

1 Samuel 17:32-49

The Battle is the Lords

16th February 2014

Today we look at one of the most well known and best loved stories in the bible that still evokes a romance in our world today as we enjoy those moments when the little guy overcomes the big bully, when the insignificant team produces a giant-killing act over the rich, well supported team. When anyone mentions David and Goliath everyone (even those who've never read the bible) sense what it means. So this morning lets be careful the romance doesn't get in the way of the key and fundamental message the writer of this passage is really providing.

As we look at this passage we discover Goliath this huge giant of a man from a place called Gath - the hero of the Philistines. But his big mistake is that he dishonours God! We also discover David - this little chap who only turned up to give his brothers a packed lunch. But look at how it then turns out - David honours God with resolute faith and trust and is handed victory.

So as we march on to look closer at this passage I've broken things down into three chunks.

1. Background
2. The Strength of Faith
3. The Victory and Vision of Faith

1. Background

So let's set the scene – we are 12 to 14 miles west of Bethlehem in the Valley of Elath. On a hill on one side of the valley stands the army of the Philistines while on the other side stands the army of the Israelites. In the middle (the valley floor) is 'no-man's land'. And it there David and Goliath meet.

Earlier in 1 Samuel 17 we discover Goliath was 9' 6" tall, he wore about 126 pounds of armour and wielded a spear with a 15 to 16 pound iron head. Look at verses 8 to 10 and hear him bellow "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. ⁹ If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." "This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." No one has any trouble hearing him. Saul and Israel are both impressed and depressed as verse 11 tells us: On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified. I'm sure we'd feel exactly the same – dismayed and terrified. Fortunately we can turn back one chapter to 1 Samuel 16 and read about Samuel anointing David. Initially Samuel tries to pick Eliab (David's elder brother) instead of choosing David. Consequently the Lord says to him in verse 7 "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." As far as God's concerned size does not matter!

Also notice the providence of God at work in the build up to David slaying the giant Philistine. Look back at verses 17-23 of Chapter 17. David's Dad, Jesse arranges for David to take a packed lunch up to his brothers at the front line. These verses seem almost casual and yet as we read them we find ourselves following David step by step until he is at the front line and hears this brute called Goliath. The innocent delivery of a packed lunch was actually a link in a providential chain leading to a momentous moment in history in which God would be glorified. In verse 23 Goliath talked one time too many – and David heard.

2. The Strength of Faith

Take a look at verse 26: What is remarkable about this? It's the first time the bible records David actually speaking. So let's think about this. Do you know people who pretty much talk non-stop? Sadly Ruth will tell you I can sometimes fall into this category. But you know what I mean. Some people just have to speak even when it's something that needs no comment or requires no reaction. If we are on the receiving end of that situation what do we do? We probably just tune them out! We've all been there. I'm a bit worried you're now tuning out of this sermon! Anyway – now let's think of the opposite situation.

We've also all come across people (friends, relatives, work colleagues) who aren't loud or outspoken, who don't thrive on hearing themselves. When that person speaks in a meeting or discussion we sort of perk up. We anticipate their words will be weighty and important. That's why David's words in verse 26 are as heavy as Goliath. We hear David speak for the first time and he doesn't disappoint as he brings a whole new world view. Until this point everything has been pretty "godless". Then David's speak: "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the **living** God?" David stands up for God and says "who is this bloke who is mocking the ranks of the **living** God?"

Theologian Dale Ralph Davis comments: "If God is so identified with Israel, do you think he is indifferent towards such slurs on his reputation? Do you expect a living God to allow an uncircumcised Philistine to trample his name in military and theological mud? Israel thought the Philistine invulnerable; for David he was only uncircumcised. A living God gives a whole new view of things".

David's strength of faith is fantastic. It shows what happens when we recognise our living God is actually **living**! The tragedy is that were someone to hear our thoughts and words in our dangers and troubles they would never guess that we had a **living** God.

And so we move towards this time when David is promoted from being the pizza delivery boy to the point where he becomes the person God appoints to do battle with Goliath. Notice: it doesn't just happen – first David has to get past his brother Eliab and then Saul, the Israelite king. In verse 28 we hear Eliab in typical older brother style say: "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle." David then gives a normal youngest-brother response: "Now what have I done?" "Can't I even speak?" Then David does verbal battle with Saul. Initially Saul says to David "no chance – you have got to be joking". But David driven on by his unshakable faith and his zeal to stand up for his living God explains what sheep have to do with Philistines. In verses 34 to 37 he points out that a shepherd lives with constant threat to his life and flock. It was not unusual for a lion or a bear to make off with one of David's sheep. But in that situation David would go after it, strike it and rescue the sheep from its mouth. And if it turned on

him, he collared it and struck it until he killed it. David says to Saul: Don't say I've no experience of war; striking down enemies is part of my job – it's just lions and bears rather than this arrogant Goliath chap. But note: David does not credit his escape from bears and lions due to luck or skill or bravery – what he is emphasising is the **Lord rescued him**. Look at V37: The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Looking back in faith enables him to look forward in faith: “**The Lord will rescue me** from the hand of this Philistine”. What the Lord has done in the wilderness of Judah (where David was a shepherd) he will do in the valley of Elah. There is a simple truth in this for us as Christians today. Our faith is sustained in the present as we remember God's provision in the past. The rich history of God's past blessings encourages faith in its current problem. So...what's your memory is like? Mine is pretty hopeless and yet even with a poor memory we can recognise times in the past when God has delivered us. Now apply a bit of logic – if God handled that situation, is he not adequate for this situation. Remember God's past deliverances. If like me you've got a poor memory invest in a diary and write some of this stuff down. Write down those answers to prayer. Over the last 18 months my daughter Lorna has written a weekly blog. It's now a treasure chest of how God has delivered and blessed her – what a wonderful tool to strengthen her faith going forward.

David will be delivered not because he has true grit but because he knows the true God. Circumstances vary, but God is the same whether among the sheep or in front of the Philistines.

3. The Victory and Vision of Faith

And so to the combat itself. In verses 41 to 44 Goliath dominates the scene. “The Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. ⁴² He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. ⁴³ He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ “Come here,” he said, “and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!” The Philistine this, the Philistine that, as if this bit of the passage trembles under Goliath's presence. Now let's compare this to David's speech in verses 45 to 47: “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. ⁴⁷ All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

David can more than match Goliath for spicy speech! David leaves us in no doubt what the headlines will be the next day. “There is a God, a real God, in Israel”. “The Lord Almighty, the God who Goliath ridiculed, shows what puny powers Goliath served”.

Notice: while Goliath comes with sword, spear and javelin God does not save by sword, spear or javelin. David overcame the Philistine with the sling and stone, there was no sword in David's hand. God gave victory through what the world regards as weakness. The theme of “weakness” builds all through chapter 17. All the important people regard David as weak. His brother Eliab tells him: “You're a pain”, Saul warns him “You're green”, and Goliath sneers “You're puny”. But David is the one God uses to deliver.

Nor does David have the right equipment: he refuses to be a little Goliath and lays aside Saul's armour and sword. Instead David demonstrates that God brings deliverance without the symbols of man's strength. What matters is not whether you have the best weapons but whether you have the real God. Your "inadequacy" may be precisely your qualification for serving God; for his strength shines most brightly behind the foreground of your weakness.

Remember what we witness here is Goliath mocking and insulting God. And everyone just stands back and let's him get on with it. Only David seems concerned to turn away this mockery and contempt of the Lord God Almighty. He recognises what's going on and he does something about it – he confronts and makes his point – first to Saul and then in verse 45 he stands up and makes his point directly to Goliath... "I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied".

So let's focus and share the vision of David's faith that keeps its eyes fixed on the honour of God and says: God's reputation is at stake; that matters to me; that matters enough to risk my life for it." Is this also our vision? What situations are there in our own lives where we see God's honour is at stake? Can we say that this matters to us more than our reputation or security? Even with situations that appear very insignificant to the dramatic scene of David and Goliath we can sometimes find it very difficult to uphold the honour of our God. So let me say again ... The driving force of this passage is the honour of God's name, his reputation, his glory. David is driven by a passion for the honour of God. But this passage isn't about the cleverness or bravery or courage of David. Rather it's about God adequacy in David's weakness. David refuses to steal the glory from God. Look at verse 37: The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." Look at verse 45: I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty.

So what's the point of this story of David and Goliath? It isn't that little people can do great things if only they'll try. It isn't that strong people can be overcome by weaker people who put their mind to it or who give it their all. No it's this: the battle is the LORD'S.

So to conclude: It's God who gives the victory, not the Israelites skill with sword and spear, not our skill trying to be a great evangelist or campaigner for social justice (although I'm not denying our efforts are important). Who will help us achieve our aims as a church? How are we going to win hearts for Christ? How are we going to convince people who are quite happy, thank you very much, that their lifestyle has a use-by date; that there will come a day when God will ask them to answer for the way they've responded to his Son, let alone the way they've obeyed his commandments? How are we going to grow a church through conversions? How are we going to help people grow in their faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ? Only by this means: by relying on the God of Israel, on the true and living God. He's the one who brings victory. He's the one who saves, not by sword or spear, but by his word proclaimed in the gospel, by his Spirit who fills each one of us just as he filled David. So when we come near to tell people about Jesus their spirits are touched by his presence. Our God is a great and mighty God. We fight the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this age, but we do it in his strength, knowing he will bring the victory and his word will not return to him empty.

Let's then be confident in fighting the battles we have to face as Christians in proclaiming the gospel wherever we are, knowing God is with us fighting alongside us, bringing people to salvation through the words we proclaim. For the battle is the LORD'S! Amen

