

[seek the Lord]

:: 1 chronicles 10 ::

So there I was, with a group of friends up in Fresno for my first ever evening of laser tag (very cool, I know). We got outfitted and split into teams, received a few instructions and then we were thrust into the onslaught of battle. Lights and fog were barreling into our faces. All around us were obstacles and ambushes. Behind each turn were opponents and havoc and terror.

Let me tell you, laser tag is not a terribly enjoyable activity for a colorblind person with asthma.

In Psalm chapter 24 we read something about our Lord:

*Who is this King of Glory?
The Lord Strong and Mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle.
Psalm 24.8*

Most of us here have not seen battle duty. In fact, the closest many of us will ever come to fighting like that is *laser tag*, or video games or literature.

However, when we come to the Old Testament, right from the beginning, the Book of Genesis, chapter 14 and on through Malachi, we encounter records and accounts of battles which the people of God fought. Real battles with real danger and real death. In some ways it is gritty and shocking. Much less sterile, much less gentle than the sort of life that we are used to here in California in the 21st century.

But there we find the people of God engaged in conflict, their victories and their losses and everything in between. We find great courage and great cowardice, great miracles and great valor and we see a great history of God's working with His people who faced very serious adversaries and threats.

But we must also understand that the battles of the Old Testament are not meant solely for *record*, but also for *example* and *instruction* and *application* in our lives today.

The New Testament spends a lot of real estate reminding us that the Old Testament is applicable to us. It is beneficial to us, even as modern day Gentile Christians living under grace in the 21st century.

We find that battle terminology, battle mentality, battle symbology are used in the New Testament. We find it in Philippians, 2 Timothy, Philemon, Luke, Romans, 2 Corinthians and Ephesians. Those New Testament books take battle analogy and use it to teach Christians about our calling, our service and our experience in the world.

So, knowing this, we can look back into the Old Testament, see these battle accounts and then attempt to find insight and instruction and application for our own lives as Believers. And when we start taking a look at these different confrontations, we can find really amazing insight into how to live this life.

Because, remember, Jesus Christ said that we are going to face opposition in this world. Paul tells us to put on the armor of God. Peter warned us of adversaries that would seek to destroy our relationship to God. So we can see what was happening in these Old Testament accounts, see how God led, how the people responded and what the outcome was. Because, just as we have been promised opposition and difficulty in the world, we have been promised **victory** if we are willing to walk with God through this life, in His strength, with His mission and equipping and strategy.

Look at 1 Chronicles chapter 10.

1 Chronicles 10.1a - Now the Philistines fought against Israel.

If you follow Israel's battle history at all, then you know that this is nothing new. The Philistines were *always* around during the time of the kings as a spur in their side. There were a consistent enemy.

This is a reminder that we are *always* under attack from either the Devil, the world around us or the sin nature within ourselves. Though there are times of less trial and times of more trial, there really is no 'off-season.' There's no time during the year where we're safe to hang up our armor and go on shore-leave from the Christian life. We are always exposed to temptation and opposition on one level or another. Just like how the Philistines always hung around to hassle the Jews.

In fact, the writer here records this attack as if it was something regular, run-of-the-mill, expected. The Philistines were a chronic threat to God's people.

The immediate application is this: Spiritually speaking, you have enemies. Serious enemies that desire to harm and hinder you. As a Believer, as a member of God's family, you **are** a target for the Devil, for the world which is corrupted and at enmity with God and to your own sin nature, which will persist with us until we are finally united with Christ in a perfect eternity.

In the mean time, God has provided you armor and a sword in your walk with Him. Keep your sword and shield handy, because today you need to be ready for battle. Today may be the day that a trial or a temptation or a difficulty shows up to bring you down, to discourage you or to make you less useful in the hands of God.

1 Chronicles 10.1b - and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.

Now this *is* something to see and consider. Because any time we witness God's people falling or failing, we *must* look for the cause of that failure.

Because falling, failure and defeat are **not meant to be a part of our life with Jesus Christ**. We *do* fail because we are imperfect, but it is not what God desires for us. It's not His plan for our lives. Christ has offered us victory. He has earned us victory through His work on the cross.

So when we see an example of defeat in the Scriptures it will benefit us to learn from the mistakes of those that have come before us so that we might avoid the traps that they fell into.

Here in chapter 10, Saul's reign over Israel was at an end. After starting strong, anointed by God, he had chosen a life of selfishness and greed and paranoia and corruption. His failure to lead the

people by the will of God eventuated in this battle against the Philistines, where the men of Israel fell before their enemies.

This was the nation which had seen deliverance under Moses. Deliverance under Joshua. Deliverance under the judges. And now, as if it were a small thing, they fall before the Philistines. Their defeat, we will see, was due to the fact that their king had walked away from God.

And we remember that in Deuteronomy 28, God had said this to His people:

Deuteronomy 28 (selections) - If you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God...all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you...the Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated...but if you do not obey the voice of the Lord...the Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies.

The choice for Israel was very simple. The choice for Saul was very simple. Moving forward to this evening, we are presented with choices. Choices to follow God or to not follow God. Choices to love others or to resent others. Choices to devote to Jesus or to withhold from Jesus. Choices to live in the Spirit or live in the flesh. Though we are not bound by the Levitical Law, nor enjoy the specific covenants that God made to the nation of Israel, we recognize that God *has* made promises to us. He *has* offered us a life and a lifestyle and all the abundance that comes with a relationship with Him. And then, having offered those things, He leaves the choice to us. Just as He did to King Saul.

The question then becomes: What will you do with the life God has given you? And whose plan will you trust as you live out that life?

We will see it several times this evening, but please take to heart this principle: **Your actions impact the people around you.** They effect your relationships and your family and our congregation and our community. That is the principle we find in the Bible. Saul's actions, his sin, had led to this defeat on Mount Gilboa.

1 Chronicles 10.2 - And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul.

The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons. Saul's failures as a king had brought war to his nation. His failures as a father had brought death to his sons. His actions had brought these enemies into Israel and the consequences were powerful. This is great tragedy recorded and preserved for us.

Because for us the Philistines are an analogy of the flesh, the old, sin nature which still resides in us and desires to distance us from Christ. And when we do not keep our temptations and our personal corruption in check, it will spill over into all aspects of our lives.

This is not what God wants for us. Jesus died so that we can be set free from sin, not bound under it. His power is sufficient to overcome temptation, to endure difficulty, to stand strong against spiritual opposition. So, tonight, if you're struggling, be encouraged. Because our Jesus is mighty to save and He is keenly interested in your daily life, down to the smallest detail. He has overcome the world and the sin nature and the Devil that they may not overwhelm you. And, like He did for Saul, He has laid out a path for you so that you might find joy and peace and victory, not defeat, if you will only trust in Him and believe in what He has told you.

1 Chronicles 10.3 - The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was wounded by the archers.

At this point I want to make a delineation, because not everyone here is acting like King Saul. Our purpose is not to suggest that spiritual battles only come when you're in abject sin or when you've walked away from God. That *can* happen. It *does* happen, but we also see men like David and Moses and Joshua going into battle. Men who were *near* to God, in love with Him and serving Him. And those men found victory in times of conflict, victory over their oppressors. They came through, they were not defeated. So the applications tonight are not only for someone who may be backslidden, as Saul was, but it is for all of us who are either in the middle of a trial, the middle of a difficult situation, the middle of temptation, or for others who are in a time of ease and will encounter these struggles sometime in the future.

Because eventually we are going to be faced with what Jesus called tribulation. And the example of Saul explicitly demonstrates to us that God's desire is that you will **not** fail under that tribulation, but that you overcome it as you abide in His love and mercy and provision. Some of those battles God fights entirely on your behalf. Battles like Isaiah 37, where the Israelites were faced with an Assyrian invasion, woke up the next day and the soldiers were all gone. Destroyed by God in the night.

Other battles are like Jericho, where God empowers, He equips, but we must actively contend through the battle. Actually fighting. Actually enduring.

This battle is one where God's man had walked away from the Lord. He had walked away from God's will and God's power and God's provision. He did not seek the Lord and he found himself wounded and overtaken. He found himself outside of God's protection.

And to each Christian here tonight I do declare that God has provided you what you need to endure the battles of life. He has not left you alone. He does not leave His people to be overwhelmed, but He has promised guidance and endurance and strength and peace for **every** situation that we face. The defeat we see here was not God's failure, but Saul's. In the Old Testament battles we find great victory for those who *sought* the Lord and *followed* His word. We see men and women who *trusted* in God and stood before the giants and the mercenaries and the chariots and overcame them as they followed in the path that God had laid out, as they listened to His words and did as He commanded. **That** is the plan that God has for His people. Victory, not defeat. Strength, not weakness. Power, not deficiency.

1 Chronicles 10.4-7 - Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and mistreat me. But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died. Thus Saul died; he and his three sons and all his house died together. And when all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that the army had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled, and the Philistines came and lived in them.

This is a very sad set of verses, a very sad end for the first king of Israel.

What got Saul from anointed, Spirit-filled king of Israel, to suicidal casualty of war on Mount Gilboa?

Jump ahead in our passage down to verse 13 and we see the crux of the matter:

1 Chronicles 10:13-14 - So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. He did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

Very simple, very straightforward.

Now before we start accusing God of being touchy, before we start thinking of Him as if He were losing His temper, we need to understand what the situation really is.

Because, God had already laid out His plan for His people back in Deuteronomy. He was very clear on how He wanted their relationship to work. Specifically, God had come to Saul and said, "ok, you're My king for My people. Follow after Me, do what I've laid out for you to do, live in the life that I have prepared for you and you will find safety and provision and protection and growth."

And Saul chose to deviate from that plan, he chose to walk away from that relationship and went his own way. He chose to reject God's clearly revealed guidance in favor of his own wisdom, his own majesty, in favor of mediums and worldly wisdom.

We see this illustrated in our text.

Notice how often Saul's armor is mentioned in this chapter. His armor and armor-bearer are mentioned 5 times in 14 verses.

Of course, we remember how previously Saul had attempted to clothe David in his armor when he went out to face Goliath. It is a subtle indication of where Saul's trust was.

He was a man confident in himself. Confident in his own armor. Confident in his own power to overcome his enemies. He was a man that disregarded God's warnings and embraced the very things that God was trying to protect him from! And despite the fact that he was saved, despite the calling that God had placed on his life, despite the Scriptures and the provision and all the rest, he said, "I'm going to do what *I* want to do. I'm going to ignore those warnings, I'm going to ignore your direction, I don't even want it. I'm the king, and I am sufficient for my own life."

We even see it at the moment of his death. Wounded, defeated, he called out, not to God, but to his *armor-bearer*. He wanted what he wanted, choosing death over repentance. Very interesting.

Saul is an example to us of what happens when we choose to leave the life that God has prepared for us in favor of one we make ourselves. He is the example that without nearness to God we have no hope for victory. When we decide to stop abiding in Christ then we will find that we cannot stand against the Devil, against the world, against our own sin nature. We won't be ready to endure trial or overcome temptation. And it is *then* that we fall. And, as Christians, when we fall, it effects not only ourselves, but others around us.

Saul clothed himself in armor. Judges 6, speaking of Gideon, the great deliverer of Israel, says that the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon.

God's plan for His people is growth and abundance and closeness with us. But when we walk away from that relationship, when we go after other enticements and other lifestyles and other attitudes, then we remove ourselves from abiding in Christ and we open up our life to hurt and to harm.

Saul was not ready for this battle. He did not seek the Lord. That was the cause for this failure and defeat. It may seem simple, but it is so important.

One more contrast from the verses we skipped:

Look back at verse 8:

1 Chronicles 10:8-12 - The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. And they stripped him and took his head and his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their idols and to the people. And they put his armor in the temple of their gods and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon. But when all Jabesh-gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh. And they buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

What an amazing contrast. At the beginning of the chapter we see the Philistines come and the Israelites fall before them without any defense. Yet a few days later, the men of Jabesh-Gilead get up, go over to the Temple of Dagon in the thick of enemy territory and immediately reclaim the bodies of Saul and his sons.

The Philistine army, which had found victory so easily against the army of Saul, had no strength against the men of Jabesh. And the one insight we get into these guys is right at the end of verse 12: "they buried their bones under the oak...and [they] fasted seven days."

These were men close to God. These were men who followed God. And to these men the Philistines were no threat. This is amazing contrast.

This is what victorious Christian living is about. This is how God wants to empower His people. This is what God wants for you. To be people who are near to Him, filled with His Spirit, used to share His love and His gospel and His truth to the people around you. You are the people God wants to use to teach and to help and to restore. This is the life that He has offered each of us if we are willing to accept it. And along the way, though there will be difficulty and suffering, we can be confident in the knowledge that God's way is the way to good cheer, abundant life and peace.

The New Testament says we are like these Old Testament characters. But which character do we line up with? Are we like Saul or are we like the men of Jabesh?

Use tonight to evaluate yourself. Remind yourself that God is trustworthy and gracious and full of mercy. Remind yourself that He is not withholding anything from you, but has prepared a life that you can not imagine. Yes, that life means sacrifice. It means sacrificing control and your own efforts to save yourself. It means giving up your heart to His love and then watching as He takes your life and transforms it into something glorious and meaningful and powerful.

God wants great victory for you. Do you trust Him? Will you seek Him? Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you.