

**PBC20060820AM**

**Beat the Odds**

**1 Samuel 17**

August 20, 2006 - Sunday 11:00 AM - David H. McKinley

**[Dr. McKinley, message, Beat the Odds ]**

[applause] Well Tina Brubaker, that was just awesome. Choir and orchestra, thank you. Rick Briscoe, thank you for leading in worship today. Rick and I will be together starting this Wednesday night as the Connection service begins again right here in the Worship Center at 6:30 and I hope that you will put that in your weekly schedule here in the fall and come and share with us on Wednesdays at the Connection service.

I hope you have your Bible this morning. If not, there should be one there in the pew for you. But I would encourage you to take your Bible and to open it to an Old Testament passage of Scripture. A familiar story in the Old Testament found in 1 Samuel chapter 17... 1 Samuel chapter 17.

Now I've already made reference to the fact a little bit earlier that back to school has gone from being a commercial announcement that we see on television, thinking about buying school supplies and clothing and uniforms and all those things, to becoming a reality in our lives. Many of you have spent the better part of this past week, whether you're in one of our schools in the community or one of the private schools, certainly getting ready for school because school is back.

And when it comes to the school years 2006-2007, the real issue is not nearly so much just issues of time and money and resource, though all those things are important. The real issue that is at hand for all of our students this year and for the teachers is simply this: Is anybody going to learn anything? That's really the issue in education. Will anybody learn anything? And to a large degree that's the issue that we face every time we gather in a worship service like this one. The real question is: Is anybody going to learn anything? And to a large degree some of that depends upon how you learn because we don't all learn in the same way. We have different learning styles and learning propensities.

Studies tell us that one of the learning styles by which some of us learn is that which is called auditory. We are auditory learners, audio meaning by hearing. And so they need to have someone say it, and if someone says it, they can begin to hear it and to learn it. And so we have many people who have developed the skill and are learners in an auditory fashion... simply by listening. But not everyone is an auditory learner.

Other people are visual learners... visual learners. And visual learners need to see it. Not just to say it, but to see it. And therefore, when they have

pictures and when they have words that are written ah... as we do here on the screen even in this moment, it allows two levels of communication at one time. There's a visual dynamic and there's an auditory dynamic that is going on at the same time. And some people are visual learners. Visual learners are those who also are very prone to taking notes in the services. They need to not only hear it but get it written down. In fact if you're an auditory learner and you're sitting next to a visual learner, you're trying to figure out how somebody who's making all those notes can hear anything! But it's because they need to see it and so that's why they're in the process of doing that.

And then there's a third learning style that has been identified as kinesthetic learners... kinesthetic. They need to have it demonstrated or they need to do it. They need to participate in the process and feel as though they're engaged and they're sharing in the experience.

So my question is: What kind of learner are you? What kind of learner are you this morning? I don't mind telling you I am a visual learner. I learn by seeing. And for that very reason when I was a child and when I was in school my favorite part of school was show and tell. (chuckle) Guess what? I learned more when I saw something... when I could experience it and was in the process. And so I always enjoyed show and tell.

And this morning I want to take some time to do a little bit of show and tell as we look at one of the oldest and most familiar of all stories in the Bible. If you were to go with me right now over to our Children's Ministry building... and I think we've got one of the most fantastic Children's ministry facilities in the world, and certainly our leadership team are absolutely incredible. They're there right now with rooms full of boys and girls teaching them the Bible.

But on the second floor there's the entire ah... story of the Bible in picture form. You start with a story board picture of Adam and Eve in the Garden and you go all the way around the halls through the major stories of the Bible until you come to the last corridor and there you have the Ascension of Jesus Christ. But one of my favorite pictures that is there is the picture that is captured in 1 Samuel chapter 17. And I want to begin to read this and to take some time to introduce not only the characters to you, but I want you see, I want you to hear and I want you to experience some things today that can help you and help me to live a life of victory. 1 Samuel chapter 17 and we begin reading in verse 1:

*1) Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered at Sochoh, which belongs to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah in Ephes Dammim.*

Glad to get that over with! [congregational laughter] All week long I've been thinking about reading that verse [laughter].

2) *And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they were encamped in the Valley of Elah, and they drew up in battle array against the Philistines.* 3) *The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, and there was a great valley between them.* 4) *And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines and his name (Can we say it together?) His name was Goliath of Gath, and he... his height was six cubits and a span.*

And the Bible goes on to say down in verse 8:

8) *Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, "Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me."* 9) *"If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be servants and serve us."*

Obviously this is the biblical account of what happened one day in the Valley of Elah between a giant named Goliath and a young man that we will meet in just a few minutes, David the shepherd boy. But I have a sneaking suspicion that if all of this were captured by video and were being dramatized that you could not go to an electronics department who would not be depicting this sequence on their monitors. If they wanted to sell you an HD-TV and wanted to impress you with size and sound, certainly it would be the imposing figure of Goliath and his voice and his stature and his influence that would make all of the difference, as you would see it. It was dramatic; it was powerful! And we've just been given the background of this captivating and overwhelming sequence as we've begun to read it in the Scriptures.

And what I would like to do this morning is I would like to essentially take the drama of what happened in 1 Samuel 17 and I'd like to look at various scenes in that drama. And as we look at those scenes I'd like for us to begin to embrace a message... a message that has strategic significance to every hearer in this building this morning, and that is how in life we can beat the odds.

The first scene that I would call to your attention today is what I would call *Goliath's intimidation*... Goliath's intimidation. Goliath was a human tower of terror. He gives all kinds of new meaning to the concept of something being supersized. He was imposing, he was intimidating, he was an incredible figure and being. And to be in the presence of Goliath was to stand and to face intimidation. Do you get the picture of what Goliath must have been? Do you have some idea of what it must have looked like and been like to stand that day in the Valley of Elah?

Well, maybe I need to pause and make an introduction. [light laughter] My name is David. And this is Goliath [laughter] And I thought that you might like to just get an idea of what the proportions might have been on that day. Now as a full grown man I'm 5 feet 10 inches tall. That's as big as

I've ever gotten and I'm not going to get any bigger. In fact all I've got to look forward to is shrinking. [laughter] But just the same... just the same Goliath, according to biblical measurements if they are converted to our standard of measure, stood 9 feet 6 inches in stature... 9 feet 6 inches tall! Look at this figure! And here this man would come out day in and day out and he would issue one challenge and the challenge was this: Winner takes all. You send me a soldier and if he kills me, all of the Philistines are going to serve the Israelites. But if I kill him then all of Israel is going to serve my people the Philistines. And so here we have this imposing, intimidating figure who came and stood in the Valley of Elah and who issued this challenge day in and day out to the armies of Israel.

Now don't you know that if the Mavs could draft this guy that would be the number one choice for the year to come. [laughter] I mean everybody in the NBA would be saying Shaq who? You know, they'd be saying Shaq who because we've got Goliath. I mean Goliath is an incredible being... an incredible figure. And the significance of Goliath was the fact that his intimidation was in his size and in his stature. It was in his threat and his sense of violence and of war. And all around him people who saw him lived in fear and intimidation. In fact all of the armies of Israel simply stood in silence. There was a massive standoff there in the valley.

But as I think about the intimidation that Goliath brings, I'm reminded of the fact that we live in a world that surrounds us with intimidation. From small experiences that bring intimidation to major things that cause us to fear and to cower in the face of duty and challenge in life.

Certainly for some this morning if I were to simply pick up one of these microphones, hand it to you and say I want you to sing that song that Miss Tina Brubaker just sang, that would be intimidating to some of you to come and stand in front of all these people and to do that. But that's one form of intimidation.

But for many of us intimidation takes other forms. ~~We're in the pres~~ When we are in the presence of people of power and wealth and affluence sometimes we feel as though we're one of the have-nots in life and so we feel that we don't quite measure up because we're not as successful or not as profiled as others in life. And so we find ourselves intimidated. Sometimes we see the beauty and the appeal of someone else and we realize that we really don't have what they have, and we feel overwhelmed and intimidated by it. We see people who have been through institutions of knowledge and education and certainly we honor their discipline and ultimately their accomplishment. But many people have developed great minds without God. And indeed, while they may have had great educational opportunity the Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of true wisdom and knowledge. And yet Christians many times cower in the face of... of academics and intelligentsia because we fear that somehow we don't know enough.

We live in a world that intimidates us through political correctness and social pressure. We have students here in this building this morning who face the intimidation of a new school year with peer pressure and with the challenges of conformity. It really doesn't matter who we are or where we are in life, all of us deal with giants of intimidation.

The Bible tells us there are three broad categories that we all face: the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world on the outside squeezing us into its mould. The flesh on the inside constantly pulling against our desire to live for Christ and to follow Him. And the devil who is ever expressing his work of evil in this world.

Yes, there was Goliath's intimidation. And there on the field of battle every one was silence and every one was paralyzed; that is until a young man entered stage right. His name? David.

And so I want you to see in our second... second scene this morning what I would call *David's conviction*... David's conviction. The Bible tells us that all this had been happening on a field of battle and meanwhile David was a young boy, living back in his homeland, taking care of his father's sheep. David lived in a little town called Bethlehem. You know of Bethlehem, I believe. And David was living there in Bethlehem, tending the sheep and the Bible says that his father Jesse had 3 sons and all 3 of those sons were over on the field of battle. So the father Jesse called the son David and said, David, I want you to take some supplies and resources and go check on your brothers who are down at the Valley of Elah. And David's father Jesse, the Bible says in verse 17 commanded him to go down to his brothers. So David being an obedient son went down and as God would have it when David arrived it was the time of day when the armies were standing. Everyone was ready for battle and Goliath came out to make his challenge.

David arrived on the scene and he couldn't believe what he saw. Certainly he was amazed and understood the imposing presence of the giant. But even more than that he was amazed at the fact that all of the armies of Israel were living in fear and intimidation because of Goliath. And so the Bible tells us that as he listened to Goliath speak and David heard it, that he looked at all the men down in verse 26 and he said:

*26) "What shall be done for this man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"*

David looked and said, What in the world is going on here? You guys are doing nothing and this giant is intimidating everyone. Who is he to defy the armies of the living God?

Well interestingly enough, David's brothers were infuriated; they were incensed that their little shepherd boy brother would come over and stand in the midst of armed soldiers and an army that had been looking at this sight every day and his brother Eliab, the oldest, said, David, you've just

come down here to watch somebody get slain! You're just here to feed on the blood and watch the violence! This is just pride in you!

Now I've already told you the reason David showed up on the field of battle is because his father sent him. He was simply being an obedient son. But his brothers began to falsely accuse him and David listened to them and looked at all of the men of Israel and then David said this in verse 29, he said:

*"Is there not a cause?... Is there not a cause?"*

David listened to what was happening. He said, Guys, where is your conviction? And David was the one man who stood in the place of battle with a heart and a spirit of conviction. As a young boy he may have been underdeveloped and he may have been overlooked and the brothers may have falsely accused him, but David refused to accept the odds or to stand in fear in the presence of the intimidation of Goliath. David looked and said, There is a conviction that we must hold. And that conviction is that we are God's people and we have God's power and we are to fight in God's name. And how can we stand here and let this man shame us?

I point to David's conviction because I believe that conviction is one of the missing marks of our day. We live in a day where there is a great lack of conviction. People have opinions and people spend time trying to accommodate others, but few people live with true biblical convictions. And I believe with all of my heart that if we are going to be the people of God and the church of Jesus Christ in this day and hour, that it is absolute paramount that we have rock-riveted biblical convictions in our lives. Convictions about the church, convictions about family, convictions about purity, convictions about morality, convictions that drive us in life.

Now I do not believe that God wants us to have convictions just so we'll be mean. There are some people who say they have convictions and they're just angry. But I do believe that there is a sense in which we must have convictions to stand on the authority of the Word of God and that we must let conviction be a virtue in our lives when we're living in a day that is instead captured by accommodation. Most people today spend their lives positioning, rather than living by conviction.

Sort of like a story I heard about a old gunslinger out in West Texas. He showed up at the saloon, slammed the doors open and walked in. He looked over on the left side of all the people in that room and he said, Everybody on this side of the room, he said, you're a bunch of lily-livered, yellowbellied cowards! And they all just stood there. And then he looked and he said, And all of you on this side of the room, he said, you're just a bunch of flabby dimwitted saddle tramps! And having put everybody in their place, he walked right through the middle of the room, walked up and ordered a drink. And about the time he took it in his hand he started hearing some footsteps behind him. He looked around and he said, Where do you think you're going? And about that time a little guy looked up and

said, Sorry, sir. I was just standing on the wrong side of the room.  
[laughter]

Positioning. We spend our lives positioning; being sure that we're standing on the right side but not standing up for anything. And the thing that is so significant in David's life is that David stood with conviction that he might be strong. Too many times we downsize God. Too many times we're trying to airbrush God to give Him a new image.

I was reminded of that recently in TIME MAGAZINE. They have a feature of two or three pages in the TIME MAGAZINE these days called "Ten Questions", and they do a interview with a prominent figure. And several days ago I was reading TIME MAGAZINE where they were doing their 10 questions with Katharine Jefferts Schori who is the newly elected bishop of the Episcopal church of the USA. This denomination is embroiled in controversy because of its appointment of gay and lesbian clergy; that's one thing. But I think even of greater significance was her response to one of the questions that the TIME editors proposed to her. Miss Schori was asked the question: Is belief in Jesus the only way to heaven? And here's how she answered: *We who practice the Christian tradition understand Him as our vehicle to the Divine. But for us to assume that God could not act in other ways is, I think, to put God in awfully small box.*

Well I want you to know I don't think we need to limit God. But I don't think we can redefine God. And I don't think we can make God palatable to this world in which we live. I believe that we've been given a miss... mission and a message to declare the message of Jesus Christ. And it's not my opinion and it's not her opinion and it's not your opinion that matters; it's God's opinion that matters! And God says: [Acts 4:12]

*Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given unto heaven whereby we must be saved! [cheers, applause]*

And I share that with you this morning not because I want to be angry with Miss Schori. I say that because it is a conviction based on the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. But that's just one conviction. We must have convictions based on the truth of God's Word and the testimony of His promise. That's exactly what David did.

David was a young man. David was the one man who could have been overwhelmed by everything there, but he wasn't! Why? Because David saw and understood the power of God. Every one else on that battlefield kept looking at Goliath and saying, Look how big he is! Look how big he is! Look how big he is! David looked and said, Look how small he is compared to God. [ha] He may be big to me but he's nothing to God. And David understood that what mattered was how he viewed God, not how he viewed Goliath. He knew that the issue was not the world view of Goliath; it was a world view that included God, and that was what made a difference for this man.

A.W. Tozer said, "What comes to mind when we think of God is the most important thing about us." And in life when you face the odds... when you face the giants... when you come up against opposition, the most important thing in life is not what you think about your life... think about your circumstances; it's what you think and what you believe about God. David was a man who had faith in the face of uncertainty and he was unwilling to downsize God, and he was unwilling to do nothing.

And so the Bible continues the story by telling us that there's a third scene. And that scene is the scene that I would call *Saul's Suggestion*. David looked at King Saul and said, Saul, I'll go and fight this man. And so Saul the king of Israel, obviously desperate for somebody to do something, agreed to let him do it but interestingly enough, beginning in verse 38, it says that Saul gave David his armor. He put a helmet on his head and he put a shield and breastplate and he put leg-irons on him and he gave him a sword and spear and he got David all ready for battle. And the Bible says that David got out all dressed up as a little mini warrior. And then he looked at Saul and he said, I can't even walk in these things, much less go fight a giant. He said, I can't walk!

The world's always giving us strategies, always giving us solutions, always giving us suggestions to take care of ourselves. But David knew who he was and David knew what he could do and what he couldn't do. David couldn't try to become a warrior like Goliath. David was a little shepherd boy and so that little shepherd boy took what he had always known and what had always been significant to him, and the Bible says in verse 40 that he laid aside the armor and:

*40) He took in his hand a staff (just like a shepherd's crook) and he chose for himself 5 smooth stones from the brook and he put them in a shepherd's bag... in a pouch that he had, and his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.*

Eight weeks ago I stood with our group from Israel in the Valley of Elah. We stood in the very place where there is a dry brook... it's the only place that water on occasion runs through that valley, and we stood in that place where the Bible says David went down to the brook and he picked up 5 smooth stones. I encouraged all of those who were with me to do as I've done and that was to pick up one of those stones and to take that stone as a reminder that in the battles of life it's not our strength and it's not our strategy; it's God's power and God's authority that matters. And so we picked up those stones. And I've got one of those in my hand.

You know sometimes people seem to think that David used big rocks. Have you ever tried to chunk, you know, a boulder? You can't do that. You can't hold a big old rock in your hand and chunk it. No, the Bible says that David took something as simple as a small stone and he took a little thing called a sling. And in all likelihood this little sling is very much like the one that David would have used. The Bible tells us that David had become



accustomed to using this sling. And he said to Saul in his interview with him: [1 Samuel 17:37]

*37) The Lord delivered me from the paw of the bear and the paw of the lion, and the Lord will deliver me from this giant.*

He understood that what he had faced as a shepherd in Bethlehem and in the Judean desert would be the very tool that he would take, and so David took one of those smooth stones and put it in the pouch of that little sling and the Bible says that David simply began to make his way toward the giant... toward Goliath, and as he did he started to swing and to sling that sling. And as he approached him, Goliath began to curse him. Goliath began to intimidate him. Goliath said:

*43)... Am I a dog, that you would come at me with sword... with sticks and with rocks that you are going to take care of me?*

But that brings me to the fourth scene and that's *God's Intervention*. A little shepherd boy with a whirling little sling released that sling and when he did, that stone became like a bullet and that bullet went just below the band of Goliath's helmet and the Bible tells us that when it hit Goliath, that so great was the impact that Goliath didn't fall backwards to the ground. The Bible said he just fell on his face to the ground. He was down; he was just down. There was no down for the count. He was just down. It was done.

And the Bible says that that little shepherd boy ran over to Goliath and he took Goliath's own sword and he removed his head and he stood up before the armies and all of the Philistines fled.

What an incredible moment! But that moment occurred not because of who David was, or because of David's skill and strategy; it was because there was one stone that made the difference and that stone was directed by the hand of God.

And it's God's intervention in life, and it's the confidence that God is involved and that God is intervening in my life that gives me confidence in all of the odds that I face in life. And he understood that power and strength was in the name of the Lord. Later, David when he was writing a psalm would write these words: [Psalm 20:7]

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we remember the name of the Lord our God.*

And wherever you are today and whatever you're facing in battle, I want to challenge you to embrace the battle even if the odds are against you in the power of the name of the Lord.

So that brings me to my fifth and final sequence this morning; my final scene and that is *Your Situation*. Because you see what we've been reading

and studying this morning isn't just about an ancient day in an ancient battle in an ancient story. It's all about God's truth for life today. The Bible tells us in Romans chapter 15 and verse 4 over in the New Testament that the:

*4) Things that were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

And then Paul went on to say: [Romans 15:13]

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing that you may abound with hope and power through the Holy Spirit.*

God wants you and God wants me to understand how to face and to beat the odds in life. And it's not gonna come by human strategies and human strength. It's gonna come by God's power and by God's grace.

Whatever your situation may be today, listen to the words of Watch Mania [?] great Christian who said, "Great difficulties are meant to force us out of ourselves and into reliance upon God. Great difficulties are meant to force us out of reliance upon ourselves and into reliance upon God." And in order to help you to walk away with a sense of reliance upon God and with a sense of strength to face the odds in your life, I want to quickly and finally give you some stones. Some smooth stones for you to take away and for you to remember for the challenges of life.

The first is the stone of *adversity*. David faced a battle. David stood in a val... in a valley. David faced a giant. And many of you are facing some supersized obstacles and odds in your life right now. Some of our students are beginning a new school year and they feel that they're struggling to know how they're going to stand for Christ and keep the momentum that they've gained through camp and mission tour and those things. And they need power and strength to face the fact that adversity is going to come.

Some of you are dealing with difficulty in your family. Things are not as they should be and you're in a battle for your marriage, you're in a battle for your children, and you're dealing with adversity. As a church we're taking on a giant size challenge to go and to begin a second location. And while there is an open door of opportunity, there will clearly be obstacles before us.

The world is filled with giants! Jesus Himself told us this. He said in John 16: [John 16:33]

*"These things I've spoken to you that you may have peace. In this world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

I reminded all those who went with us to Israel that we needed to pick up some stones of remembrance from the brook because life isn't a holy land

experience walking around with our Bibles and following in the footsteps of Jesus. Life many times takes us to face giants in valleys... adversity.

The second stone that I would point out to you is the stone of *availability*. God is looking for men and women who are willing to trust Him and to prove His faithfulness. David was just a shepherd boy, but he was a little boy who, against the odds, said, God, here I am: take my life.

And while you may be overwhelmed by the odds that you face in life, listen to what the Word of God says in 2 Chronicles 16 and verse 9:

*The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those who love Him.*

God is looking for people like you, just like you and like me, who will say, Lord, I'm available. I'm going to take a stone and though it may not be much, with Your power I am going to stand.

The third stone that I would point out to you is the stone of *activity*. No matter who you are or where you are, God is working in your life if you belong to Him. And just as God worked in David's life when he was young, learning how to face the lions and the bears, each of those experiences were just preparatory for what he was ultimately going to do in David's life when he would face the giants.

Sometimes we have a tendency to fear that others are fighting giants while we're chasing minnows. But just as the writer of the book of Zachariah says: [Zachariah 4:10]

*Do not despise the day of small things. And realize that even in the small windows of life God is working and God is moving in your life.*

The fourth stone that I would point out to you is the stone of *authority*. All of us deal with authority issues in life. But I'm convinced that the primary reason that so many of us struggle with authority issues is because we haven't settled the issue of authority. And one thing that has to get settled in life is that my life is under God's authority. He's responsible for me in every way. And whether it's in the face of hardship... whether I'm dealing with difficult people... whether I feel that I'm being mistreated... whatever it may be, the authority issue once it is settled gives me the ability to live in a different dimension.

David would have never defeated Goliath based on power, but he defeated him by God's authority. 2 Corinthians chapter 10 tells us this:[2Corinthians 10:3-4]

- 3) *That though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.*
- 4) *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds.*

And what's true in warfare is true in our walk. I walk with God under authority. I honor His authority in my finances. I honor His authority in

my connection and commitment in the church. I honor His authority in my service. I honor His authority even when I struggle. And what's true of warfare is true of the walk. I must learn to use the stone of authority and to understand that it's not my strength; it's God's power.

That takes me to the last stone and that's the stone of the *Almighty*. One little stone that didn't matter in the face of a giant became the very source in the hand of a Mighty God to prove the Almighty power of God over all things that we face. And wherever you are and whatever you're struggling with today, I want you to know that while you can't, God can! And where you feel limited, God is all powerful. It's not just the sword and the shield and the spear; it's the stone and simple faith. That's really the key issue in salvation. It's all about the stone and about simple faith.

Eight weeks ago when we stood in the Valley of Elah, I stood there with a group of people encouraging them to do what I talked to you about: Pick up the stones, know that we would go home and face challenges. But little did I know that I was standing there with a couple who would travel home that very day from Israel and who would face the unthinkable tragedy of the loss of their 25 year old son. My heart was broken. Precious days spent studying and celebrating and praying in Israel to come home to the worse valley experience imaginable.

In four days after we stood in the Valley of Elah we stood in the cemetery and I stood there, having the honor and the responsibility of burying their son. As I looked at that couple that day, I reminded them what we'd talked about when we stood in the Valley of Elah. And then I reminded them as we looked at that grave that 2000 years ago it was a shepherd boy born in Bethlehem whose name is Jesus who died and who was buried. And when the followers of Jesus, the disciples came to find Him on that first Sunday morning when they arrived at the tomb, the stone had been rolled away. And because the stone was gone, Jesus was alive. He had walked out of the grave; He had conquered death. Yes, He tasted death but He conquered death!

And in that moment I talked to that family about the hope that we have even in the most unthinkable moment of life; to know that Jesus has conquered death and rolled away the stone. And as I spoke those words, I looked down and there sat that dear dad with that little stone from Elah in his hand. He was holding on to the Almighty God.

What are you holding on to today? Oh, maybe you don't feel like you need anything. Maybe you feel like you're free-wheeling. But I'm telling you, there's a giant that's going to walk into your life. There's going to be a day when you face a valley. It may not be a tragedy of the loss of a child, but I'm here to tell you life is filled with difficult experiences where you find yourself against the odds. And I have one firm conviction today: if you have Jesus Christ you have hope, and you can face any odds with victory if you have the hope of Christ.

But if you do not have Jesus Christ, you do not have hope. And you do not have power. And you will not have peace.

And today I want to close this service by inviting you men and women and boys and girls to come to Jesus Christ who is the One who has the authority to forgive sins. He's the One who has the power to give you new life. And today if you have never received the gift of life in Christ, the One who opened the grave, who offers us eternal life, who offers us power to live today, I want to encourage you to receive Him.

Others of you need to settle the authority issue of your relationship to a church. You're like the soldiers who are dressed for battle. You show up on Sundays but you sit on the sidelines. And I'm not saying that's a bad thing but what I'm saying is the right thing is to get into the battle. To get into the... to get engaged and to make a difference. And today I want to invite men and women in this place... boys and girls who know Christ, to make Prestonwood your church home and church family. We invite you into this community, that you can make a difference with us for Christ.

Some of you need to follow Christ in baptism. It's an authority issue. It's coming under because you demonstrate that life doesn't belong to you. You have died with Christ; you've been buried; you are risen to live a new life; and you are now going to live and follow Christ. And every believer needs to follow Christ in baptism.

So whatever it is that God may be speaking to you today... whether it's the personal odds that you face in life that need surrender, or a decision in this moment that needs response, don't be intimidated into waiting and postponing and procrastinating something that needs to happen right now.

*Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the power and the testimony of the Scripture. And thank You for the opportunity that we have to respond even now by faith. And Lord I pray right now that You would move by Your Spirit to call people into relationship with Yourself and with Your church as we respond. In Jesus' name. AMEN*

As you look up I want you to stand up. Every one standing. [music begins] I'm going to ask that no one be leaving. Give us just one more moment. Standing in the balcony, right at the heads of each of the aisles we have ministers of our church, right there, right there, right there. And if you're there in the balcony I'm not going to ask you to step out and come down here; I'm going to ask you just to make your way to one of those ministers who are there. If you want to know Christ and begin a relationship with God, let them know. If you want to become a part of Prestonwood, let us know. Just make your way there right now. We're waiting to receive you.

And then here, on the lower floor. Whether you're in the terrace or here on the floor itself, the ministers of our church are here standing to receive you. And right now I want to invite you, I want you encourage you, I want

to challenge you to step out and to follow Christ. Never to be the same again! Walking out of here in the power of Jesus' name. Come right now as we sing.