

Sermon 19: 1 Samuel 17: David and Goliath

OUTLINE

The fear of Israel
The faith of David
The fear of Saul
The faith of David

INTRODUCTION

David and Goliath is one of the best known stories in the bible, but what is it really all about? Some think that it is merely a rags to riches story about David the Shepherd who becomes king, and so we should all reach for our dreams. Others have applied it facing the giants in the your life, or standing up to bullies. The five stones of David that he took into battle are one of the most abused portions of scriptures made to represent any number of things. For example, David would have picked 5 smooth stones like river stones which had been eroded by water, like 5 principles that have been shaped by the Spirit. Five things to face your giants such as prayer, fasting, bible study, meditation and service. Or they could be the five points of Calvinism; or the five Solas. To come to such a familiar portion and get at the main message can be difficult when we have had so many wrong ways of looking at it.

My understanding of this text is that this chapter is here to unpack a big question that was raised in the last chapter. Saul was set aside for a man whose heart the Lord had seen and chosen. This chapter then puts on display David's heart. David is a man who believes in God, and so is zealous for His glory and trusts that God will act to fulfil His promises to Israel. David is a man who walks as if God is real. Certainly there will be things to imitate as we look at faith in action, but it is as David's heart after God's own heart is being put on display.

We will look at four things, we will look first at the fear of Israel in the face of Goliath and then the face of David; we will then look at the fear of Saul and then the faith of David again.

The fear of Israel

Our scene begins with the Philistines moving into Israelite territory. We find the two sides facing each other across a valley, v1-3. Goliath struts into the valley and utters his challenge of single combat, winner taking all. There is a lot of detail about his description, v4-7, 'And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. 5 He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. 7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him.' Standing over 9 feet Goliath is massive, the armour he is wearing weighs over 120 pounds, the head of his spear is 6 ½ kilos. Giantism and strength go hand in hand, Robert Wadlow, the tallest American on record could carry his father up the stairs at the age of 9. Goliath was obviously very intimidating and v11 records the effect, 'When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.'

Israel fearing giants, does this sound familiar to you? Our first reaction to any difficult situation is to resort to evaluations of fear not faith. We see size not sin as important. Remember back to when Israel wanted to enter the promised land. The 12 scouts saw giants in the land and Israel feared. This fear was a denial of God's strength and His promises to give Israel the land. This resulted in Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Please notice in v16 that Goliath came out and offered his challenge for 40 days, a detail alluding to this time in Israel's history. It was Caleb and Joshua alone, who counselled going against the giants in Canaan, they alone inherited the promised land and it was Caleb who upon entering the promised land 40 years later overcame giants to take Hebron. In this chapter we have the familiar themes of giants, fear and faith, but instead of Caleb we have David.

The faith of David

God's hero arrives on the scene not with the formal braggadocio and pomp of Goliath's announcement, but while running family errands. In God's providence it is as David is chatting with his brothers that Goliath comes out to give his daily challenge. Men are running away, people are speaking about the great reward the king will give to the man who beats Goliath, then David speaks for the first time, v26, 'And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"' At first blush his words look materialistic that he is as concerned about the reward as the man speaking in verse 25. However there are 3 clues as to his true meaning, firstly in the word reproach, the description uncircumcised Philistine, and the remark about defying the armies of the living God.

If Israel's armies are seen as weak then Israel's God is seen as weak, this mark against Israel's armies is in fact saying something about God which David cannot abide. So his comment on reproach is not merely being concerned about having a bad reputation for being wimps, but the way this reflects back on God. Secondly, David is very mindful of the religious position of Goliath, he is not a Jew, and he should not be in the land, he is an uncircumcised Philistine. He is one of the enemies who Israel is to drive out of the land, and this because God's judgement rests upon them. They are not the ones in covenant with God but Israel is. This defiance of God and His people by someone under God's judgement cannot be abided by David. Thirdly, David makes reference to the living God. God is not a dead idol like the Philistines worship. God is real, and God is not to be trifled with. God does judge, and He does act on behalf of His people. David has a firm conviction of this and must speak out against the Philistine who acts in denial of this. Not only that if we reread David's words in v26 you can hear the outrage at asking the question about what the reward is. I read the first question as restating it in an absurd manner as to ridicule it for being a wrong motivation. David is looking at God not at Goliath the walking fortress.

Let's look at the reaction to David.

The fear of Saul

Saul hears about David's outrage and sends for him. V32, 'And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.'" Saul like everyone else around him is focused on Goliath not God, on who is tallest not on who is under God's judgement on account of sin. V33, 'And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth.'" In this section we have 2 attitudes in response to David outlined.

Firstly, there is Eliab's, the older brother's point of view, v28-29, 'Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." 29 And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?"' Eliab can't hear David's faith or theological point, he can only hear him through his preconceived notions of what he knows of David growing up. His zeal for God's glory and desire to see God vindicated is misunderstood as warmongering and a desire for conflict.

Secondly, when Saul looks at David he sees a nothing, a youth who is unskilled. So David has to argue the case with Saul. David gives examples of how God has already helped him against lions and bears, v37, 'And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"' David's speech reveals a man who has walked with God and has tested Him, one who has seen God's goodness and has a storage drive with memories to draw on for faith. Saul allows David to go, but not without first loading him up with all the impressive trappings of armour that they have seen on someone like Goliath, v38-39. But they don't fit and David resorts to his shepherd's equipment. Saul had fallen into the typical trap of thinking that those with the biggest guns will win. David is thinking about God as the one who gives the victory.

The faith of David

So David goes out to meet Goliath. The war of words is given more air time than the actual battle. In the Hebrew we have 63 words for David's speech but only 36 for the killing of Goliath. V45-48, 'Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with 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. 46 This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."

Notice where David's faith is not and where he sees Goliath placing his faith. David speaks about the weapons that Goliath has, as impressive as they are they are useless against the power of God. David comes in God's name, the God of Israel's armies whom Goliath has resisted and mocked. David declares that Goliath will be defeated, not to gain glory for David but that God's name will be known, and that the people watching would learn the lesson that God does not save by armies and battles and the arm of flesh. But it is God that gives the victory. Here is the lesson. God is real, God does not need us, God will win, we need not fear.

The battle is swift, David runs in with no hesitation. He uses one stone to drop Goliath and then uses Goliath's own sword to behead him. This resulted in a rout of the Philistines who fled and were defeated by Israel. The chapter ends with Saul asking questions he should have already known the answer to. David has served him with music, but only now is Saul taking real attention of David.

When David went out to fight Goliath it was with faith in a God who wanted his name to be great in all the earth. Do you have this anger and this faith? Are you indignant that the

media portrays God as a genie who grants wishes, and not the omnipotent and holy God who deserves more worship than all the universe can eternally muster? Are you angry when the Church who is supposed to be Jesus body on earth, has taken those members and used them for feathering their own nests and getting fat instead of laying down their lives in love? Do you pray with David, 'rivers of water run down from my eyes for men do not keep your law'? Do you seek in the conversion of the lost the glorification of the cross and of God, as another knee bows in allegiance and another heart joins the chorus of praise that is still not loud enough to do service to the greatness of our God? And what about your faith? Are you putting your money and body on the line in order to see God glorified in the salvation of sinners? David did. Do you believe that God is seeking his own glory and will answer your prayers, strengthen your efforts, and bless your sacrifice to those ends? David did, he believed that God would kill Goliath because he was a hindrance to his glory, an insult to his reality, an inconsistency with his promises. This is the anger and the faith that a heart after God's own heart has.