

## 1 SAMUEL 17

### INTRODUCTION

This is probably one of the best known and best loved stories in the whole Bible and I have no doubt that if you have been a Christian for any length of time then you will have heard sermons on this story. Even if you have never heard anyone preach on it before you will have been taught it in Sunday School, if you went to one but the problem with this story is that most people miss the whole point of the story.

I have heard sermons about slaying our own Goliaths with God's stones of faith prayer etc. That is how this story is often taught in Sunday Schools but when we come to Scripture we must allow the point of the passage to speak to us and the point of this passage is not about slaying our own Goliaths whatever they may be. The key to understanding the passage is to notice that the word "defy" or "defied" appears six times in our passage (vs. 10; 25; 26 (twice); 36 and 45).

This word is used in relation to this brute of a man called Goliath and therefore Goliath is not just a giant from Philistia but he is a man who by his challenge to Israel is challenging and dishonouring Israel's God.

### 1. THE STORYLINE (vs. 1-25)

I do not want to remind you or deal with many of the details of the story for it is so well known that I would be telling you things you already know or can read for yourself and as you can see it's a long chapter and there is much material here that needs to be considered. So I will be picking the story up at verse 26 where David asks an important question because the question is a challenge to faith (v 26). Who will take up this challenge and remove the disgrace from Israel?

But before we look at this theme let me make a few observations on the story. First of all we must not miss the fact that Goliath is an impressive man; you have to stand in awe of this giant of a man when you think about his size, his protective armour, his weaponry and the weight of it (vs. 4-7). It's not hard to see an object 9' 6" high. He wore about 9 stone of armour and wielded a spear with an iron head which weighed just over a stone.

Then we must notice his challenge (vs. 8-10) and as he bellows out his challenge asking for a challenger to engage him in a single combat no one has any trouble hearing him. Saul and Israel were both impressed and depressed and the sight and sound of this monster terrified them (v 11). But interestingly in the previous chapter we all learnt a very important lesson about not looking and basing our judgement on outward appearances (16:7) and now that lesson is about to be put to the test at least as far as David was concerned. The text 16:7 applies to God's choice of a King but it also applies to Israel's enemies and to our enemies as well.

Had David learnt the lesson about not focusing on the outward appearance? Well we will see in a minute, but there is something else I want us to notice before we move on and look at the heart of the passage. From verses 12-23 we have a lengthy introduction of David into the situation; it instructs us about the Lord's providence in making sure David is in the right place at the right time to demonstrate his faith in slaying Goliath.

I want us to think about the structure of this chapter for a minute; just imagine you have never read this story before and you have no idea how it ends or what will happen. You read the opening 11 verses and see this heavily armoured superman; you listen to his "super words" and you watch Saul and Israel searching for the panic button. But then from v 12 onwards we are introduced to David and the story eventually brings David to the front line where he hears the dishonouring

chants of this giant Goliath. From David's and Jesse' point of view David was only going to serve his brothers who he expected to be engaged in battle by supplying them with food and he was serving his Father by bringing back a report about how the conflict was going (vs. 17-19).

It's amazing how God leads his people; everything in this journey for David was so natural and casual but it was God's providential leading for when Goliath issued yet another verbal challenge (v 23) this time David heard it and well we know the rest of the story.

But without David being on the front line he would never have heard the taunts of Goliath and so God's providential dealings made it all possible so that David in faith would take up that challenge and eventually slay Goliath and remove the shame that was upon God and his people. So often that is how God works in our lives we just happen to be in the right place at the right time in order to act in faith to bring honour to God and remove the disgrace that was upon God's people.

Let us look at the lessons and the prime lesson concerns the honour of God, but let me take the theme of David's faith in order to show us how faith is important in bringing honour to God.

## 2. THE VOICE OF FAITH (v 26)

The first part of the verse seems to indicate that David wants to know what was in it for him should he take the risk and meet this giant Goliath. But that was not his main concern for his main concern was that such a man should defy the armies of the living God. "Who does this man think he is challenging God and his people in this way?"

David is saying this man is mocking our God by challenging Israel, for God and his people are so closely linked that any challenge to God's people is a challenge to God himself. For the people of Israel they looked at the outward appearance and trembled they thought that he is a man who is simply unbeatable; he is the greatest. But David looks at Goliath and thinks "who does he think he is talking like that to God's people?"

Will God allow his name to be trampled in the mud by this uncircumcised Goliath? What made the difference in the assessment of the situation? Israel trembled while David says "who does he think he is?" The difference is faith in the living God, having a living God on your side makes all the difference to every situation. That is the lesson that we all need to learn we have a living God who is on our side. Sometimes the way we talk and the way we think you would think that we do not have a God at all. Whatever problem we face in life or whatever dilemma we encounter we must start with this fact that we have a living God who is on the side of his people. Of course knowing this is not a guarantee that every situation will work out as we hope or planned; for God's ways are often strange but it is the starting point of every problem.

If we are worried about the size of the church of Jesus Christ today and the disgrace this brings upon the name of our God, then we need to remind ourselves that we have a living God who is on our side. Likewise the way that the church's enemies use its smallness to mock God would be enough to make us afraid of the church's future except for the fact that we have a living God who is with us.

However the voice of faith will say to this world who do you think you are to defy the living God? Perhaps one reason the church is in the state that it is in is because we have lost sight of the living God and have given in to fear. Faith looks to God and affirms his greatness and acts accordingly as we will see from David's actions. Let us be convinced that we have a living God who is on the side of his church today and that truth will energise us into action on his behalf.

### 3. THE STIMULATION OF FAITH (vs. 34-37)

But when there is a man of faith who speaks words of faith then there is at least one voice that opposes such talk. In this case it is Eliab who vents his anger in a typical older brother way (v 28). David gives a normal younger brother response of “what have I done” (v 29). But David will not be put off by his older brother so he continues to speak to others about this tragic situation and Saul gets to hear about what David is saying and sends for him (vs. 29-32).

We have this conversation between Saul and David and it is David’s words that we want to focus on for David’s response to Saul’s negative comment (v 33) is a response of real active faith (vs. 34-37). David explains that he has been a shepherd looking after his Father’s sheep and a shepherd and his sheep live with the constant threat of attack from wild animals for it was not unusual for a lion or a bear to make off with one of David’s sheep.

In such cases David showed immense bravery and went after it and killed the wild animal and saved his sheep. Therefore David’s point is this; “don’t say I have no experience of killing enemies for slaying enemies is part and parcel of my job.” The only difference is that as a shepherd he had to kill wild animals; whereas in this case he will have to kill an arrogant giant. But that is what he must do and that is what will happen because this giant has defied the armies of the living God; he has made himself an enemy of God and his people (v 36). But who will kill this giant and bring about this victory for God’s people?

We are told in verse 37 that the same God who delivered David from the lion and bear will deliver him from the hand of the Philistine Goliath. David’s victories were not down to his own skill as a warrior or to pure good luck but it was God who delivered him. David looked back in faith and saw God’s hand at work in his life and that enabled him to look forward in faith and to speak words of faith God will deliver him from the hand of this Philistine (v 37).

What God has done in the past for David encourages him to believe that God is able to do it again in the future? Here is another lesson about faith; for faith is sustained in the present and for the present as it remembers the past and how God has dealt with us and indeed with his church throughout church history. The history of God’s goodness to his people in the past nurtures and encourages our faith in the present. If God is able to help God’s people through the various dilemma’s of the past including this one of Goliath then surely that same living God is able to handle our problems and dilemma’s in the present. Therefore we must read the Scriptures regularly in order to encourage our faith in the present. The Bible is full of God’s dealings with his people in the past and if He worked like that in the past then is He not able to come to our help in the present?

We also ought to read biographies of men and women of the past and how God came to their aid and how he acted in response to the faith shown. Read church history for whatever we face today will have been faced in the past by someone and that will stimulate and encourage our faith.

It is also good to keep written records of how God has dealt with us in the past for when faced with a present circumstance that requires faith or when faced with an uncertain future we can then look back and see how God has personally acted on our behalf and has come to our aid. I often wonder if our faith is so weak because we fail to stimulate it through the reading of Scripture and church history.

Do we fail to reflect upon the work of God in our own past and I don’t just mean his work of grace in conversion but his active work in our everyday lives. Let the past encourage our faith in the here and now and then like David let us act in faith in the knowledge that the God who has helped in

the past will come again to our side and help us in the present and in the future. David will be delivered from Goliath not because he is courageous or is a good warrior but simply because he knows the true God. Therefore spend your time wisely in getting to know the true living God so that we can act in faith when challenges face us.

Let us remember that although circumstances and problems change; God is the same and acts on behalf of his people therefore have faith in him and act in faith depending totally and only on him.

#### 4. THE VICTORY OF FAITH (vs. 41-57)

The final section of the chapter focus on the battle except there is not much of a battle. We have the taunts of Goliath and the cursing of David and his God and his threat and promise to kill David (vs. 41-44). Then we have David's speech (vs. 45-47), it is interesting that more space is given to David's speech than to the actual combat. In the Hebrew language David's speech takes 63 words whereas the combat takes only 36.

After all the verbal exchanges and the anticipation the knockout blow comes very quickly if it was a boxing match we would say that Goliath was knocked out in the first round. However we must not underestimate David's method of killing Goliath. I was amazed to read in preparation for this message that this stone that David fired would be two or three inches in diameter and when flung by an accomplished person a stone could reach speeds of 100 or even 150 miles per hour.

But David's speech gives us the meaning of this whole episode and it is on this that we must focus in order to get the message that God wants us to hear. The message is clear that David's victory will show the world that there is a God in Israel (v 46). God will show to Goliath and his god who has real power to deliver people. But how does God demonstrate his power to the world. He uses weak human instruments like David.

Goliath comes to David with sword, spear and javelin but David comes only in the name of the Lord almighty the God of Israel (v 45) and with his stones and sling. Under normal circumstances there was no contest a man like Goliath with his military hardware would defeat a man like David with his limited weaponry. But God gave the victory to David and he did it through what the world regards as weakness.

We see this throughout the chapter, everyone regards David as weak, Eliab saw him like that (v 28), Saul saw him as weak (v 33) Goliath sees him as a hopeless case (v 42) yet he is the one that God has chosen to deliver God's people and restore honour to God's great name.

David does not really have the right equipment for such a contest at least that is what everyone thought including Saul (v 38) but God uses what the world considers to be weak individuals who possess what they consider to be insufficient weaponry to bring victory over this giant Goliath. But this is how God works in our world; what matters in the work of God is not whether you have the best weapons but whether you have the true God on your side.

In fact our inadequacies are the qualifications that God needs in order to accomplish his victories through us. God's strength shines brightly through our weaknesses. That is how it is for the church of Jesus Christ today. The world considers us to be weak, there are not many of us if any of us who are considered to be great in the eyes of the world; none of us have any influence in Parliament; no one reads about us in the daily paper and no one is interested in what we say.

Yet we are the people that God uses in this world to serve him and to build his church. We likewise don't have weapons that the world considers to be powerful. We have the weapon of the

gospel message and the weapon of prayer and we have the weapon of faith but the world thinks nothing can be accomplished with these things. We need to be good communicators with big ideas and money if we are going to make an impact in this world. That is what the world thinks.

Yet God by his mighty power uses weak instruments who wield the weapons of prayer and faith to knock down strongholds and to accomplish his purposes within our world and as He does so; his power is clearly seen in our weakness. How can our church be built up? Only by the power of God alone; his power convicts and convinces sinners of the truth of the gospel and enables them to repent and believe.

He exercises his power through us as we pray and act in faith by the proclamation of his word and as we do so God's power accomplishes his purposes through us.

But as we conclude what is it that motivates David to act in faith. What motivates him to speak with the voice of faith and to stimulate his faith by remembering the past and what is it that enables David to act in faith so that God gains the victory? It is his concern for the glory of God. Only David it seems is concerned that God is being mocked and derided by Goliath. Only he is concerned enough to do something about it and act in faith. It's God's honour and reputation that inspires David to act.

That my dear friend is what will cause us to act, if we are not concerned about God's reputation then we will never speak words of faith or act out of faith. We will never take up the weapons of prayer and gospel proclamation unless we are concerned that our God is being derided today. We will never speak to anyone about their misuse of the Lord's name or about their sin unless we are concerned for the glory of God. David was concerned about God's reputation and acted in faith.

Are we concerned? Will we act? If we do act in faith then we can expect God to use us; weak though we are in order to accomplish his purposes and to bring honour to his great and wonderful name.

Amen