Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we resume a sermon series titled, □ “Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift.” It is a study through the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. Our text for today is □ 1 Samuel 18:17-30.

From this text, I draw a big idea that I am going to reveal right up front. Here it is: □ God is fighting unseen battles for you. God is at work on your behalf in ways that you cannot see. You and I are oblivious to some of the things God is doing for our benefit.

This heavenly reality has an earthly parallel. Young children are not aware of all the things their parents do to ensure their wellbeing. Kids are clueless concerning the sacrifices their parents make for them.

As children mature and perhaps have children of their own, they often, in retrospect, begin to see and appreciate what their parents have done for them. They begin to realize what they took for granted. A sense of entitlement gives way to gratitude.

Similarly, when we, as children of God, begin to see that God, our Father is fighting unseen battles for us, we appreciate him more, we trust him more, and we can rest in the knowledge of his unseen care for us.

In our text for today, we are going to see how God is at work to protect and empower David, who seems largely oblivious to the threats against him.

In the preceding context, young David has heroically defeated Goliath and become a hero in Israel. As a result, King Saul becomes insanely jealous of David, fearing that he is he man God has chosen to replace

him. So, Saul tries to kill David, first with a spear, then by putting him on the battlefield.

Our text begins in □ 1 Samuel 18:17, where it says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:17 Then Saul said to David, “Here is my elder daughter Merab (*me-rab*). I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the LORD’s battles.” For Saul thought, “Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.”

You may recall, Saul had promised his daughter’s hand in marriage to anyone who killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:25). Accordingly, Saul should have given his daughter to David straight away. Instead, Saul adds another condition, saying, □ “Only be valiant for me and fight the Lord’s battles.”

Saul is now saying that killing Goliath was not enough; David must earn his daughter’s hand by fighting valiantly against Israel’s enemies, the Philistines. Saul knows that David loves the Lord, so Saul tries to make this sound godly by saying that David must fight the □ ***Lord’s*** battles.

But there is nothing godly about it. Saul’s evil motives are revealed in the last part of verse 17 that says, □ “For Saul thought, ‘Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.’” Saul is thinking that it is better to let the Philistines kill David than to do it himself because he would be shedding innocent blood. And besides, Saul might get some blowback because David had become popular among the people.

David’s naïveté is revealed in his response in □ verse 18.

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:18 And David said to Saul, “Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father’s clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?”

David declares that he is from lowly origins and is unworthy to become a son-in-law to the king. I don’t take this to be a sly, self-protective refusal of the King’s offer based on David’s discernment of Saul’s evil motives. Rather, it is a genuinely humble acceptance. David is oblivious to the trap.

At this point, you may wonder, “How could David be so clueless? I mean, Saul tried to spear him earlier! Why doesn’t David wake up and smell the coffee?”

Good question.

A number of things are in play.

First, remember David is still a wide-eyed young man at this point.

Second, in the ancient culture of Israel, the king was revered in a way that is hard for moderns in the western world to understand. David views Saul as God’s anointed.

Third, David knows Saul to be an emotionally and spiritually tormented man. Remember, David had been hired to play music to soothe Saul’s troubled soul. In fact, David was playing when Saul tried to spear him. Strange as it may seem, victims commonly rationalize or minimize their abuse. Perhaps David chalked it up to mental illness, not realizing that Saul viewed him as a political threat. David may have even wondered if there was something displeasing about the music he played that could have provoked the attack.

Whatever the case, David does not fully realize the ongoing danger from Saul.

But God is fighting unseen battles for David.

We get a glimpse of this in □ verse 19, which says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:19 But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel (*ah-dree-él*) the Meholathite (*may-hóle-a-thite*) for a wife.

Meholathite is not a new kitchen countertop material. It is a person who is from the ancient region of Meholah.

It is easy to miss, but when the text says, "Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David," the implication is that David fulfilled Saul's added requirements; namely, he went out and fought the Philistines valiantly. David did what Saul thought would get him killed.

But God protects David. He triumphantly survives.

But when it comes time for David to receive Merab as his wife, Saul breaks his promise and gives her to another man. This provides evidence of Saul's evil motives. He never wanted David for a son-in-law; he wants David dead.

Now comes a twist in the story. (This is better than a soap opera.) □ Verse 20 says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:20 Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.

Think of the irony here.

The people of Israel love David.

Saul's oldest son, Jonathan, loves David.

Now, Saul's youngest daughter, Michal, loves David.

Saul is an island of hatred surrounded by a sea of love.

Michal's love for David pleases Saul for a diabolical reason. It gives Saul another opportunity to have David killed. Verses □ 21 through 25 explain Saul's slimy scheme.

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:21 Saul thought, "Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law."
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> □ ESV 1 Samuel 18:22 And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in private and say, 'Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king's son-in-law.'"
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> □ ESV 1 Samuel 18:23 And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?"
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> □ ESV 1 Samuel 18:24 And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak."
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> □ ESV 1 Samuel 18:25 Then Saul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the

> Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.'" Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

In that day and culture, in order to be married, it was customary for a groom to pay a bride-price to the father of the woman he intends to marry. It was usually paid in money, but the father could ask for something else.

So—what a coincidence—Saul asks for the same thing I asked for when I married off my daughter: a hundred Philistine foreskins. Only I asked for ASU foreskins. Same thing.

Note that Saul keeps adding conditions for the giving of one of his daughters. First, it was anyone who could slay Goliath. When David met that condition, Saul adds fighting against the Philistines valiantly. When David met that condition, Saul then adds a hundred Philistine foreskins.

Saul is hoping that David is not going to be able to do this and will die trying.

All this sounds barbaric, and it is. But it was not extraordinary for the time. In the ancient Near East, in order to prove that a certain number of enemies had been slain, it was not uncommon to produce body parts as evidence: heads or hands or male genitalia.[1]

At this point, after Saul had double-crossed David by marrying off Merab to someone else, you might think that David would start to catch on that Saul is not on the up and up.

But you'd be wrong. □ Verse 26 says,

[1] David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 2007), 486.

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:26 And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. . . .

On the face of it, David looks as gullible as Gomer Pyle. Shazam, garsh, and gaaal-ee.

Either that or Michal is so irresistible, David is not thinking with his head.

Regardless, David dives headlong into the challenge, which apparently has a deadline. He even decides to double the foreskin count. □ Verses 26 and 27 explain,

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:26 . . . Before the time had expired, 27 David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. . . .
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> □ ESV 1 Samuel 18:27 . . . And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife.

There is a tendency to glamorize Bible heroes, but I think it fair to question David's decision to needlessly double the foreskin count. Is it courageous? Is it generous? Is it showing off? Is it to prove something? Is it youthful exuberance? Or is it just foolhardy?

I can't say.

It's quite possible that the Lord not only saves David from the Philistines, but also saves him from himself.

Regardless, I can only imagine the look on Saul's face when David shows up with a big bag of two hundred Philistini tortellinis.

Saul is constrained to give Michal to David.

Verses □ 28 and 29 reveal the effect all this has on Saul.

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:28 But when Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, 29 Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.

Ironically, Saul sees what David does not yet fully apprehend: that God is fighting unseen battles for David. And this realization makes Saul even more afraid. And David's successes and reputation keep growing. Verse □ 30 closes out our text, saying.

> ESV 1 Samuel 18:30 Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

Not only do all of Saul's attempts to get rid of David fail miserably, they have the opposite effect of multiplying David's success and reputation.

Is it because David was so discerning that he saw through Saul's schemes?

No.

Is it because David was so smart that he was able to navigate the political minefield?

No.

Is it because David is just that much better at fighting than everyone else on the planet?

No.

It was because the Lord is with David. Which is another way of saying God is fighting unseen battles for David. Without God's protection and empowerment, David would have had no chance against Goliath or Saul or the Philistines.

Later on in his life, David writes some songs that acknowledge this. For example, in □ Psalm 61:3, David says to God,

> ESV Psalm 61:3 for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

Again in □ Psalm 138:7, David says to God,

> ESV Psalm 138:7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me.

You may be thinking, "Well that's David. He's an extraordinary Bible guy. I'm not David."

You're right. You're not David and neither am I. Nevertheless, the big idea is true for us: □ God is fighting unseen battles for you and me.

I am not showing it on the screen, but in Philippians 1:6, the apostle Paul assures us,

> ESV Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

That good work includes fighting unseen battles for us.

Looking back on my own life, I can see that God has been fighting battles for me that I couldn't see at the time.

I did not grow up in a Christian home. As an adolescent, I was so close to getting into so much trouble legally and relationally.

On multiple occasions, I ran from the police, including a car chase. But I never got caught.

As a teenager, I was on a pit crew for a late-model stock car sponsored by Olympia Brewing Company, who provided all the free beer this under-aged boy wanted. Some in the crew were promiscuous. I went with them to bars and strip clubs. Some of them went to prostitutes. Some of them were cheating on their wives.

But somehow, the only person I've ever been with is my wife.

It's not because I was virtuous; I definitely was not. It's not because I wasn't interested; I definitely was. And it's not because didn't have any opportunities; I definitely did.

Looking back, I think God was fighting an unseen battle for me, protecting me, saving me from myself. I suspect he knew that I couldn't have handled the relational baggage. I suspect he knew that certain things would have completely derailed me. And perhaps he knew that my future marriage would need the extra glue of being each other's only.

When I was in high school, I dated a rich girl for a couple of years whose parents thought I was marrying material. Their only concern was that I wasn't at all religious. Of course, they didn't know about my running from the police. Or the strip clubs. They introduced me to boating, water skiing, snow skiing, motor-homing, deep-sea fishing, and scuba

diving. Despite all the perks, I broke it off because I wasn't head over heels for their daughter.

Then I connected with Cathy, who had also just ended a long relationship with her boyfriend. I guess that makes us a rebound relationship—the ones that aren't supposed to last. At our high school graduation party, we kissed. And I thought, "Wow, this is a 200-foreskin girl!"

Cathy shared with me her faith in Christ. And I thought it was hogwash.

I started reading the Bible to prove her wrong. I didn't think of it in these terms at the time, but I came to learn that God had been fighting a battle for me that I had not seen. It was a battle for my soul.

In the gospels, I read that, out of his great love for me, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die in my place and on my behalf in payment for all my sins. And on the basis of that payment, he offered me the free gift of eternal life, including reconciliation with God and adoption into his forever family. All I had to do was believe in Jesus for it.

I believed. It was the summer between my freshman and sophomore years in college.

I didn't see it coming. I never wanted to be a Christian.

The unseen battle for my eternal salvation had been won. But God was and is still fighting for my wellbeing as his child.

A year and a half after my conversion, Cathy and I got married in the middle of our junior year of college, which, apart from my eternal salvation, is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I am

convinced that God gave her to me to save me from myself. And she has been doing it for nearly 50 years.

On a dime, I had swung from an atheistic skeptic to a Christian zealot. Within three years of my conversion, I had led a college-singles group, I led a high-school group, I became a part-time, paid youth director, and I preached my first sermon in big church.

I was twenty one.

If I were in authority, I would not have let me do any of those things. I had no church background, and I had no formal Bible training. I was an ignorant zealot. Looking back, some of the things I taught and did were cringeworthy. All I had was a voracious appetite for Scripture and a desire to get it right, but that desire was not always realized. God worked in spite of me not because of me.

Upon graduation from college, I thought about going to seminary to become a pastor.

Thankfully, I did not. We had no money. And I had already started a job in marketing research before I graduated.

God saved the church from me.

And he saved me from myself.

I was not ready to be a pastor. Had I gone to seminary and become a pastor right away, I think I would have crashed and burned.

God fought for me by letting me grow up, get some training, burn off some selfish ambition, and make a bunch of leadership mistakes in the

business world instead of the church. It was a 15-year stint in marketing research.

Aside from managing people, most of my years in business were spent gathering consumer data, subjecting the data to statistical analysis, and then writing reports and making presentations to clients to explain what it means and what the implications are for their business.

Which is remarkably similar to what I do now. I've just traded consumer data for biblical data. I gather biblical data, subject it to interpretive analysis, and then write reports and make presentations to congregants to explain what it means and what the implications are for our lives.

When I was in business, I could not see that God was fighting for me, preparing me for what I'm doing now.

As a pastor, I have had a few modern Sauls throw spears at me. And sometimes, I look back and think to myself, "Bob, you were as gullible as Gomer Pyle. What were you thinking? How could you not see that coming?"

It hurt. But I survived.

Not because I was so discerning.

Not because I was so smart.

Not because I was better than anyone else on the planet.

But because the Lord was with me. Which is another way of saying God was fighting unseen battles for me. Without God's protection and empowerment, I would have had no chance.

I look back on some things I've done in ministry and wonder. Was it courageous? Was it generous? Was it showing off? Was it to prove something? Was it youthful exuberance? Or was it just foolhardy?

Sometimes, I can't say.

But one thing I do know. God is fighting unseen battles for me. And the same is true for you.

And I am so grateful and secure because of it.

Let's pray.

Lord, thank you that you are fighting unseen battles for us. This truth helps us to appreciate you more, to trust you more, and to rest in the knowledge of your unseen care for us. Amen.