

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, August 31, 2008  
Rev. John Tapscott

"OUR CHAMPION"

1 Samuel 17:50; Matthew 16:21

Most of us watched some of the Olympic games, and were happy when our Canadian athletes began winning medals. There is a sense of national pride in watching our athletes win some victories against tough international competition. But champion athletes are really champions for only a short period of time. Records are soon broken, and every four years new men and women stand on the podium and receive medals. Almost every year a different team wins the World Series or the Super Bowl or the Stanley Cup. It's been a long time for any of my teams. Most champions are quickly dethroned, it seems. And not only in sports but in most fields. So let me ask you - who is our true champion, our everlasting champion? Well, let me tell you what you already know. Jesus Christ is our champion.

Now neighbours and countries have long competed against one another, to see who is the fastest, the strongest, and so on. Sometimes the competitions are military conflicts and deadly serious. To the victor goes the spoils of war and control over the conquered nation's land and people. The Old Testament books of 1 & 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel recount the kingships of Saul and David in Israel. One favorite story from the time is that of David and Goliath. We read in 1 Samuel 17 how one spring the Israelite army lined up on one hillside and the Philistine army on the other with a valley in-between. Every day a bronze-covered champion named Goliath came out of the Philistine camp, daring any Israelite soldier to battle him. If he won, the Israelites would be subject to the Philistines. If the Israelite warrior won, then the Philistines would serve Israel. For 40 days there was a stalemate, as no Israelite soldier dared to face Goliath. The Hebrews had reason to be afraid, and not just because Goliath was nine feet tall. The Philistines had developed bronze weapons which were not yet part of Israel's arsenal.

But one day, David, a teenaged shepherd, was sent by his father to

visit his brothers in the Israelite army and take them some provisions. Upon reaching the battle-lines, David heard the giant's daily challenge. David sought out King Saul, and said, "I will go into battle against this giant who defies the living God and taunts his armies." At first Saul refused. But David told him how he had taken on and defeated bears and lions in protection of the sheep. And when Saul saw David's determination he finally said, "Go, and the Lord be with you." So David went, taking no armour or weapons, except his staff, his sling shot and five smooth stones from the stream. One other thing David took was his faith in the name of the living God, the Lord of hosts.

And here's what happened. "When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone, and sling it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine, and killed him; and there was no sword in the hand of David." Samuel 17:49-50.

So Goliath, the Philistine champion of Gath was champion no more. David was now champion of Israel. News of his heroism spread throughout the land. Years later David became king of Israel, though he encountered many obstacles along the way, some of them from King Saul who was jealous of David's popularity. And when David finally became king of Israel, he encountered more troubles, including his own sin, plus rebellion in his own house. But finally David prevailed and regained the throne. In all, he reigned as king for forty years and he went down in history as Israel's ideal king. Indeed, God promised that through David's line, the Messiah would come. David was a hero, but he is not the everlasting champion.

No, our true and everlasting champion is David's greater Son, the one who was both Son of Man and Son of God. Jesus Christ came from Heaven's realm, in fulfillment of God's promise. He became flesh and entered the decisive battle against our enemies of sin and evil and death. Christ died on a Cross at the hands of evil men, but God raised him victoriously from the grave on the third day. Christ himself predicted not only his death but also his resurrection victory. Matthew 16:21 "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem

and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests, and be killed and on the third day be raised." As great as David's victory over Goliath was, Christ's victory was infinitely greater and accomplished far more for us and for God's creation. Christ is God's champion, and our champion, the one who saves us from our enemies. He was lifted up to sit at the Father's right hand in heaven and He will return as Judge and King to restore God's creation and make all things new, and to bring God's people home. Jesus Christ is our champion; the champion who can never be dethroned.

The fact that Jesus Christ is our champion means that we never face or battle the giants of life alone.

Now we all face giants of some kind, giant problems or obstacles that we can't see any way over or around. They may be health problems or family issues, difficulties in your work, people who block your way because of jealousy or ill-will. Sometimes we face giant temptations. The evil one is constantly tempting us not just into moral failure, but into unbelief, and to adopt a nonchalant or defeatist attitude towards the church and the faith. Jesus asked, "What does it profit a person if they gain the whole world and lose their soul?" Well, the evil one tempts us constantly to believe that we can gain the whole world and not lose our soul. It's a lie, but it's a constant temptation we must face and battle. We face giants of fear and foreboding; giants of sin and guilt; giants of discouragement and failure that whisper in our ears "You're no good, you're a loser; even God has given up on you." Huge numbers of people in this world battle giants of addiction. The largest gathering of people in this church building outside of Sunday worship is the A.A. group which meets here on Wednesday evenings. And we will all face the giant of death.

But we never face these giants alone. David went forth in the name of the Lord of hosts and we go forth in the name of God's Son Jesus Christ, to whom God has given all authority in heaven and earth. Yes, we learn from David's example and courage. But David doesn't go with us into battle. The one who goes with us is the Lord Jesus. We go forth trusting that He will show us the way. We go forth not with a bronze sword, but with the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit; we go forth in the strength of Christ himself. We go forth knowing that anyone who defies

the living God, no matter how large, will not stand. We go forth with courage knowing that no giant can defeat the church of Jesus Christ. "I am building my church," Christ says, "and the powers of death will not prevail against it." We go into battle against temptation clinging to Christ and trusting Him to give us the victory. "Greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world." And even if we should slip and fall, the hand of our champion picks us up, forgives us, and sets us on our feet again. We go forth trusting that not even the giant of death will take us from the hand of Almighty God or defeat his purpose for our lives, for in Christ we have eternal life. . We never face the giants or battle them alone for the Lord Jesus Christ is with us. And the battle is not just ours, it is his, too. Jesus Christ is our champion.

One of the remarkable sports stories this year is that of Josh Hamilton, outfielder for the Texas Rangers. Hamilton is tearing up the American League with his phenomenal hitting. A few years ago, Hamilton almost ruined his career, his life and his marriage through drug addiction. Here's some of Hamilton's story in his own words.

*"Within my first week of sobriety in October 2005 -- after I showed up at my grandmother's house in the middle of the night, coming off a crack binge -- I had the most haunting dream. I was fighting the devil, an awful-looking thing. I had a stick or a bat, and every time I hit the devil, he'd fall and get back up. Over and over I hit him, until I was exhausted and he was still standing. I woke up in a sweat... and the terror that gripped me makes that dream feel real to this day. I walked down to my grandmother's room and spoke to her through the night. The devil stayed out of my dreams for seven months after that. I stayed clean and worked hard to put my marriage and my life back together. In June 2006 I was reinstated by Major League Baseball, and a few weeks afterward, the devil reappeared. It was the same dream. I would hit him and he would bounce back up... This devil seemed unbeatable... But just when I felt like giving up, I felt a presence by my side. I turned my head and saw Jesus, battling alongside me. We kept fighting, and I was filled with strength. The devil didn't stand a chance... When I woke up, I felt at peace. I wasn't scared. The lesson was obvious: Alone, I couldn't win this battle. With Jesus, I couldn't lose.*

*I get cravings sometimes, and I see it as the devil trying to catch me*

*in a weak moment... When it happens, I talk to the devil and say, "These are just thoughts, and I'm not going to act on them." When I talk like that, when I tell him he's not going to get the best of me, I find the thought goes away sooner...*

*But there is one story that sticks with me, so much that I think of it every day. I was driving out of the players' parking lot at Great American Ball Park after a game in May with my wife Katie and our two girls... There's always a group of fans standing at the curb, hoping to get autographs... On this night, a boy of nine or ten gave me a pen and something to sign. Nothing unusual there, but as I was writing the boy said, "Josh, you're my savior." This stopped me. I looked at him and said, "Well, thank you. Do you know who my savior is?" He thought for a minute... finally, he smiled and blurted out, "Jesus Christ." "That's exactly right," I said.*

Now the giant you and I face is probably not the same as the one Josh Hamilton faced and continues to battle. But we have the same Saviour, and the same champion. There is no giant that we must face or battle alone, for he is at our side. The battle may not always be easy, but in God's time Christ's victory will be ours, too. Jesus Christ is our champion.

One more thing. Because Christ is our champion we not only trust in Him, we give ourselves for his service, just as he gave himself for us. We take up the cross and deny ourselves for his sake, knowing that in his service we find life. And because Christ is the everlasting champion, our service in his name does bear fruit. It has eternal consequences for ourselves and for others. I finish with some of my favourite words in Scripture from 1 Corinthians chapter 15. The apostle Paul lifts his heart to God, saying, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And then he exhorts the church, "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain."



