

INTRODUCTION

The Beijing Olympics will conclude tonight, but we still have one more week in the series entitled, “Go For the Gold—How to be a Champion for God.” Are you ready for more Olympic Trivia questions?

1. How many official volunteers are working the Beijing Olympics?

- A. 24,000
- B. 56,000
- C. 70,000

The answer is C. Of course, when you have a centralized communist government, the word “volunteer” has a different meaning!

2. Which long jumper holds the Olympic record?

- A. Bob Beamon, 1968
- B. Mike Powell, 1998
- C. Carl Lewis, 1996

The answer is A. At the Mexico City Olympics Bob Beamon jumped an incredible 8.9 meters—almost 30 feet. That record stood for 23 years until Mike Powell broke it in 1991, but he did it at the world championships, so Beamon’s jump is still the *Olympic* record. (The Beijing gold was won by Jahir Saladino from Panama who jumped 8.34 meters.)

If you know Latin, this next one will be easy for you.

3. The Olympic motto, “Citius, Altius, Fortius” means:

- A. “Winning, Lasts, Forever”
- B. “Faster, Higher, Stronger”
- C. “Cities, Mountains, Forts”

The answer is B. That phrase was proposed by Pierre de Frédy, Baron de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympics. He got the idea after hearing a Catholic priest in Paris use the phrase in a sermon.

If you’ve been watching the Olympics the last question is a no-brainer.

4. Which Olympian has won the most gold medals in a single Olympiad?

- A. Mark Spitz
- B. Larissa Latinynina
- C. Mark Phelps?

If you chose C, I’m sorry you missed it. The correct answer is A, Mark Spitz won seven gold medals. Michael Phelps won eight, but I have no idea who Mark Phelps is!

The Olympics feature champions for gold, but the Bible tells the stories of champions for God! Some of them are so famous, everyone knows them by name: David and Goliath; Daniel in the lion’s den; or Elijah on Mount Carmel. But hidden between the pages of these major characters there are some interesting champions who often go unnoticed and unappreciated. This month we’ve met champions like Benaiah, who faced his fears and chased a lion into a pit on a snowy

day. We learned about risk-taking from Abigail, the first super-model. Last week we allowed Puah and Shiphrah, the brave-hearted midwives, to teach us that a champion does the right thing. They chose life even after Pharaoh ordered them to kill the boy babies.

Today, let’s meet Micaiah, the prophet with a bloody nose. He’s going to teach us that a Champion Can Stand Alone. Let me give you the background for this story. This happened about 900 years before Jesus was born. Israel had been one unified nation under King David and King Solomon, but by this time, they had splintered into two separate nations. Judah to the south had a king named Jehoshaphat, and Israel to the north had a wicked king named Ahab. The story really begins when Ahab wanted to buy a vineyard next to his palace that was owned by a man named Naboth. Ahab offered to buy the vineyard but Naboth refused to sell, since that land had belonged to his father and his father’s fathers. Ahab pouted like a spoiled brat. He went to bed and refused to eat. His wicked wife, Queen Jezebel, said, “What’s the matter, big boy?” Ahab said, “Naboth won’t sell me his vineyard, and I want it for myself.” Jezebel hatched an evil plot and said, “Get up and eat, I’ll get that vineyard for you.” So Jezebel set up a scam where two of her gangsters accused Naboth of blasphemy, then they carried Naboth out of the city and stoned him to death. With Naboth dead, it was a simple matter for Ahab to claim his vineyard. But God wasn’t about to let Ahab get away with that, so He sent the prophet Elijah to King Ahab. Elijah found Ahab in Naboth’s vineyard and said to him, “God sent me to tell you that you aren’t going to get away with murder and robbery. Just as the dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, the dogs will lick up your blood in the very same place. And your wife Jezebel will be eaten by dogs.”

Three years went by without incident and Ahab probably thought Elijah’s prophecy would never happen.

Ahab decided he wanted to attack the Syrians and capture one of their cities. He sent word to King Jehoshaphat in the south to join him in this attack. Jehoshaphat agreed, but being a godlier king than Ahab he said, “King Ahab have you inquired of the Lord about whether we should go into battle?” Ahab said, “I have 400 prophets and they are unanimous that if we go into battle, we will be victorious.” But Jehoshaphat knew these “prophets” were appointed by the King and they were simply Yes Men, and not true prophets of God. So Jehoshaphat said, “Do you have any prophet from God to ask?” Ahab frowned and said, “There is one prophet of Jehovah, his name is Micaiah, but I hate him, because whenever he speaks he says something bad is going to happen to me.” Jehoshaphat said, “Let’s listen to him.” So Ahab sent for Micaiah. When he was brought in Ahab said, “Micaiah, should we go into battle?” Micaiah quickly said, “Sure, King, if that’s what you want to hear, go for it—it’s what you want to do anyway.” But Ahab recognized Micaiah was being sarcastic, so he swore him to an oath to speak the truth. Let’s pick up the story in verse 1 Kings 22:16:

“The king said to him, ‘How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?’ Then Micaiah answered, ‘I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, ‘These people have no master. Let each on go home in peace.’ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘Didn’t I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?’”

Then Micaiah went on to describe the carnage and destruction that would occur if they went into

battle. He pointed at Ahab’s 400 prophets and said in verse 23:

“‘So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you.’ Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. [It literally says that he punched him in the face] ‘Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?’ he asked. Micaiah replied, ‘You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room.’ The king of Israel then ordered, ‘Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king’s son and say, ‘This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.’ Micaiah declared, ‘If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me.’ Then he added, ‘Mark my words, all you people!’”

With 400:1 odds in their favor, Ahab and Jehoshaphat went into battle against the Syrians. However, Ahab must have believed Micaiah, because rather than dressing like a king, he disguised himself as an ordinary soldier, hoping he wouldn’t be targeted. In the heat of the battle a Syrian archer just shot an arrow toward the army of Israel without even aiming. That random arrow flew straight toward Ahab and pierced his body in the chink on his armor. He realized he was wounded and told his chariot driver, “Take me back, I’m wounded.” On the sidelines as Ahab bled to death in his chariot, he watched in horror as Micaiah’s prediction came true. They buried him near his palace, and the Bible specifically says dogs from Samaria came and licked his blood from his chariot, exactly as Elijah had predicted. And several years later, Jezebel was killed after she was thrown from the top of the wall and the dogs ate her body, again, exactly as God has spoken through Elijah. The old Puritan preachers used to say: “The wheels of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small.” That just means when God says something will happen, it may take awhile, but it WILL happen.

As our story ends, Micaiah is still in prison on a bread and water diet, but the wicked King Ahab is dead. Micaiah is a champion who wasn’t afraid to stand alone to speak God’s truth when it wasn’t popular or pleasurable. We learn from him that God’s Champion CAN stand alone. There are at least four championship lessons we can learn from Micaiah.

1. STAND UP! A CHAMPION CAN GO AGAINST THE CROWD AND SPEAK THE TRUTH

Four hundred prophets were saying, “Go to war and you’ll win.” Micaiah had the courage to stand up and speak God’s truth. He had to go against the crowd to do that. He faced peer pressure just as we do today. Peer pressure starts when we are young. We want to “be like” everyone else and we want to “be liked” by others, so we tend to go along to get along. The first true reality television show was called “Candid Camera”—how many of you remember it? Hidden cameras captured the behavior of unsuspecting people. Actually, many of the Candid Camera episodes became case studies for sociologists researching peer pressure. In one episode, several actors were already on an elevator when an unsuspecting person stepped in. The actors were all facing the back of the elevator, and in over 90% of the cases, the unsuspecting person turned and faced the back also—that’s peer pressure.

In another episode, actors were sitting in a doctor’s outer waiting room wearing only their underwear. Over half of the unsuspecting people who came in also disrobed and were waiting to be called back to the examining room!

As Christians, we are called to be different from the crowd. We’re not of this world, so we should never seek to be like the world. Instead, we’re commanded to always speak the truth in love. The Bible says, “we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching ... instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up in him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” (Ephesians 4:14-15)

That’s a great balance—truth and love. Each without the other would be incomplete. Some people speak the truth, but they use it as a hammer to hurt others—there’s no love there. On the other extreme, some people are so “loving” that they never tell the truth about someone’s dangerous behavior, they just put up with it assuming that it’s the loving thing to do. That’s not love, that’s sentimentality.

If you are going to base your morality on the Bible, you may be like Micaiah and be only one voice in 400 who says, “This is right, and this is wrong.” But may God give you the courage to be a Champion for Him!

2. STAND ALONE! A CHAMPION NEEDS A TEAM, BUT CAN STAND ALONE IF NECESSARY

I’ll say more about a Champion’s team later, but sometimes God’s Champions find themselves standing alone. It may be painful, but a true champion can stand alone if he or she stands on the side of God’s truth. I had an email from a Christian teenager this week who said she has debated that abortion is wrong, and most of her friends believe just the opposite. I wrote back and told her that if she was the only one standing for truth, then she was still in the right.

The Bible says, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then ...” (Ephesians 6:13-14)

We don’t have to make up truth; we only need to stand on God’s truth. What is truth? Jesus said in John 17 that God’s Word is truth. Jesus was the Word made flesh, so that’s why He could claim, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) Standing on God’s truth simply means that we stand firm in our personal relationship with Jesus. As the wonderful hymn says, “My Hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame; but wholly lean on Jesus’ name! On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is shifting sand; all other ground is sinking sand.” (Words by Edward Mote, 1834)

Let me ask you two personal questions: (1) Like Micaiah, are you willing to stand up and speak God’s truth in love? (2) Are you willing to stand on God’s truth even if you’re the ONLY one standing? If you can answer yes to both those questions, then you should carefully consider this next lesson:

3. STAND STRONG! A CHAMPION WHO SPEAKS THE TRUTH CAN EXPECT TO BE ATTACKED

We’ve all heard the expression, “the truth hurts.” But it’s also true that sometimes when you speak the truth, you *get* hurt. Micaiah got a bloody nose and prison time for speaking the truth! Don’t be surprised when you’re attacked for standing up for truth. Jesus promised us that it would happen. He said, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own ... but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19)

Martin Luther was a German Catholic monk who started reading his Bible and compared it to the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, such as the selling of indulgences (these were like “get out of hell free cards” the Catholic church would give to large donors.) In 1517 he hammered a paper listing 95 problems he had with Catholic doctrine to the Castle church door in Wittenberg. He dared to challenge the authority of the Pope and claimed the Bible is God’s final authority. He believed in justification by faith, that salvation was a free gift of grace, and in the priesthood of all believers. Luther was put on trial for heresy at Worms (pronounced Vorms) in 1521 with Emperor Charles V presiding. Luther’s writings were spread out on a table and he was commanded to renounce his heresy. His reply was: “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” He was found guilty of heresy and was declared an outlaw. German citizens were forbidden to give him food or shelter, and anyone could kill him without penalty. But friends rescued him and hid him in Wartburg Castle for a year where, in privacy he translated the New Testament into German. Before his trial a Catholic priest had warned him, “The whole world is against you.” To which Luther responded, “Then I’m against the whole world.” That sounds like a true Champion who can stand alone—even when under attack!

4. STAND TOGETHER! A CHAMPION’S FULL REWARD DOESN’T COME IN THIS LIFE

Our champion, Micaiah, didn’t receive an immediate reward for speaking the truth—in fact; he landed in jail with only bread and water. We never hear from him again, so we don’t know if he died in prison, or if he was released. Ahab’s son Ahaziah became the next King, and the Bible says he provoked the Lord to anger, just as his father did. So, I’m sure he didn’t like Micaiah any more than his father had. But the lesson we learn is that God’s champions don’t have to receive a reward in this life. When we stand up for truth, and stand alone, and stand strong, our true reward will come in the next life.

Actually, I think Micaiah IS mentioned again in the Bible, just not by name. In the Hebrews 11, we find a Roll Call of Faith. All the well-known Champions for God are mentioned by name—Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samson, and David are mentioned. Then in the last part of that chapter we read a summary statement about the lesser known Champions. I believe our prophet with the bloody nose is included in this verse. “... Others braved abuse and whips, and, yes, chains and dungeons. We have stories of those who were stoned, sawed in two, murdered in cold blood; ...the world didn’t deserve them! ... Not one of these people, even though their lives of faith were exemplary, got their hands on what was promised. God had a better plan for us: that their faith and our faith would come together to make one completed whole, their lives of faith not

complete apart from ours.” (Hebrews 11:38-40 *The Message*)

Notice it says that none of them have already received God’s promise—they’re waiting on us. It says their faith and our faith will come together to make one completed whole. That means all of God’s Champions who have died are in heaven, and they’re crowded on the medal stand waiting on us. Have you noticed some of the Olympic medals are given to individuals, and some are given to teams? I loved seeing the U.S. Women’s Basketball team stand together and all receive gold medals for their victory. In the same way, in heaven, every champion of God will stand together with all the other Champions of God and we’ll receive rewards from Jesus.

CONCLUSION

In 1936 Adolph Hitler attempted to use the 1936 Berlin Olympics as a platform to promote Nazism and Aryan superiority. The Olympics were held on the verge of World War II, and the city and stadium was covered with red and black swastikas flying everywhere. German soldiers goose-stepped and saluted the ever-present, posturing Hitler.

However, by the time the Olympics were over, Jesse Owens, an African-American son of an Alabama sharecropper had crushed Hitler’s myth of racial superiority. He stood for truth, stood alone, and stood strong just like Micaiah. Owens won five gold medals. In addition, he humiliated Hitler through a brief but unique friendship with a Nazi poster boy.

After a stellar track career at Ohio State, Owens arrived at the Berlin Olympics facing intense opposition because of his skin color. In Germany, Nazis portrayed Negroes as inferior and ridiculed the U.S.A. for relying on what they called “black auxiliaries.” One German official even criticized the U.S. for allowing “non-humans, like Owens and other Negro athletes” to compete.

Owens, a quiet, humble man, accepted it all with dignity.

During the trials for the long-jump, Owens came dangerously close to not qualifying. He fouled on his first two jumps, and had only one jump left to qualify for the finals. It was at this point that Luz Long; a tall, blue-eyed, blonde German long jumper stepped in and introduced himself to Owens. Long was Germany’s best and was expected to win the gold, with Owens being his stiffest competition. Luz Long suggested that Owens make a mark several inches short of the takeoff board and jump from there to be safe. Owens took his advice and easily qualified. He went on to win the gold medal in the long jump and Luz Long took the silver. Long was the first to embrace Owens and congratulate him on his win. There’s a famous picture of Jesse Owens on the medal stand with Luz Long behind him, and it looks as if the German is saluting his new friend, Jesse Owens.

Later Owens would comment: “It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler. You can melt down all the medals and cups I have and they wouldn’t be a plating on the 24-karat friendship I felt for Luz Long at that moment. Hitler must have gone crazy watching us embrace. The sad part of the story is I never saw Long again. He was killed in World War II.”

Owens returned to America as a hero, but he still wasn't exempt from the racial discrimination in his home country. He received a ticker-tape parade through the streets of New York City, and there was a reception held in his honor at the top of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. However, in a sad ironic twist to his story, this “hero” was forced to ride the freight elevator to attend his own reception that evening.

Lucrative sports endorsements were rare during the Depression and Owens struggled to have enough money to eat. He resorted to participating in events like racing against horses and dogs. He later said, “People said it was degrading for an Olympic champion to run against a horse, but was I supposed to do? I had four gold medals, but you can't eat four gold medals.”

It wasn't until the 1950s that Owens attained financial security by becoming a public speaker for corporations at public relations events. Owens died at the age of 66 in Tucson, Arizona in 1980.

His success in the 1936 Olympics far surpassed the impact of simply winning a race or jumping the farthest. His masterful performance was a political and racial statement heard around the world. Finally, ten years after his death in 1990, our country gave Jesse Owens a fitting reward for what he really accomplished. President George H. Bush posthumously awarded Owens the Congressional Medal of Honor, deeming his accomplishments, “an unrivaled athletic triumph, but more than that, a triumph for all humanity.”

What a beautiful picture that is of the Christian life. All the medals and rewards we receive in this life are nothing compared to the one we'll receive posthumously—when we are in heaven and we join all the others who've gone on before us. They're waiting for us, and their reward won't be complete without us. But one day we'll stand before Jesus and hear the applause of the nail-scarred hands and we'll hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” He'll pass out the garland crowns of a victor, and then we'll lay those crowns at His nail-pierced feet. That should be enough motivation for us to be like Micaiah and stand for God's truth. Even if no one stands with us now, we'll stand together with all the faithful on heaven's medal stand!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes