

HOW TO KILL A LION ON A SNOWY DAY

by Ray C. Stedman

I want to do something this morning which I have done only once or twice before in all my twenty-three years at Peninsula Bible Church -- to repeat a message I have given here before. I do this for two reasons.

- First, this has been a very heavy week for me. I have already preached or taught or lectured some twenty-two hours this week, and so have had very little time to work on proper preparation of a message. Rather than present one half-prepared I would much rather do this.
- Second, I feel this message is much needed. I do not think I have known a time when more people have been going through deep trouble and tribulation and pressure. We have seen a sample of it this morning in the prayer requests over which we have just prayed. And I feel this would be an appropriate message for such a time.

So I apologize to those of you who have heard this message before -- and remember that you have -- but I hope that, like wine and cheese, it will improve with age!

I have chosen this passage in First Chronicles because it deals with a very practical problem in our lives, one which every one of us wrestles with from time to time. I want to be both practical and helpful -- that is what Scripture is for. And this passage deals with the problem of how to kill a lion on a snowy day.

Now, you have had that problem this week, I know! You may not have recognized it, but I am sure you have had it. As we get on into this text I am sure you will agree with me. It deals with that problem, along with a couple of others, and I think we will find it helpful.

And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds; he smote two ariels of Moab. He also went down and slew a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he slew an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits tall. The Egyptian had in his hand a spear like a weaver's beam; but Benaiah went down to him with a staff, and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and won a name beside the three mighty men. He was renowned among the thirty, but did not attain to the three. And David set him over his bodyguard. {1 Chr 11:22-25}

You notice this is in the days of David the king. There are two groups of men mentioned -- the thirty, and the three. These three mighty men, whose names are given in preceding texts, were the leaders of all the armed forces of Israel, the "Joint Chiefs of Staff," if you like. Then there was another band of thirty men who were the commanders of various divisions within the military. It was among these thirty men, chosen from throughout the ranks of Israel, that our man Benaiah the son of Jehoiada became prominent. He was made captain of David's bodyguard. He was chosen for that position of honor close to the person of the king because of three great events which had happened in his life, three deeds of valor for which he was widely known throughout the nation.

The first was that he smote two ariels of Moab. If you are reading from the King James Version you will notice that it says "two lion-like men of Moab." This is because the King James translators did not know what this word meant. Nor, in fact, did the translators of the Revised Standard Version. For this word in Hebrew is one of the very few of which we have lost the meaning. We do not know what it means. The King James translators noticed that it was somewhat similar to the word for lion. So they translated it *lion-like*, feeling that this would be as close as they could come. But it does not mean exactly that. So when the Revised translators worked on this passage they said, "Well, let's not translate this word at all. We don't know what it means, so let's just admit it, and anglicize it, i.e., take the sound of it in Hebrew and put it in English." So that is why it

is *ariel*, for that is what it sounds like in Hebrew.

But no one knows what an ariel is. The King James translators made what you might call a "holy guess" at it. If I may take an unholy guess, I would suggest that the word probably is some kind of military term, referring to a troop unit of a particular size, like a company or a platoon, and that this man had won fame because he encountered these two units, whatever they were, of the military of Moab, and single handed, put them down. Whatever it does mean, it was a notable deed. He was widely recognized as a mighty man because he had smitten these two ariels of Moab.

Another deed for which he was known was that he went down and slew a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. That, too, was a notable deed. A lion is a very ferocious adversary. He met him in a very difficult place and slew him, and was recognized as a man of valor because he had dared to face a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. We are going to come back to that incident in a moment.

The third great deed for which he was known was that he met an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits (about nine feet) tall. That is about the same size as Goliath, for slaying whom David won fame. This man had a tremendous spear, like a weaver's beam. Unfortunately we are not acquainted with that terminology. A weaver's loom had a tremendous beam on it, usually about six or seven inches thick. That is what this man's spear was like. We might liken it to a flag pole or a telephone pole. At any rate it was a formidable weapon. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiadah met this huge man with this great spear, and, using only his staff, somehow knocked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, seized it, and slew the giant with his own spear, for which he won great fame in Israel as a man of valor.

"Well now," you say, "that's all very interesting. But what on earth does it have to do with me? How does this relate in any sense to me? It is an interesting story, and certainly he was a great man, but I don't see how this helps me." But, you see, this is one of the glories of Scripture. Paul tells us in Romans 15:4a {RSV}, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction," and these tales in the Bible are not merely Sunday school stories, or even myths and legends recorded for our entertainment. They have meaning and purpose for us. They apply to us.

For instance, it is interesting to note that these three enemies whom Benaiah overcame are all used in Scripture as types, or symbols, of enemies of the believer today:

1. "Benaiah smote two ariels of Moab." Who was Moab? In the Old Testament we find that the Moabites were a tribe living on the borders of Israel who were related to the Israelites. Back in the book of Genesis we are told that Lot, when he fled from Sodom, hid with his two daughters in a cave. There, in a rather shadowed episode, we are told that Lot was made drunk by his two daughters and that, in his drunken stupor, he sired children by each of his own daughters. One was Ammon, and the other was Moab. Ammon, by the way, is the one for whom the capital city of present-day Jordan was named. So the Moabites were closely related to the Israelites and grew up beside them. But they were always enemies of Israel, wherever you read of them. This is used throughout the Old Testament as a picture of something which is true of us. We have an enemy within us, to which we are related. In the New Testament it is called "the flesh." It is referred to as our "self-life," the "old life," and by other terms like that. But it is related to us. It is part of us. We cannot get rid of it. It lives in the back room of the house of our life, like a poor relative. We are ashamed of it, but we cannot get rid of it. And so Moab is a picture of the flesh throughout Scripture.
2. "And he slew an Egyptian." Egypt also is used as a type, or picture, of an enemy throughout the Scriptures. Do you know what it is? Egypt was the leading nation of the world of that day, the country which was looked up to as the source of worldly power, with its vast armies and tremendous temples, its pharaohs and their pomp and circumstance, its libraries and accumulated wisdom. All this is a picture of the superficial impressiveness, the empty glory of the world and its ways. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he was taken up on a high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the earth, with all their power and glory. That is what is symbolized by Egypt. The Israelites, many of them, longed to return to Egypt. They had forgotten the bondage, the slavery, the cruelty, the tears and the heartache of Egypt, and remembered only its comforts, its conveniences, the leeks and onions

and garlic and melons of Egypt. What a picture Egypt is of the world and its ways -- its philosophies, its pursuit of pomp and prestige and pride and status! So this incident is used as a vivid figure of a man who overcame the world.

3. But then there was the lion. I am sure you have guessed by now what the lion symbolizes. Remember that Peter tells us outright: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour," {1 Pet 5:8 RSV}. Here is an enemy who is sinister, and who, like a lion, has tremendous majesty and authority and power, and is out licking his chops, looking for something to eat, "seeking whom he may devour." What a picture!

Who among us has not been confronted with these enemies? There they are the world, the flesh, and the devil." We have felt the pressure of them, seen the attack of the flesh, our relative, Moab, sneaking up on us when we are least aware. We have felt the pull of the world, its attractiveness, and have wanted to be involved in it and thought we were missing something if we were not. We have felt it draw us away as we have longed to go back to Egypt. And at times, I am sure, we have sensed a tremendous dread of the devil, felt frightened, terrified by this powerful adversary.

We don't have time this morning to deal with all three of these in detail, so I would like to focus on this central story of the killing of the lion, as I think it has great significance for us. Certainly this was the most dangerous of the enemies recorded here, for a lion is the most powerful of beasts, the most ferocious of adversaries. There are several things said about it which we want to note. We read that Benaiah slew a lion -- a lion, not a leopard, not a wild hyena or a boar or a buffalo, but a lion.

Why a lion? Well, it is not for nothing that the lion is called the king of beasts, because it is indeed a very powerful animal. I have read that a lion is able, with one blow of his paw, to smash the human skull just as you would break an egg. He would slap you and your skull would cave in. Yet the bones of the skull are among the strongest structures of the body. A lion is able, with his teeth, to bite through any bone of the human body, including even the thigh bone. With one crunch of those jaws he could smash that bone. And to face that kind of ferocious beast at close quarters is a tremendously daring thing to do. That is what Benaiah did.

As a boy I used to wonder what would happen if a lion and a tiger got into a fight. For years I would play that over in my imagination and speculate about the outcome. Until one day I happened to see a movie exhibited by Dr. Louis Talbot. He had been in India on an occasion when a lion and a tiger had somehow accidentally fallen into the same pit. Someone was there with a movie camera and filmed the whole thing. I tell you, I watched with great interest as this battle went on! These cats circled one another, one would lash out at the other, they would spit and snarl and leap about in that light way cats have. Then suddenly they would grapple together and roll about, spitting and biting. It was tremendous to watch! Then, quicker than the eye could follow, something happened, and the tiger appeared to cave in. He simply fell down. The lion had caught it at just the right moment, had slapped it on the side of the head, and had crushed its skull. That was the end of the battle.

So that was the adversary Benaiah the son of Jehoiada met on the day when he slew this lion.

Do you know that every one of us has a lion in our life? This, for Benaiah was the worst possible foe he could meet. And you and I have something like that don't we? You have something -- and it flashes into your mind as I say these words -- which is the worst possible foe. It is something you have dreaded, something you have been afraid of, something you have thought might happen but have wished would not. It had been there on the horizon of your thinking, always threatening, and you have been wondering if it were ever going to happen. The worst possible foe, the thing you have dreaded more than anything else -- that is the lion in your life.

Maybe it is a quite different lion for the person sitting next to you, or for me. Maybe it is a physical disease or affliction -- a heart attack, brain surgery, cancer. It may be some terrible, crushing disappointment, some loved one taken from you so that you are left alone. Maybe it is the fear of being financially ruined. Whatever it may be, the lion is the worst possible foe in your life.

Benaiah met this lion, and he met him in the worst possible place. He met him in a pit. If you are going to fight a lion, certainly the one place not to choose is a pit, where you cannot get away, where you are at close quarters with this lion and there is no escape.

If I were to fight a lion, I at least would want to be out on a plain where I could take certain steps -- preferably long ones -- to get away! I would feel like the man who was caught stealing watermelon out of a patch. The farmer fired at him, and when his friends asked him, "Did you hear those bullets?" he said, "Yes sir, I heard them twice -- once when they passed me, and then again when I passed them!" That is the way I would feel about a lion. I would want to be out where I could run.

But you cannot run in a pit. Benaiah met the worst possible foe in the worst possible place.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever run into this terrible thing you dreaded to have happen, and found there was no way to avoid it? You could not go home to mother, could not take a vacation, could not do a thing. You had to face up to it. There was no way to get away.

But also notice that Benaiah met this lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. That made it a very treacherous situation -- the worst possible foe, in the worst possible place, under the worst possible circumstances.

You folks who grew up here in California have no idea what snow is like. I grew up in Montana where, as we often said, we have only two seasons: Winter and August! We know what snow is like, and what snow does. I have been in snow up to my chest -- cold, numbing snow -- just walking out in the back yard. One of my favorite delights, ever since I came to California, is to sit on my patio on a warm winter afternoon and read all about the blizzards back east! Snow numbs the fingers and makes it difficult to handle weapons. Snow makes footing treacherous and slippery. And snow blinds the eyes. You have all read about snow-blindness. The brightness of the sun upon the snow can actually destroy your vision temporarily. All these factors were involved in this battle when Benaiah the son of Jehoiada met the lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. He met the worst possible foe, in the worst possible place, under the worst possible circumstances.

And do you know, as I speak of this, I think that right now this is where God has me. I am going through something like this right now in my own experience. Something I have dreaded all my life has happened. Something I did not want to see happen, felt would be the most hurtful thing which could happen, has happened. I cannot escape it, and have to deal with it at a time when I have lots of other pressures, lots of problems. It is not an easy time to do it. It is the worst possible foe, in the worst possible place, under the worst possible circumstances. Are you there too?

Well, the thing we want to know is, how did he win? The whole focus of this story is that Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was able to kill this lion. He slew him! How did he do it? Is that the question you are asking? The passage does not seem to tell us, does it? The account seems merely to give us the incident without telling us anything about how it happened. There again is the wonder of the Scriptures. We are told in the book of Proverbs, "The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search it out," {cf, Prov 25:2}. And God never tells us something like this without hiding the answer for us to find, if we will but look for it. And this is what he has done here. He has hidden certain clues in this story which tell us how Benaiah the son of Jehoiada won this battle.

The answer, of course, if you think about it, is that Benaiah was able to do this because that is the kind of man he was. He was indeed a mighty man of valor. It was not the deeds he did which made him that way. He was already a mighty man of valor. The deeds simply revealed what he already was. He had what it took. He was that kind of man. These deeds simply made it clear to everybody else that he was that kind of man.

In the Bible, when you want to know what a man is like, look at his name, because biblical names are deliberately designed to give you a clue to the character of the individual. There is much evidence for this throughout the Scriptures. You know how God often changed a man's name when he changed his character.

- o *Jacob* meant "usurper, supplanter," and God changed his name to *Israel*, "prince with God," when

Jacob went through a transforming experience in his life.

- He changed Abraham's name from *Abram* , "exalted father," to *Abraham* , "father of a multitude."
- He changed Sarah's name from *Sarai* , "dominating," to *Sarah* , "princess."
- Jesus changed Peter's name. He said, "Your name is Simon, but I'm going to call you Peter, for I'm going to make you into a rock." *Peter* means "rock," {cf, Matt 16:18}.
- And Saul (which means "asked") of Tarsus was changed to *Paul* , which means "little," when he became a Christian.

So God changes names when character changes. If you want to know the meaning of a man, look at his name.

In the book of Isaiah we learn that Isaiah had two sons to whom he gave special names in order to teach the people something. One was called "Shearjashub," the other "Maher-shalal-hashbas." Can you imagine calling that boy in to lunch? His name means "hasting (is he) to the booty, swift (to the) prey," and it was a testimony to the people of Israel that God had declared Israel to be a spoil and a prey to the nations around, and that he was inviting the nations to hasten in, to hasten to the spoil and to the prey. "Now is the time to come in and take this nation." Ah yes, that was the word of warning. But the other boy's name was a note of hope. It means "a remnant shall return." That is what God taught his people through those names.

There is a similar instance in the book of Genesis in a name which God chose to teach a lesson to a whole generation. The whole world was taught by the name of a single man. His name was Methuselah. He was given that name by his father, Enoch, the one who "walked with God, and was not, for God took him," {Gen 5:24}. Enoch didn't start walking with God until he was sixty-five years old, when his son was born. He named him because of something God taught him at that time. The name signifies it: It means "when he dies it will come." What will come? The Flood. Can you imagine how they watched him everywhere he went? "Where's Methuselah? Keep your eye on him. We don't want him falling off a cliff, because when he dies it will come." Everybody knew that. Sure enough, you can see from the account that the very year Methuselah died, the Flood came. And the grace of God is revealed in the fact that Methuselah was the oldest man who ever lived! Nine-hundred sixty-nine years they watched him. But when he died, the Flood came.

What does this name mean -- "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada"? That is a clue to the kind of man he was. Well, there is an interesting thing about it. This man was well-known in David's day, and is mentioned often in Scripture. But in almost every instance, with only one or two exceptions, his name is listed as "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada." So his father's name is important too. If you take the meaning of those two names, in the order of seniority, you get the secret of how to kill a lion on a snowy day. Jehoiada means "God knows," and Benaiah means "God builds." Those twin truths are the secret of how to meet a lion, the worst possible foe, in the worst possible place, under the worst possible circumstances, and win. Remember to rest upon the facts that God knows, and God builds.

God knows where you are. He chose that place for you. That is the revelation of Scripture. God put you where you are, and, therefore, he knows. He knows all about you. Jesus said that the hairs of your head are numbered. He knows what you are going through, and he brought it about. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose," Paul tells us in Romans {8:28 RSV}. And he not only knows what you are going through, but he feels what you feel. God knows how you feel. That is one of the most comforting things to realize when you are upset, when somebody has done you dirt. When you are angry, or remorseful, or impatient, or are tempted to be bitter, or have been betrayed, or have been hurt -- God knows how you feel. The writer of Hebrews tells us, "We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses," {Heb 4:15a RSV}. We do not have the kind of God to come to who says, "Oh, don't bother me! Your little troubles -- what are they to me?" No, no. We have one who "in every respect has been tempted as we are" {Heb 4:15b RSV}, who has been where we have been, and knows how we feel.

On my way to Europe recently I was reading the story of Corrie Ten Boom, that remarkable Dutch woman

who has traveled around the world telling the story of her years under the occupation of the Nazis in Holland, when she and her family were put in a concentration camp. I was reading this account because I was going to visit her home there in Holland. (In fact, I bought a watch at her watch shop.) The Nazis had taken her and her sister and had put them in a concentration camp under horrible conditions, along with thousands of other women. One day, after a terrible series of degrading experiences, these women were marched out single-file and, one by one, were made to take off all their clothes and stand absolutely naked before a group of Nazi doctors, arrogant men, who showed their contempt for them. These modest, refined women had to stand stark naked before these examining doctors, and it was a terrible wrench to their spirit. Corrie says that she turned to her sister, Bessie, and said, "Bessie, remember, Jesus was naked on the cross." And her sister turned, and her face lit up with a smile, "Oh, that's right. Oh, that helps!" God knows. He knows how you feel.

Ah, but more than that, he builds. He has a purpose in mind. He knows what is happening and he is using it to work toward an end. That is the glorious thing, isn't it? Out of all the record of Paul's heartache and sorrow and privation and pain and suffering, "This light affliction," he said, "is but for a moment, and is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" {cf, 2 Cor 4:17 KJV}, and, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," {Rom 8:18 KJV}. And this is not only in heaven some day, but now. Those who go through heartaches, pressure, problems, tribulation, always emerge, when they are in God's hand, softened, chastened, mellowed, more loving, warmer, more compassionate. God is building -- that is the whole point. This is the secret of survival: God knows, God builds.

In 1895 Andrew Murray was in England suffering from a terribly painful back, the result of an injury he had incurred years before. He was staying with some dear friends. One morning while he was eating his breakfast in his room, his hostess told him of a woman downstairs who was in great trouble and wanted to know if he had any advice for her. Andrew Murray handed her a paper he had been writing on and said, "Just give her this advice I'm writing down for myself. It may be that she'll find it helpful." This is what was written:

In time of trouble, say, "First, He brought me here. It is by His will I am in this strait place; in that I will rest." Next, "He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child." Then say, "He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow." And last, say, "In His good time He can bring me out again. How, and when, He knows." Therefore say, "I am here (1) by God's appointment, (2) in His keeping, (3) under His training, (4) for His time."

That is how to kill a lion on a snowy day.

Prayer

Thank you for this truth, Lord, which leaps at us from an obscure incident in the Scriptures, which shows us that all these things have been designed for our instruction, that we may know how to face life and live as you want us to live. May it strengthen us in the hour of trial. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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