

“OUR TEARS IN GOD’S BOTTLE”

**PSALM 56; JOHN 11:35
LENT 5-A, APRIL 6, 2014**

Most anyone who has ever attended Sunday school is probably familiar with that well-loved story of David and Goliath, when the Israelites and the Philistines were poised for a great military contest; some 18 miles southwest of Jerusalem (I Samuel 17).

On the side of the Philistines was a true **GIANT** of a man whom the Bible tells us was over **9 feet tall**; wearing a **bronze helmet**, a two-hundred pound **coat of armor** and carrying also a **sword** several inches thick, tipped with a **25 pound iron spearhead**. His armor bearer walked dutifully ahead of him with a huge shield.

EVERYONE IN THE ISRAELI ARMY WAS SCARED TO DEATH OF THIS MAN. NO ONE WAS WILLING TO ACCEPT HIS CHALLENGE FOR A ONE-TO-ONE MILITARY DUEL.

BUT AS THE GOOD LORD DIRECTED THE AFFAIRS OF THAT DAY—A YOUNG SHEPHERD BOY NAMED DAVID, whose father had sent him to that very place to take provisions to his three older brothers—all serving as soldiers in King Saul’s army—witnessed personally the brash taunting of Goliath. David is so deeply offended by what he witnesses that he vows he will meet the mighty Goliath head on in battle himself personally!

You might also remember how: (1) King Saul first, tries to dissuade David from doing what certainly would appear to be a very foolish thing in the eyes of mere mortals. But David could not be dissuaded. (2) Then secondly how Saul tries to outfit the young David with his own military armor; but it was far too heavy and cumbersome for David to wear.

DAVID CHOOSES, INSTEAD, TO BE ARMED CHIEFLY WITH HIS STRONG FAITH IN GOD, PROFESSING: *“The LORD God who has delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me also from the hand of this Philistine!”* (I Samuel 17:37) David shouted at Goliath: *“You come to me with a sword and a spear but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts—the very God whom you have defied!”*

As Goliath approached, David ran out to meet him and reaching into his shepherd’s bag David took out a smooth stone, hurled it from his sling, and hit the giant Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in. The man fell on his face to the ground. Since David didn’t have a sword of his own, he ran over and pulled Goliath’s sword from its sheath. David killed him with it, and then cut off his head. **WHEN THE PHILISTINES SAW THAT THEIR CHAMPION WAS DEAD, THEY TURNED AND RAN!**

It was probably **SOME YEARS LATE WHEN DAVID** then sat down one day and wrote that magnificent **23RD PSALM** under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!”*

Yes, there were times when David was blessed with such a strong and courageous faith that he was also led by the Holy Spirit to write one day, *“The Lord is my light and my*

salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1-3)

And again on another day, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, even if the earth should quake and the mountains be carried into the heart of the sea!" (Psalm 46:1-3)*

BUT PLEASE BE CERTAIN THAT DAVID HAD HIS MOMENTS OF WEAKNESS AND FEAR TOO! And such was the case that David was remembering when he was also led by the Holy Spirit to pen these very honest and truthful words of Psalm 56.

DAVID, WHO AS A WARRIOR, HAD CELEBRATED MANY MILITARY VICTORIES, IS NOW BEING PURSUED AS THE CHIEF ENEMY OF KING SAUL; whom the LORD God had, by this time, rejected as Israel's king.

WHEN DAVID SEEKS REFUGE FROM SAUL, WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT DAVID MAY HAVE CHOSEN TO RUN AND HIDE? The place that he actually chose was nowhere other than the **VERY HOMETOWN OF THE MIGHTY GOLIATH, CITY OF GATH!**

Yes, David was still remembered there, alright, but his legacy was not one that the inhabitants of Gath admired. It's not that the mayor of Gath gave David **a key** to the city in a public press conference, or that the community invited him to be the guest speaker at the local **Chamber of Commerce!**

WHY WOULD DAVID CHOOSE SUCH A PLACE TO SEEK AS HIS REFUGE? Because in his mind, this would be the very last place that Saul would have ever expected David to go! And he was right! In this psalm, David recalls the prayers that he prayed to the Lord when he was faced with such a perilous situation.

I. FIRST OF ALL, DAVID PRAYS TO BE DELIVERED FROM DEATH (VV. 1-4). *"Have mercy on me, O God, for my enemies are hounding me; all day long they assault and oppress me. They hound me all the day long; truly there are many who fight against me, O Most High!"*

I SAMUEL 21 GIVES US MANY MORE OF THE DETAILS OF DAVID'S EXPERIENCE THERE IN GATH, we don't see any real evidence of any actual physical violence which the townspeople there may have perpetrated upon David, BUT HE WAS CERTAINLY ASSAULTED VERBALLY AGAIN AND AGAIN AND MOST DEFINITELY THREATENED.

While he trusted in the Lord, there are times he most definitely sought to influence others to be compassionate towards him too. He went around the city of Gath pretending to be a **MAD MAN, SCRATCHING ON PEOPLE'S DOORS, AND ALLOWING HIS SPITTLE**, the Bible says, to drip down continuously over his beard (I Samuel 21:12-15)

PLEASE NOTE: DAVID MANIFESTED BOTH FEAR AND FAITH AS HE CRIED OUT TO GOD: *“Whenever I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. In God, whose Word I praise, I trust and will not be afraid. For what can flesh do to me? All day long they damage my cause; their only thought is to do me evil. They band together; they lie in wait. They spy upon my footsteps, because they seek my life!”*

David had to watch his step in Gath, not only in what he did, but also what he said, because he was a man under suspicion, who was being watched. **He had a target on his back** and only the Lord could protect him.

II. SECONDLY, DAVID PRAYS THAT HE WOULD NOT STUMBLE (vv. 5-11). David's faith made him certain that **God had not lost track** of him. David's faith made him certain that God was still fully **aware of his situation**. David's faith made him certain that God was **still watching out for him**. Listen again to verse 8, *“**You have noted my lamentation and put my tears into your bottle; are they not recorded in your book?**”*

BUT WHAT COULD DAVID POSSIBLY MEAN WHEN HE CONFESSES HIS FAITH THAT GOD HAD PUT DAVID'S TEARS INTO GOD'S BOTTLE? Archaeologists have unearthed small “tear bottles” in which mourners collected their actual tears and then deposited the bottle at the gravesite, as tangible evidence that they were really mourning their deceased loved ones! David is confessing his belief, that certainly the LORD God is fully aware of what David is feeling and how David is suffering! **Not only does God take notice of our sufferings, but he is willing to suffer alongside of us. He is a God who grieves together with us! He is a God, who as David puts it so uniquely and aptly here, is willing even to put our tears into his bottle!**

III. THIRDLY, DAVID PRAYS THAT GOD'S DELIVERANCE OF HIM OUT OF THIS HORRIBLE SITUATION WILL RESULT IN HIS PRAISING THE LORD YET AGAIN (vv. 12-13). Even in the face of all the hardships that David was facing, his greatest desire is that he will continue to glorify the Lord, and this is why he wrote down this psalm, to a large degree, no doubt because the LORD God had delivered him out of this situation!

ACCORDING TO VERSE 13, GOD DID ANSWER DAVID'S PRAYERS. He delivered him from death. He kept him from stumbling, and he enabled him to walk in a godly way and to praise the Lord. *“**For you have rescued my soul from***

death, and my feet from stumbling that I may walk before God in the light of the living!”

FRIENDS, THE WORDS OF OUR GOSPEL LESSON THIS MORNING DO MUCH TO ASSURE US THAT GOD NOT ONLY GRIEVES ALONGSIDE OF US, BUT THAT OUR GOD HAS FURTHERMORE, ACTUALLY ACTED MIGHTILY AND DECISIVELY TO REMOVE OUR TEARS OUR TEARS FROM US. That God collects our tears in his bottle, should be evident to us from the fact of Jesus’ own reaction to the grief and the pain he saw Mary and Martha and their friends experiencing in the town of Bethany that day! What was Jesus’ own reaction to everything he witnessed there? The shortest verse in the whole Bible, **John 11:35** tells us: **“Jesus wept!”**

AND AREN’T WE GLAD, DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THAT THE 11TH CHAPTER OF JOHN DOES NOT SIMPLY END THERE? How different things would be for us in our lives, if after John tells us that “**Jesus wept,**” he then goes on to tell us that after Jesus expressed his personal sympathy to Martha and Mary, that **he bid them farewell and simply headed for home!**

That would not be much a story! Certainly, there would be no comfort in it! If this were the case, you and I wouldn’t even be here today. **But this is not what happened! Instead, we read that first Jesus wept, but he then went to work doing his utmost to remove the tears from the eyes of all those people who were there that day!**

Jesus first wept, but then he acted to raise Lazarus from the dead and to restore him to his sisters again. He wept, but he moved to remove the tears from their eyes and bring renewed joy to Lazarus’ sisters. **IT IS THE SAME WITH GOD THE FATHER**--David would remind us in our appointed psalm this day! He notices our tears, but he also acts to remove our tears.

In Psalm 116:8, we read: *“You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living!”*

In Psalm 126:5, we read: *“Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!”*

In Isaiah 25:8, we read: *“He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from the earth, for the LORD has spoken!”* This verse from Isaiah 25 is actually quoted two more times in the Book of Revelation; once in chapter 7 and once in chapter 21.

In Revelation 7, we read: *“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

In Revelation 21, we read: *“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes!” (Revelation 8:14-17; 21:20)*

Jesus did much more than to weep over our sad situation. *“For you know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish!” (I Peter 1:18-19)*

There is much evidence in the New Testament that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ truly was a man; a human being. For we read: **“He was born of a woman. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. He must have been nursed like other infants. He increased in knowledge. He hungered for 40 days in the wilderness. He was tempted like we are, though he never sinned. Even as the Risen Christ, he ate a piece of broiled fish and bread to demonstrate that even then he had a real body.** Jesus knew thirst and was thirsty upon the cross. Jesus grew tired. He grew so tired that he fell asleep in a boat in the midst of a storm.

These facts from the life of Christ all speak to us about his humanity. Yet none of those things speak to our troubled hearts as does this verse in John 11:35: “Jesus wept!” From this we know that his body had glands, as ours do—tear glands. And we know that he felt as we feel.

He is a man who became our Savior so that we might become like him. Can’t you and I especially identify with this Jesus? Can’t you and I certainly love him?

Hold fast to Christ’s divinity by all means. A Savior who is not God-in-the-flesh is no Savior at all. But while you hold to his divinity do not give up the fact that he is also truly human; for it is as a man, as well as God, that he presents himself still today to perishing men and women.

The Risen Christ, who was alive to dry the tears of his grieving disciples that first Easter day, is alive also for us to wipe away our tears too! He is the Savior who makes us certain that God our Heavenly Father keeps our tears in his bottle! Amen