

A WEAKLING COULD BE A DANGEROUS OPPONENT!

Today's Text: 2 Chron. 20: 1-30

Extracts:

It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehosaphat. Then some came and told Jehosaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar" (which is En Gedi). And Jehosaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah... Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel... in the midst of the assembly, and he said, "Listen, all of you Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehosaphat! Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's' [2 Chron. 20: 1-3, 14-15]

Tom and Jerry is a popular cartoon series on television. Tom is the cat who is always overbearing, flaunting his advantages (power, speed, etc) over Jerry, the vulnerable but elusive rat. In one episode, Tom was as usual tormenting Jerry. In the process of attempting to avoid Tom, Jerry stumbled on a ferocious bulldog that was agonizing over a nail stuck to his paw. Smart Jerry helped to remove the nail. In appreciation, the dog gave him a little bell and told him, "Any time you are in trouble, ring this bell and I will come to your rescue." Soon after, Tom saw Jerry and ran towards him. To Tom's surprise, Jerry stood still. Instead of running away, he rang a little bell. From no where, the bull dog ran in, charged at Tom and threw him through the high window!

Whether in the home, school, office, business or church, many of us behave like Tom. We throw our weight around (physical size, position, material wealth, gender, race or ethnicity, etc) when we relate to the Jerrys of this world, those we consider inferior to us, that is, people who are vulnerable and can easily be defeated. We simply assume that on the basis of our advantages, we can always defeat such weaklings. We deny them respect, promotion and other benefits due to them. We subject them to physical and emotional abuse. We dare them to challenge us if they think that they can beat us. We could equally be the perpetrators! However, we may be in for surprises! What we see may not be what we shall get. If the perpetrators are not careful, they are setting themselves up for an embarrassing defeat.

In today's lesson, we shall see how the well-armed and well-organised armies of Ammon, Moab and others were disgraced by (in their own eyes) a weakling like King Jehosaphat. We shall learn a few lessons as believers to deal with Satan and his followers who tend to see us as weaklings.

1. What makes a weakling so dangerous?

I once heard of a testimony in a Lagos church. A very quarrelsome man was in a bus stop on a rainy day with another man whom he had accused falsely of pushing him into the rain. He refused the man's apology and several times he provoked a fight. The other man did not say a word, in spite of the unprovoked attack. On arriving at his destination, the innocent man came down from the bus, again closely followed by the quarrelsome fellow. He kept raining abuses at him but the innocent man remained mute and kept moving! When he finally arrived home, he opened the door and for the first time turned to his attacker and said, "Brother, please, come in. What can I offer you?" Stunned, the quarrelsome man replied, "I am relieved. I had thought that you were a ghost!" He went on to ask for the source of the man's patience with him. That was how the quarrelsome man was introduced to Jesus, and he was the one who gave the testimony in that church!

What makes a weakling so dangerous? These are some of the reasons:

a) *We are blinded by superiority complex*

Human beings tend to take comfort in the advantage of quantity, perhaps because of the group instinct that is in-born in us. We equate numerical advantage with superiority. Cultures with material advantages, measured by *per capita income*, automatically assume that they are better than the rest of the world and they can, therefore, determine the rules of international conduct. Within a country, ethnic groups with the largest population assume that it is their birthright to rule that country. Better-educated people assume that they should occupy higher positions and be better paid wherever they find themselves. Older people assume that they deserve respect from the younger ones. The truth is that such airs prevent us from paying attention to other people's strengths and contributions.

Goliath was a giant who fought for the Philistines against King Saul of Israel. He was over nine feet tall and heavily armed. Each day, he would come out and boast before the armies of Israel, saying, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together" [1 Sam. 17: 10]. In other words, since the armies of Israel could never defeat him, not to talk of the armies of the Philistines, let them just play games! In deed, there was nobody to accept the challenge until teenage David, who was not yet qualified to enroll in the army, came forward. When Goliath saw David, "he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking." He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks? ... Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field" [vv. 33-44]. Now, that is superiority complex at work! He should have wondered what was the source of the young man's boldness where the trained soldiers had been scared to come forward. Instead, he was blinded by his physical strength and underrated the

weakling's power. He paid dearly for it with his life and his armies' loss of the war!

b) *The weakling may actually be pretending to be weak!*

Some people may disguise their strength so as to deceive the opponent into a false sense of security. This is used in sports, where a relatively unknown team may focus on injuries on its side while praising the strength of the opponent. It may express fears about its ability to minimize the loss. Meanwhile, it is actually perfecting the strategy for a major victory! The German women's soccer team used that strategy to eliminate the much-fancied United States women's team, the defending champions, during the 2003 Women's World Cup. When David was fleeing from King Saul, he ran into the land of the Philistines whose hero, Goliath, he had killed. The servants of the king of Gath brought David before him. However, David had changed his behaviour, pretending to be mad. He "scratched on the doors of the gate and let his saliva fall down on his beard." The king was angry with his servants and said, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" [1 Sam. 21: 10-15]. David was allowed to go, a decision that the Philistines were to regret when David became king of Israel!

c) *The weakling may be relying on forces unknown to you!*

A Nigerian proverb says, "Be careful to hit a weakling because you could break your hand!" In other words, that weakling could be relying on forces unknown to you. Some people may be relying on satanic forces for "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" [Eph. 6: 12]. Believers, on the other hand, rely on God by putting on His whole armour, "that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" [v. 11]. Therefore, when you attack a weakling, you are also confronting the powers behind him or her.

In response to Goliath's derisive attack, David told him, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear and a javelin. But *I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied*" [1 Sam. 17: 45]. Let us take another example. When Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin where they were forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus, the disciples were unmoved. So when the Jewish leaders "saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were *uneducated and untrained men*, they marveled. And they realized that *they had been with Jesus*" [Acts 4: 13].

From the forgoing, we can sense the need to be cautious when we are dealing with people over whom we think that we have undue advantages. A weakling could be a dangerous opponent. The story of Jehosaphat is a case in point.

2. Jehosaphat was a very dangerous weakling!

a) *Jehosaphat as perceived by his enemies*

Jehosaphat was the ruler of the smaller kingdom of Judah. The Syrians had just recently killed Ahab, the king of the larger kingdom of Israel. Jehosaphat had been in that battle but miraculously escaped being killed. Nevertheless, for being in alliance with a wicked king like Ahab, God had sent a seer, Jehu, to tell Jehosaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you” [2 Chron. 18: 1-34 through 19: 1-2]. So, God allowed this attack on Jehosaphat, just as when our sins expose us to satanic attacks.

You will recall that the Moabites and the Ammonites were the descendants of Lot, Abraham’s cousin [Gen. 19: 30-38], while Jehosaphat and his people were the descendants of Abraham [2 Chron. 20: 7]. They were possibly aware of the spiritual state of the descendants of Abraham, whose kingdom had been split into two as a result of the idolatrous rule of their kings. Therefore, they could have perceived that that was the right time to attack Judah with a massive force and gain an easy victory. After all, Jehosaphat and his people had become weaklings ready to be plucked. So, besides the Ammonites, the Moabites hired others to assure victory [vv. 1-2]. However, like all the people who act on the basis of superiority complex, they did not appear to have reckoned with Jehosaphat’s defence strategy.

b) *What they did not know about Jehosaphat*

As soon as Jehosaphat heard the bad news, he “*feared* and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” [v. 3]. Fear is the first *natural* reaction to uncertainty. To that extent, there is nothing wrong with expressing one’s fear. However, it becomes bad if it does not immediately drive us to God, as Jehosaphat did. Some people become so paralysed by fear that they develop high blood pressure!

Jehosaphat got the whole nation involved in *repentance* and seeking the face of the Lord. He did not call a meeting of the military council to take stock of men and supplies and to plan their defence strategy. He knew that he could not match the military strength of the enemy in terms of numbers, hardware and skills. His strength lay elsewhere.

Next, Jehosaphat gathered men, women and children from all the cities of Judah and brought them to the temple of God built by Solomon. Do you know why? God had assured Solomon that “My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place... *perpetually*” [2 Chron. 7: 15, 16]. Jehosaphat acknowledged the sovereignty of God in heaven and on earth, and reminded Him of His promises to the people of Israel over time, especially the ones to Solomon for prayers offered in that temple [2 Chron. 20: 11]. To underline his helplessness, Jehosaphat closed his prayers by saying, “We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; *nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You*” [v. 12].

As they stood before the Lord, the Holy Spirit descended on Jahaziel, a Levite, who prophesied and said (among other things), “thus says the Lord to you: ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for *the battle is not yours, but God’s*” [vv. 14-15]. God gave them specific guidelines on the battle plan in which they would have to do virtually nothing [vv. 16-19]!

c) *What Jehosaphat’s enemies got!*

Early the following morning, the armies of Moab, Ammon and Mount Seir heard from the direction of the Wilderness of Tekoa songs and praises, loud and bold, coming from the army of Judah. The refrain was, “Praise the Lord for His mercy endures for ever” [vv. 20-22]. Fear and panic set in among Jehosaphat’s enemies because the Lord had set ambushes against them. I can imagine them saying among themselves: “Those noises could not be coming from the camp of weaklings. You have misled us! Didn’t you assure us that morale was low in the camp of Judah? You will pay for deceiving us!” Recrimination crept in and they began to fight among themselves until they completely destroyed one another [v. 23]!

Without thrusting a spear or throwing a javelin, the weakling won a decisive victory. It took Jehosaphat and his people four days to cart away the abundant valuables and precious jewels that their enemies had left behind [vv. 24-26].

3. Lessons

We may not know the source of our enemy or opponent’s strength but we need to know ours. A weakling like Jehosaphat won a decisive victory by first *setting his house in order and following thereafter what God asked him to do*.

Jehosaphat and his people reconciled with God by proclaiming a fast and seeking God’s forgiveness and guidance. Such *occasional* rituals are in order to reconcile us with God each time we fall or face a major crisis. However, we do not need to

afflict ourselves by giving up food or drink or sexual relations with our spouses *for a season* when we can fast on a *routine* basis by living only to please God.

In the days of Isaiah, the people asked God, “Why have we fasted... and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls and You take no notice?” In response, God said,

Indeed you fast for strife and debate...to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen?... Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness; to undo the heavy burdens; to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry; and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? [Is. 58: 3-7]

In other words, *fasting means living daily in the fear of the Lord*. To successfully do that is to deny yourself so many sinful pleasures and to practise *holy living*. The blessings promised by God are also many. For example, “Your light shall break forth like the morning; your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. *Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am’*” [vv. 8-9]. Are those not worth *routinely* fasting for?

4. Conclusion

By definition, every true believer is a weakling! You are expected to bless those who revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for Christ’s sake [Matt. 5: 11]. You are expected to turn the other cheek to the person who has already slapped you on the right cheek [v. 39]! You are not to avenge any wrong and “if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” [Rom. 12: 17-19]. In short, you are to offer your body as a living sacrifice and not to conform to this world. Rather, you are to be transformed by renewing your mind so that you may prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God [vv. 1-2].

If the world chooses to attack you on account of your being a weakling *for Christ’s sake*, they are in for a surprise “for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye” [Zech. 2: 8]! A weakling for God is a dangerous opponent!