

Goliath Defeated

Scripture: I Samuel 17:1-54

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People of God: It's one of the longest stories told in the Bible. It's a familiar story, a favorite of children, though it's not really a kid's story. It's a dramatic story, whose ending turns things upside down—a young boy, with just a sling shot, brings down a mighty warrior, armed to the teeth.

But what's so important about this story that so much space is given to it? What kind of a battle is described here? Why is victory so important? What does this story have to teach us about the spiritual battle we are engaged in today, as God's people face forces of sin and evil?

David versus Goliath. That's how we usually describe this story. That's understandable, given how these two characters are described and contrasted in these verses.

On the one hand, we have Goliath. His physical appearance is described in verses 4 through 7. It's very rare in the Bible, for a person to be described in such detail, but here we are told what Goliath looked like. He was a warrior machine. There was first of all his height. Standing nine feet tall, he dominated all others. His armor was made of bronze, the strongest metal then known. Its weight would have required enormous strength. His weapons could have cut down a whole group of soldiers, let alone one unprotected individual. He was the invincible fighting machine, whose threatening voice caused his foes to shrink back in fear.

On the other hand, we have David. A young man; or as both Saul and Goliath describe him: just a boy. He was too young to have enlisted in the army. All what he was good for was to be an errand-boy for his father, bringing food to his older brothers. When Saul tried to put his armor on David, David couldn't even walk around with them. He tripped over them. And so what David brings to the battlefield is only his staff and his sling.

David versus Goliath. You couldn't ask for a greater contrast in

figures. But this is more than just a personal battle. This fight takes place as the centerpiece of the war between the Philistines and the Israelites. This is not David versus Goliath; it is Philistine against Israelite. It's interesting to note that the narrator uses the name Goliath only a few times. Most of the time he is simply referred to as the Philistine. That's who Goliath represents.

During this period of history, the Philistines were the greatest threat to the nation of Israel. They lived to the west, along the Mediterranean Sea. They were technologically superior, having weapons the people of Israel did not have. Now the two armies of the two nations were gathered together. The one army on one hill, the other on the opposite hill, with the valley between as the battlefield.

In this confrontation, the Philistines are confident. They are sure of themselves. They are convinced that with Goliath, they will win the battle. They are certain of victory. On the other hand, the Israelites shrink back in fear. They stay in their camp in shame. They are helpless in answering the challenge of Goliath. No one dares go forward, not even king Saul, whose kingdom hangs in the balance.

David versus Goliath. No that's too narrow a view. The Philistines against the Israelites. That's better. But that too is still too narrow a view. Because this battle is a battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness; between the people of God and the people of the world; between those who were part of God's plan to reclaim his world for himself and those were in rebellion against the Lord and his way of doing things.

Goliath has what the NT will call the spirit of antichrist. He seeks to crush God's people, to lead them back into slavery, as in the days of Egypt. He curses David by his false gods, assuming that the gods of the Philistines are greater than the God of Israel. And so ultimately the honor of God is at stake here.

But the condition of God's people was such that they were in no condition to defeat this spiritual enemy. They had lost all sight of the perspective in which they were to view this battle. They just thought of it in terms of military might. They forgot the Lord and his power and his might. No wonder, they were afraid.

The reason for this pitiful condition lies squarely with their leader--king Saul. Saul was God's anointed King to rule on his behalf. He should have been to the foreground in the defense of God's kingdom. But instead, he is in the background. He's hiding in his tent when he should have been on the battle line. He offers a bribe to find a warrior who would dare tackle Goliath. He offers wealth, tax exemptions and even his own daughter to the lucky winner. But no one dares come forward.

Why? Because the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul. Saul had been disobedient to the Lord. He was unworthy to lead God's people. As a result, God's people are now threatened with defeat. It seems as if the forces of human rebellion and evil will have the upper hand.

But God does not leave his people to face their enemies powerless or without hope. God does not give up them despite the spiritual condition of Saul and the army. The Lord is unwilling to allow the gods of the Philistines to triumph over his people and over his name.

Instead, the Lord ensures the victory. The person the Lord uses is David. David is now his chosen representative. He has been anointed to lead the people. Now David is used by God to deliver the people from the hands of their enemies.

It is David who reminds the people what the central issue is all about. He does so why he asks the crucial question in verse 26: *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?* These words are at the heart of the chapter. They are the center around which the action takes place. With these words, David states plainly what is at stake.

God's people are being disgraced by the insults and taunts spoken by Goliath. They are being dragged through the mud. They are being shamed and humiliated. And by whom? This uncircumcised Philistine. This unbeliever. This person who stands outside of the covenant community, who does not bear the mark of belonging to God. This ungodly person is defying the armies of the living God. Therefore, it is God himself, his name and his reputation, who is being insulted and mocked.

David reinforces this point when talking to Saul. Saul at first tried to persuade David not to fight Goliath. Saul looked at the issue only from an earthly point of view. You are only a boy; he's been a fighting machine for a long time. But David objects. He has a source of strength that this heathen does not have. He has the Lord to deliver him. Saul had forgotten that the Lord was on their side. No wonder they were so discouraged and dispirited.

But even when Saul allows David to go, saying, "the Lord be with you", Saul doesn't get the point. He tries to equip David with the same equipment as Goliath. But it doesn't work. Because it's not military might that will win the day, it will be because the Lord is with him.

That's the message David brings to Goliath when they approach in battle. When Goliath hurls insults towards David and boasts in what he will do to the body of David, David counters with a warning: *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 defiled. David comes in the name of the Lord Almighty. Many years earlier, Pharaoh learned about the power in the name of the Lord. Now Goliath will find out. What Goliath boasted he would do to David will actually happen to him. Goliath and the Philistines will be defeated.

Why? David says: *the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.* The triumph of David over Goliath was not a personal victory, for his own glory. It was not national victory, for Israel's own economic welfare. It was a victory of the Lord, for his glory. His name is advanced. The world again is reminded of who is control of the nations. Of who is setting the agenda. Of whose kingdom will triumph.

Not only that, David adds, *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 you all into our hands.* The reason why the people of Israel were disheartened was because they sought to fight the forces of the world at the same level of the world. Saul tried to rely on his own military strength rather than rely on God's strength. But here, God's people are reminded the battle is the Lord's.

In this conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God, the Lord raised up his anointed servant to ensure the defeat of those enemies seeking to crush the establishment of God's kingdom. In this case, the Lord used his servant David. David here points ahead to that other anointed servant of the Lord--Jesus, who would once and for all defeat the enemies of the Lord.

The means by which Jesus would accomplish this great victory was not through the means that the world might use. Jesus didn't use an army, but through his own death on the cross.

The battle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God continues. The forces opposed to God taunt the people of God, the church. They threaten to overwhelm the church, to make the church just like the world. At times these threats are overt, as in times of persecution. At other times, these threats are more subtle, where the world slowly tries to undermine the uniqueness of God's people. The world lays before us many traps to ensnare us so that we end up serving the pursuits of the world rather than the goals of God's kingdom.

The "uncircumcised Philistines" surround us. Many of them are very nice people, whose indifference to God, however, challenges our insistence of the priority of God and his kingdom. Many of them lead lives that are contrary to God's law and seem not to be unduly affected by that; making it

more difficult for us to walk according to the principles of God's law. And yes there are those who are hostile to the gospel and they can make life miserable for us. The spirit of Goliath, the spirit of the antichrist, is alive and well in our culture.

How do we react? Are we even aware of the threat posed by the “uncircumcised Philistines?” Do we recognize the Goliath’s in our lives? Often, they are not as large and obvious a threat as in our story, but they can be as deadly. How do you react?

Do you shrink back in fear? Do you wonder whether the faith is still worth fighting for? Do you still dare to take a stand for Jesus? Or, perhaps are you even tempted to join the other side, or at least try to play both sides? Is the battle even worth it?

But the church does not have to retreat in fear and dread. She does not have to be afraid of engaging the enemies of God. Believers do not have to abandon the public square, leaving the debates about justice and social policies to those without regard to God. The church may be out numbered. She may not have the resources or the financial clout as other institutions. She may be ignored and even despised by the centers of power. But she has the anointed servant--the descendent of David, Jesus Christ, who through his death and resurrection has guaranteed the victory.

And we are called to follow Jesus into battle. Not with the weapons of the world. But with the weapons of the kingdom--God's Word and God's Spirit. Those are our stones—prayer, worship, Scripture, the Spirit. And we head into battle, with a desire to love our neighbor as ourselves, with a determination to see that justice is done and evil is overcome, with a sense of compassion for those who are lost and hurting.

And so, are you willing to take a stand for Jesus? Are you willing to follow him into spiritual battle against the forces of sin and evil? Are you willing to proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord? In his name, we go forth. The battle is his and he has won the victory. Amen.