

David | The Once and Future King

David and Goliath

First Samuel 17

8.22.21

We're looking at this history from the ancient world, the story of Israel's rise to power and the formation of the monarchy around 1000BC.

Within this history is found perhaps the most detailed biography from all antiquity: the life of David, the once and future king.

Today's episode is the best known of all the David narratives. To label a situation a "David and Goliath story" is almost universally recognized as describing an underdog's reversal of fortune.

If you know the general approach, we take to the Bible here at Park Road you won't expect this sermon to tell you how to defeat the giants in YOUR life... We're careful not to moralize the Bible's message...or turn the Bible into a life-hack or a series of "principles for successful living". We're supposed to see something bigger and grander here, something so truly majestic that it fires our imagination and helps us to see the larger Story that encompasses everything... the Story that swallows and transforms our own personal stories... but...

But DO we really have to choose...or SHOULD we? Is this story we teach our children and sometimes misuse (in a moralistic, motivational-speaker kind of way – "get out there and conquer!") is it ONLY an illustration of the Big Story or IS there some moral value to the story and, if so, what IS it and how do we follow it?

So, David and Goliath:

- 1) An Example to Direct Us
- 2) An Emblem to Delight Us
- 3) An Engine to Drive Us

This is part of the contrast we began to see two weeks ago. David is God's choice and Saul is the peoples' choice. They're different. Saul worked with donkeys and in time acted the part – stubborn and mean; David worked with sheep – he became tender and protective. He saw himself as a sheep with the Lord as his Shepherd (Psalm 23).

David played the harp for King Saul's violent mental unrest as David had played to calm the skittish sheep in the field. David was tender and protective and artistic. Saul was presidential – tall and strong. David was the forgotten runt – not the firstborn...but the eighth, overlooked, disrespected by his family.

Now the Philistine champion, “the strong man”, the representative of this persistent enemy of the Israelites, Goliath of Gath is mocking Saul and his armies. “Send me YOUR champion and if he beats me – YOU WIN...but if I beat him, WE WIN!”

Saul is desperate. He promises wealth and even the hand of his daughter – a bride! – to the man who will represent Israel and kill this mountain of a man, this Goliath of Gath... But there are NO takers because Goliath of Gath is a giant. He dresses in scale-armor (like an invincible dragon). His weapons are industrial strength – like a human tank!

But the quality in David that stands out as an example to us is... his... LUST for life...ZEAL.

As Saul and the troops and David’s own brothers look out on “the Valley of Decision” (Joel 3.14) and see this giant (could be 9 feet tall; LXX says 6’9”) and he’s mocking the troops and trash-talking and defying God, (v 11) “they were dismayed and greatly afraid”.

And we can only imagine as this mockery/trash-talk continues for 40 DAYS that the Israelites are demoralized and are contemplating being owned by their cruel enemies. Slavery awaits them! Frozen!

In contrast, David is that “put-me-in-the-game, Coach” guy. He runs. He rises early in the morning. He tends to his sheep and leaves them in qualified hands. He stows his baggage with the supply manager and again (22) “he ran to the battle line.”

When David sees the giant and hears news the Israelite warrior who defeats this giant will not only vindicate the Name of God and get honor among his countrymen and get tax-exempt status for his family and great wealth but ALSO will win the hand of a princess (Saul’s daughter) – become the King’s son-in-law.

When David hears this...he seems... baffled ...like why aren’t these troops JUMPING at this opportunity? He asks the troops: “Is this really the offer? Where’s the line; how do you apply? And they answer: “well, there are no applicants. Apparently, no one is worthy to open the book and breaks its seals (Rev 5) (but I’m getting ahead of myself).

The point is – when we tell our children or when we use this passage to teach people to be courageous... I’m not even sure that’s what David was. They say courage is when you’re afraid to do something but you do it any way.

But David doesn't seem afraid at all. It’s not really bravery in David... it’s a thirst for life... It’s a sense that life with God is a sacred adventure and God can be trusted because David has seen the trustworthiness of God: “YHWH who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, "Go, and may YHWH be with you."

Saul tries to put his own armor on the young man...because that's what you do. But David doesn't know how to fight that way (the conventional way) so he politely declines and picks up 5 smooth stones and he approaches the Philistine, who feels insulted by Israel sending a kid...and Goliath curses David but David gives it right back.

He boasts in YHWH – “you rely on your size and your equipment but the battle belongs to the LORD NOT to swords and spears!

So with apparent fearlessness and in total dependence on God, David (v. 48) “ran quickly to the battle line to meet the Philistine” and he commits this smooth stone to the LORD and lets it fly and it sank into the giant's forehead.

And because he had no sword, he uses the sword of Goliath of Gath and finished him off – severs the head and all the Philistines run and the Israelites are instantly lifted from their malaise and fear and despair. They rise up and shout and they chased the enemy all the way home and took all the plunder they could carry.

And finally David takes the head of the giant to Jerusalem... kind of a weird thing to do (whether it was then or years later we don't know). And the passage ends with Saul asking about David's family because Saul promised to relieve them from paying taxes.

Now, if we want to use David as a role model and follow his example... I'm ok with that...as long as we see that David was not a super-hero (isn't that the point?) David was the runt who believed God and had no sword. If David was special, it was because God made him special.

This is anything BUT a celebration of human will-power and determination. And the WAY we use David's example is ALL-IMPORTANT. David himself would NOT want us to focus on David...but before I talk about HOW to use this example...let me look at David as an EMBLEM.

The life of David is haunted. In virtually every scene there are sightings of another Anointed King...whispers...glimpses...symbols...reminders...promises of the One who would sit on David's throne and rule all creation.

In this valley of decision situated between two mountains (blessing and cursing – Deut 11.29 and the Valley of Decision – Joel 3.14) – a place that's consequential and that determines the course of our lives – two riders were approaching and the wind began to howl. Two Champions are pictured here. We meet them in the first pages of the Bible: the Seed of the Woman who will be bruised on the heel by the Seed of the Serpent... whose head will be crushed in battle.

Goliath wearing armor that looks like a serpent or a dragon represents his people. David represents God's people. David is an emblem of a greater Champion, Jesus Christ, the last

Adam, the representative of God's people is pictured here. He is the One worthy to open the Book and He is the Champion who lives, dies and rises in the place of all God's people in all ages.

He, Jesus Christ, is crucified outside Jerusalem on a hill called, Skull Hill. All four Gospels record that fact. Three of them name it in Hebrew – "Golgotha". The word looks a lot like a contraction of the words GOLIath and GATH –GOL-GATH-A... Is it possible that God planned for the head/skull of the Dragon-Man to be buried in Jerusalem reminding us that as David stood over the defeated Goliath so Jesus Christ would be lifted up over GOL-GATH-A and would crush the skull of the dragon (devil)? Why else are we told that weird fact that David brought the head of Goliath to Jerusalem?

And for slaying the Dragon with the Dragon's own sword – for defeating death BY DEATH, Jesus Christ, our Champion is declared "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." (Rev 5.12) And He wins a Bride – that's us.

"Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, mocking the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb 12.2) WE ARE HIS BRIDE; we are His joy and the reason He went to the Cross, to defeat death by death – He did it for US.

He was sent by the Father to ensure the welfare (shalom) of His brothers and to feed/refresh them (like David did) "He came to His own but His own did not receive Him" (John 1.10-13) – like David, so Jesus is ridiculed and rejected by His brothers (John 7.5) – the Stone the Builders rejected has become the Cornerstone (Ps 118.22ff).

And this is how we read the Bible. The Hebrew Bible – the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings are all about Him. There are flashes of Him and promises and symbols and signs and sightings of Jesus Christ everywhere you look in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis-Malachi) and we have to learn to read the Bible in this delightful way. The story of David and Goliath is so much more than a pep-talk of how we can go out and overcome the giants in our lives.

David IS an example (most of the time!) and we should all have the lust for life that he had – zeal to know God and running into each new adventure God has for us – trusting Him... But if we don't see the bigger picture in David's story we really miss out on the Main Thing.

In fact – the emblem is the engine for the following of the example (repeat!).

When we see and celebrate the pointers to Jesus in the David Story and the whole history leading to the Gospels THAT'S WHAT DRIVES US TO OBEY IN A NEW AND LIVING WAY.

We begin to see that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit He gives to everyone who BELIEVES – this was always God’s plan. God is not waiting for us to be good enough or determined enough.

That kind of striving – doing stuff to get God to like us and bless us – that leads to a slavish kind of fear. Instead He wants us to see, as David the believer saw, “The battle belongs to the LORD” (47).

And it's when we believe that because we see it ultimately in Jesus (and His championing us at Golgotha) – when we believe it that trust leads to a zeal for living and a lust for life.

Do you see yourself in the story of David and Goliath? Are you Goliath – relying on your own resources and opposing God, even mocking Him?

Are you Saul trying to do it the conventional religious way – one-size fits all (but it really doesn't fit at all)?

Are you David – a strong super-hero of the faith?

I think where most of us are ...in the bleachers. We’re the fearful troops, paralyzed by the scary stuff that’s happening in the world and in our own families and the pandemic and the world the flesh and the devil relentlessly opposing us.

I see those troops...as this super unlikely nobody walks out to defeat the Dragon man in his scale armor... Our Champion has no sword! There’s a lot of snickering...there’s a lot of fear. Slavery awaits.

And then as the Champion stops running and that sling goes round and round...faster and faster...every eye is fixed. Every mouth is closed.

All heads craning in a dizzy circular motion... and the stone flies through the air – total silence and this stupid gesture is the only thing between us and SLAVERY and death.

And then... the giant falls! It’s too good to be true and the whole crowd goes so loud – we erupt in tearful shouts of joy and relief! “The men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted and pursued the Philistines...” Zeal has returned!

Jesus Christ has done that for me! He is worthy... Jesus Christ our Champion! And to the degree that we see it and celebrate it and trust – that sense of relief then HIS victory brings us to our feet and we run into the Battle...with a lust for life – praise the Champion He is worthy!