

Confessing God, My Protection

We live in a dangerous world. There are those who would tempt the church and seek the blood of her people. Closer to home, we fight our sinful natures each day, constantly experiencing a battle between the new man of righteousness and the old man of sin. Satan prowls around looking for those whom he can devour. The Christian life is full of temptations, snares, enemies, and fear. But there is one who is bigger than our enemies, temptations, snares, and fears. God is our protector. He cares for his people like a shepherd. Let us see how God protects his people by examining his word in I Samuel 17, as he cares for his servant David in his fight against Goliath.

The book of I Samuel records different historical events in covenant history. One of the events that stand out is the faith of Hannah as she prayed to God for a son. Another is the battles that Israel fought against the Philistines. It was also at this time that Israel longed for an earthly king to rule over them. True of all these events is that they display faith, or lack thereof. These events cannot be disconnected from God's covenant, his promise of salvation to his people. We must remember that God preserves his church because his mercies in Jesus Christ endure forever (Psalm 106:1). We see a people who have faith, but also a people who faltered in that faith. It is in this context that we come to I Samuel 17.

In I Samuel 17, we see that the Philistines assembled to war against the Israelites. Goliath, a man of whom we read in verse 4 as a "champion" among the Philistines, stood in the valley between the two opposing armies. This was indeed a frightening man. His presence was very intimidating. The Holy Spirit tells us that Goliath was six cubits and a span. If we assume that one cubit equals about 1.75 feet, and that a span is the distance between the end of the thumb and the tip of the pinky with an outstretched hand, Goliath may have been nearly eleven feet tall! Additionally, according to modern day equivalents between shekels and pounds, Goliath may have been wearing a coat of mail weighing about 170 pounds. The head of his spear weighed nearly 20 pounds, along with brass protection on his legs, a target of brass between his shoulders, and a helmet of brass upon his head.

Briefly reviewing more of the history, Goliath sought an Israelite to fight him. If the Israelite won, then the Philistines would be Israel's servants. If Goliath won, then Israel would be enslaved to the Philistines. Day after day the giant approached the Israelites and made his offer, and the Israelites would shrink back in fear. All except one man. David, a youthful shepherd and son of Jesse, heard the offer of Goliath as he was delivering food to his brothers at war. As you well know, David asks about the offer, and then goes to King Saul for permission to fight the giant. After some convincing, Saul allows David to fight Goliath.

Verse 39 is a key verse in the narrative. Naturally, Saul gave David the protection that he would need when he faced Goliath. Yet, David put this armor off because he had not proved it. Instead, he chooses five smooth stones out of a brook. What a mental picture! David was but a young man who tended for sheep. He had killed a lion and bear before, but never had he encountered a giant with protection and weaponry. Furthermore, David had no protection of his own. Yet, amazingly, we do not read that David hesitated once throughout all of this. Goliath mocked David for taking up the challenge. He cursed David according to his gods, and told him that he would feed him to the birds and animals.

David was not afraid. He did not back down from Goliath's vain threats. According to earthly standards, David had every reason to run at that moment, and run fast. Then we come to a stunning confession in verse 45: "Then said David to the Philistine, thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." What a beautiful confession! An amazing confession! What happens next we all know—David kills Goliath with a sling and a smooth stone.

This amazing confession proceeded from David's mouth by the grace of God, rooted in a strong confidence. That confidence was faith! The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 7, Question 21, defines true faith in a personal way as "not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel, in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits." There is no doubt that David knew his duty to kill Goliath was not merely to rid Israel of an intimidating foe, but had covenantal weight too. God was watching over his chosen, covenant people, and would direct David in fulfilling his purpose.

This faith of David was not merely head knowledge, but heart knowledge also. He refused the armor that Saul gave him to go into battle with only one thing—God's protection! What an amazing testament to the faith that God gives his people in Jesus Christ.

What about your faith? What about mine? Do you view God as your protector? This trust also implies a deep humility. I am nothing of my own! There is nothing that you can do to protect yourself! We are but the dust of the ground and we wither as the grass. Furthermore, we learn from Paul in Ephesians 2:8 about the significance of faith: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Faith is not a warm and fuzzy feeling concerning a vague reality. It is a strong confidence and assurance that we are saved by none other than the mediator of the Covenant of Grace, Jesus Christ. God will protect you because, borrowing from

the words of our Essentials of Reformed Doctrine catechism book on page 38, “God maintains, restores, and perfects his covenant through him [Jesus Christ].”

That faith is tested in our day. America and other nations around the world are becoming more and more hateful of Christians. Biblical principles are being tossed aside because they don't please the flesh. You and I are not accepting enough. There will come a day when legislation is passed that silences Christians. There will be a day when God will allow Satan to prowl the earth more freely than ever before, with his murderous eye on the Church of Jesus Christ.

That faith is tested in more subtle ways today also. Satan leads his own group of “Goliaths” in today's world. Certain individuals in well-known circles, such as Hollywood superstars, government officials, and distinguished professors, hate the church on this earth. There are men who “know it all,” the “intellectual giants” in the earth. There are men and women who draw huge crowds of followers because of their fame. Then you have the church—lonely and despised. She is despised by the world, but rich with God; Rejected of men, but accepted by God. She fights an intimidating battle.

Yet, God protects that precious remnant! Do not forget the “P” in TULIP. God preserves his people. God has protected his people throughout history. She has strayed from God's commandments over and over again only to be nearly devoured by the wolf. Over and over God gently leads her by the hand as a shepherd back to the green pastures of his word. This confidence in the protection of God is the same confidence that saints in the history of the church have held dear to. Just imagine the persecuted church in Roman times: the poor vulnerable Christian sitting dusty, bloody, and exhausted in the middle of the coliseum. He hears the constant jeers of the crowd as they mock him and his faith. He is being surrounded by hungry lions. Yet he looks up and sees God, his protection! A protection that is so deeply rooted in his heart that no man or persecution can take it away!

Personally, God protects you and me. Are you ever in a situation where you are pressured to drink or to do other things that you know you should avoid? Have you experienced the mockery of your peers in a college class? Have you been shunned at work for being a Christian? Be assured, God is your protector! God is infinitely above your enemies, and he is high above mere pressures of co-workers and friends. He is our sovereign God! He views powerful men of the earth as mere dust, a minute detail of his vast creation. Oftentimes you and I forget the power of God's word. Void of God's word, men and women with PhDs sputter forth useless and vain information. Without God's word, you and I are whipped around by the winds of this world. Equipped with God's word, you have everything! God, our protector, gives us that word so that we may grow in our knowledge of him and be encouraged by it.

What is left then? Thanksgiving! That is, blessed thanks to our God for his eternal protection. David himself sensed this protection in a very real way in Psalm 23. You and I, as David confessed in that Psalm, eat around our shepherd's table peacefully while the wolves bare their teeth all around. In our Christian churches, schools, and homes, we are in blessed communion with our God in heaven. What comes from such protection? A heart is overwhelmed with thanks. In II Samuel 22, David, as seen in verse 1, speaks a word of thanksgiving for the deliverance the Lord gave to him over his enemies, including Saul. Though the waves of death, the floods of ungodly men, and the sorrows of hell swept over him, he stood firm in the rock of his salvation (vss. 5, 6)! Our God is indeed a powerful God.

Let us pray and sing that which David confessed in II Samuel 22:47: "The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation!" Do not back down when you face a Goliath. Do not be intimidated though the sins of flesh discourage, Satan tempts, and the world mocks. We have a sure victory even while we are on this earth. Rejoice in the blood of the lamb! For in that blood of the covenant is our protection and eternal victory.