest of the story. Goliath charged him. And young David reached for his sling with one hand and a stone with the other. And he loaded, and aimed, and just let it fly. And he toppled the giant, and saved his people from all the Philistines. The runt of the litter came to the rescue, and saved his big brothers, and all of God's people with a sling and a stone!

It just doesn't sound possible does it? How can somebody's kid brother conquer a giant? It just doesn't make sense. But then miracles never do. They just don't make sense. And it *was* a miracle. There's just no other way to explain what he did. Ah, but it wasn't **just** a miracle, mind you. It was something more – as if God was sending a message to his people – to all of us, I think. And that's what it was. It was a message loud and clear. David said it himself.

**This is so everyone will know that we don't need swords and spears to fight our battles. Because the Lord is with us. And the battle belongs to him. ✠**

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Isn't it amazing? A giant -- a warrior who threatened the very life of God's people was brought down by a shepherd -- a boy. And all he had was a sling and handful of stones. Or was it? The truth is David had more than a sling and a stone. He had a refuge, a source of strength, a helper who was close at hand even in trouble and danger and deep distress. And so do you...

So let me ask you this morning ... What kind of problems are you facing today? What are your troubles? What are your fears? What sort of giant is threatening you? ... Sometimes the troubles and trials seem so big you just want to turn and run as hard as you can. Because you don't have the strength or the heart to face it alone. But there is good news today! You aren't alone. Jesus, your brother, is watching and waiting, ready to give you the strength you need to face the giant, whatever it may be. Even though you may feel helpless and weak, you will stand (just as David did when he faced

Goliath). For, as Paul said, **WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS IN ALL OF THESE THINGS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVES US.**

Bruce Larson was a pastor in New York who did a lot of counseling at the church he served. And over the years, he saw a lot of people who were facing giants -- giant problems and giant burdens, giant worries about relationships and family and health and money. And some of the people who came to him their were struggling with faith -- trying to decide if God is really who people say he is.

He'd often ask the person he was counseling to take a walk with him from his office there down to the RCA Building on Fifth Avenue. And there, in the entrance, they would see a giant -- a statue of Atlas who is trying with all his might to hold the world on his shoulders. And you can see in the statue he's straining every muscle and he's knees are buckling under its weight. And he could see that same stress and strain in the faces and even in the shoulders of the people he took there.

And then he would ask them to walk across the street with him. For there, on the other side of Fifth Avenue, is Saint Patrick's Cathedral. And behind the high altar of that great church is a little statue of the boy Jesus, who's maybe eight or nine years old. And there in the palm of his hand he is holding the world with no effort.

You get the picture. We can try, like Atlas, to face the giants in our lives with our own strength, our own might, our own wisdom and power. Or we can say, "Here Lord, it's in your hands. I give all my fears, and all of my burdens, and all that I am to you." And we will be ... what was it Paul said? We will be ... **We are more than conquerors through him who loves us.** Because no matter how small, or how

weak, or how powerless we are, God is with us. And the battle belongs to him.

**Oh ... God is for us a refuge and strength,  
a helper close at hand, in time of distress,  
so we shall have ... NO FEAR ... though the earth should rock,  
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This is the word which is given for you. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

*Benen, OblSB*

