

David and Goliath

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[0 : 00] This is the AM service on January the 4th, 1998. The preacher is Dr. Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled David and Goliath and is from 1 Samuel chapter 17. Well, they say that sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.

That's what we were taught to say at school when we were confronted by some bully calling us names. And sometimes you hear it said about David and Goliath that it's a story about dealing with bullies.

That's one way it's sometimes taught to children. Goliath is the archetypal bully, a great big oaf of a man. And he taunts Israel, he taunts David, he calls them names, but in the end he's slain by stones.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. So, read David and Goliath and don't ever be afraid of bullies. I'm sure that each one of you, even if only here for the first time, know something of the story of David and Goliath.

[1 : 25] It's one of the best-known stories in the Bible and a children's favourite. And yet how often is it properly understood? It seems to me that it's a story that's very easy to draw out some sort of trite point without understanding the profound message of the story.

It's not really about bullies. Sometimes we hear the story of David and Goliath as being about David's cleverness or his bravery, that brain is better than brawn because David used his mind and thought through a clever way to kill a giant.

Sometimes we hear it used to say that it's really a story about the triumph of the little person over the mighty person or the mighty institution or a government or something like that. Sometimes the story is used to argue that spiritual armour is more important than physical armour.

Goliath had all sorts of physical armour on him and yet really it's the spiritual armour of God that matters. But those sorts of explanations fail to do justice to what David and Goliath is all about. It's not about bullies, bravery or armour. It is about the honour of God in the world. Goliath was a giant, a ferocious foe, nine and a half feet tall, six cubits and a span.

[2 : 45] He was the Philistine champion, their great fighter and so convinced were they by his invincibility that they sent forward this one man to challenge any Israelite to a duel and to suggest that the victor of the duel would represent the victorious country.

Israel or Philistia. His armour was enormous and heavy. The weight we're given here is not in our modern metric terms. It's 57 kilos.

He would have had trouble flying interstate or overseas because it's nearly three times the weight you're allowed to carry on an airplane. Goliath comes out with taunts and offers a duel to any Israelite man who would take him up.

And no wonder Israel was terrified. Day after day Goliath would come forth and issue his challenge and day after day the challenge was refused by the people of Israel.

The description of Goliath at the beginning of chapter 17 of 1 Samuel is meant to fill us with some fear and terror. He's an overawing type of character, a formidable foe.

[3 : 55] And in marked contrast to him is David. The description of Goliath is one of might. The description of David is one of something that's not very formidable at all.

He's the youngest son of eight boys. Still a youth, probably a teenager. He's a shepherd boy who looks after sheep and lambs and cattle and so on.

The reason he comes into the story is because he's running errands for his father. Three older brothers are fighting in Israel's army. His father Jesse is 12 to 14 miles away and sends him on a message with some food because the families would have to provide food for soldiers in the army and to find out how the war is going against the Philistines.

So David obeys his father's instructions and heads off to the battlefield to feed his brothers and to get a message. When Goliath is on the scene, what is needed to fight against him is a man. And the word man, a simple word, occurs each time there is a consideration about who will fight against Goliath. So Goliath, when he comes out and issues his challenge each day, calls for a man to fight against him.

[5 : 09] The Israelites, in their fear, spoke amongst themselves about the need for a man to oppose Goliath. The king had issued a reward for the man who would fight against Goliath and kill him.

The reward was wealth, the king's daughter in marriage, and also freedom. Probably freedom to travel in the land and possibly also freedom from taxation.

But at each point, it is a man that is expected. When David comes on the scene, it is clear that he is not a man. The king, when David confronts the king, calls him just a boy.

And David's youth, his boyhood, if you like, is very much emphasised in the story. He is the most unlikely hero. Never called a man.

Always a boy or youth. But maybe that is part of the appeal of this story. He is very clearly the underdog. And yet in the end, of course, he is victorious over the mighty, seemingly invincible champion.

[6 : 20] Australians like the underdogs to get up and win. Maybe that is why this story has appeal for us. But the key to David's success is not the fact that he's an underdog.

It's not the fact that he was skilled with a stone and a slingshot. It isn't that he was clever or brave or would stand up to bullies. The key to David's success is found in the words that he speaks.

And in the course of the story throughout the chapter, David speaks three times. The first speech is to his fellow Israelites. He's arrived on the scene, carrying out his father's command to bring the food for his brothers and to go to the war front to find out how it's going.

He comes and leaves the food, presumably at some quartermaster store, and then goes up to his brothers. And he overhears the Israelites speaking, afraid about Goliath. And David speaks just one verse.

He says to the men who are 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?

[7 : 37] Goliath is treated with contempt in those words by David. He's not mentioned by name, just this Philistine, this uncircumcised Philistine. Uncircumcised because Israelites, an Israelite man, were circumcised.

And so the uncircumcision is a sign of disdain, really, for the opposition, for the Gentiles, the non-Jews, the non-people of God. Goliath is just an enemy.

He doesn't belong to God. That's the description that David uses in those words. But also the key to David's perception of Goliath, the giant, is that he is defying God, the living God.

It's not just that he's defying Israel, the army of Israel, or the king, but he's defying God himself.

David is not motivated by the king's reward in all of the follows.

He's motivated by the man who defies God. He wants to see that man have an end put to him. But David's words here show us one of the undercurrents of this story.

[8 : 49] For the story of David and Goliath is a story told against the people of God, that is, the nation of Israel. For David's words, in part, are a mockery of the fear of his fellow Israelites.

Let me explain how the story shows this. The Philistines were a long-standing enemy of Israel. And the setting, we're told, at the beginning of the chapter is a place called Soko.

Not a very important place in ancient Israel, but the key to it is that it's in Israel's territory. It shows that Israel has been failing to keep the land that God had given them. They had allowed the enemy, the Philistines, to make incursions into their land.

And indeed, they're coming fairly much into the land. Soko is only 12 to 14 miles from Bethlehem, which is where David is from. So the Philistines, the enemy of God's people, are encroaching upon their land.

Traditionally, the Philistines lived in the coastal plain, the strip of land along the Mediterranean, similar to today's Gaza Strip. The next strip of land in are low-lying hills.

[9 : 55] That's where this battle is being fought. And then Israel's secure land was in the higher, more rugged country. But the Philistines are making incursions. And David mocks their fear when

he says to them, the fellow Israelites that he's standing with, who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God.

In a sense, he's rebuking his fellow Israelites for being afraid of a Gentile, being afraid of an uncircumcised man who defies God. He's implying to his fellow Israelites that they have forgotten God.

They've forgotten the power of God, that their God is a living God, not an idol made of human hands, but a real and living God. They've also forgotten the power of God in their past history. 400 years before, under Joshua's leadership, God had conquered the inhabitants of the land, which included many giants, we're told. God had done that. But now, 400 years later, the people of Israel have not learned their lesson of history.

They've forgotten what God has done in the past. And now they're afraid of one giant in their land. David is mocking their fear. That's seen even more in the response of David's brother Eliab, one of his older brothers who's fighting in the Israelite army, speaks to David in response to David's words and says to him, Why have you come down?

[11 : 20] With whom have you left your few sheep in the wilderness? What a patronising thing for an older brother to say to a younger brother, typical of every family probably. Go back and look after your own little lambs, little boy.

I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down just to see the battle. Like any boy may be interested in seeing a good old stouh, that's what he thinks David has come to see.

He thinks he's all full of words, but no significance. Eliab, I think, characterises what Israel was like. They refused to consider God in their equation.

He's unable to see the truth of David's words. He thinks David is just being childish. But of course the irony is that the opposite is true. David's words are full of truth.

His heart is not evil, as his brother thinks, but rather full of good after God. David, in these words, has acknowledged that his God is a living God.

[12 : 23] And therefore when he assesses the situation, he doesn't see it through purely human eyes. But he recognises that because God is a living God, Goliath the giant is no opposition for his God at all.

And in saying these words, he rebukes the fear of his fellow Israelites. A reminder to us, I guess, that in all our assessment of our world, our world's needs, our own troubles in our own lives, we ought always to reckon with God.

David's second speech is to the king. The report of David's words to his brothers and the fellow Israelites has been taken to the king. So the king asks for David to be brought to him to find out whether this is a real challenge to Goliath or not.

David comes to the king in verse 32. And David says the first words that are recorded here, which may suggest that he's taking the initiative with the king, that the king is losing control.

David said, let no one's heart fall because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine. Again, a derogatory way of describing Goliath.

[13 : 34] Well, the king is rather bemused by David's offer. He says to him, you're not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him for you are just a boy and he has been a warrior from his youth.

David replies to the king's put down of him by giving him his CV, his curriculum vitae. So he says to the king, your servant used to keep sheep for his father.

And whenever a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth. And if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down and kill it.

Your servant has killed both lions and bears. That's a fairly impressive record for a young teenage shepherd boy. But it's not an arrogant boast about his own ability either.

For his next words make it clear where he places his confidence. Not in David's own ability to kill lions and bears, but a confidence placed in God.

[14 : 38] So he goes on to say, this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, the bears or lions, since he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will save me from the hand of this Philistine.

David acknowledges that his own success and skill against lions and bears derives from God delivering him. And he exercises that same confidence in God when he considers fighting against the giant Goliath.

Without God's help, David's own skill, experience, and ability count for very little. But he places his confidence in God. It doesn't mean he sits down and lets God do it, but rather he exercises every inch of experience and ability he can.

But his reliance is on God, not himself. An important reminder to us in our lives as well, that our confidence must come from God, not ourselves.

It doesn't mean that we have no ability or skill or experience or ingenuity, but our confidence must be placed in God. Having placed our confidence in God, we then exercise every gift we can in his service.

[15 : 58] But David's words to the king are perhaps a bit two-edged as well. Just as his first speech was in a sense a critique of his fellow Israelites and the army, so his second speech, his words to the king, provide a bit of a cut against the king himself.

For it's David who mentions God's name against the king who is meant to be God's king and God's choice. No one else has called upon the name of the Lord.

Only David does. Only David has when he says to the king, it is the Lord, the name of God, who has delivered me from the lion and the bear and will do so here.

Another of the undercurrents in this story you see is that it's also a critique against the king, King Saul. Saul was Israel's first king and the reason he was chosen to be king was precisely to fight against the enemy threat of the Philistines and other countries around about.

Saul himself was chosen because he was a tall man, a fearsome man, not unlike Goliath, though probably not as tall. But yet the irony is he's a failing king.

[17 : 16] He's failed to do what he was chosen to do and that is to fight against the Philistines. Despite his own impressive height and stature, he's terrified of this giant Goliath. From this story of David and Goliath comes the ongoing thrust between David and Saul for the kingship.

It's clear from even before this incident that David will be king, that he's God's choice as king and yet Saul remains on the throne and David will not lift his hand against the king.

In the end, Saul comes to grief in a battle, not at David's hand and David then becomes king. But the story of David and Goliath has this undercurrent to it that it's an attack on the king, King Saul, who has failed to deliver what he was chosen to do as king.

David's third speech is to Goliath himself. Firstly, he spoke to his fellow Israelites, secondly to the king and now thirdly and finally to the giant himself. Saul takes up David's offer, he gives him his armour, David refuses the armour, it's too big and heavy for him.

Instead, he takes his stick, he takes his slingshot, he picks out five smooth stones from the Elah River and then goes off to battle, hopelessly underprepared it seems from human perspective to fight against this giant Goliath.

[18 : 45] When Goliath sees him coming, he expresses his utter disdain and contempt for such a challenge. So we read in verse 41, the Philistine came on and drew near to David with his shield bearer in front of him.

When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him. For he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. Come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.

Goliath curses David by his gods and David replies, You come to me with sword and spear and 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.

It's clearly a battle not between two men, not between two armies or two countries, but between gods. the nameless gods of the Philistines whom Goliath has used to curse David and the name of the Lord, the name by which and in which David goes to fight.

[20 : 14] For it is God who's been affronted by Goliath, not Israel, the king or the army, but God himself. And it is God's honour which is at stake in this battle.

For it is God's name that Goliath has brought into disrepute in his challenges and taunts. And David acts for the honour of God, not his own safety, his own security, nor for the reward of the king, but for the honour of God.

So David's third speech concludes with these words to Goliath. This very 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 Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand. David fights for the honour of the Lord. He fights so that the Israelites will know that God is God, a living and powerful God and he fights so that the world will know that God is a God, a living and powerful God.

It is the honour of God in the world that motivates David to fight against Goliath and it is the name of the Lord which brings him victory against such a giant.

[21 : 52] There is an important message I guess here for us that the honour of the Lord is something we ought to stand for and fight for when it is brought into disrepute.

In our day and age it is unlikely to be in a military battle and I don't think God calls us to military fighting as he did the Old Testament people of God but surely day by day we hear God's name being brought into disrepute last Easter day I went in the afternoon to the football match Jesus' name was mentioned more than it had been in church that morning every time I wanted to say in response is risen but I kept my mouth shut you don't have to go to a football match to hear that though do you each time we hear God's honour God's name being brought into disrepute through words through actions how do we respond what courage do we show why do we respond because we are offended or because God is offended David was prepared to risk his life for the honour of God maybe that's an example that we ought to be prepared to follow in the end of course David kills Goliath the giant defeated by the youth by the teenager the descriptions of the two make it clear that this is the most unlikely victory but it's not a fluke nor is it put down to David's ability skill ingenuity or cleverness or anything else it is God's victory as David said the battle is the Lord's and therefore the victory is the Lord's as well and so often God works in this way that he uses things that are weak to bring about his purposes because if he used a strong David a mighty David full of armour and swords and so on it would not be so clear that the victory was God's but by using a weak youth it is very clear that it is God who's brought the victory not David and that's one of the ways God continues to work in the world to use what is weak to shame the strong and the wise St Paul made the point in 1 Corinthians but of course the best example is not David but the cross what the world considers weak and futile and impotent is actually the strength of God for our salvation Stixton's stones may well have brought Goliath to the ground but in the end it was the name of God that killed him learned to be one that Caleb found the■ so Thank you.