1 Samuel 17 (Read vv.3-11) “David & Goliath: Fear or Faith?”

Intro. Israel was in big trouble. The army of the Philistines had entered the land of Judea, bent on conquest. They had a champion warrior, a giant of a man who was taunting the armies of Israel, & Israel’s God. He issued a challenge to Israel to send out a man to fight him, with the winning side taking control of the other nation. All of Israel, including the king, was fearful. Not one in the army had enough courage to face Goliath. His taunting went on for 40 days (v.16).

Today the people of God continue to face spiritual enemies, bent on conquest. They want to expand the kingdom of darkness and send us into retreat. In our personal lives we face fearful & distressing problems, because we live in a fallen, sinful world. As we face our enemies & problems, I hope we will always remember the story of David & Goliath. It is one of the greatest examples of the victory of faith over the world’s might. It was a prelude to the victories of the Church over the might of the Roman Empire, & other powerful governments that have sought to destroy the Church. It is also a great pattern for the young especially. Young people should be inspired by the example of David who overcame, not because of his own strength, but because he put his trust in God. So I hope that every young person who hears this message will be inspired to stand up for God & righteousness in spite of your youthful age, & in spite of any opposition you face.

So as we face our own Goliaths of worldly opposition, or very difficult circumstances, let us face these with a similar faith in God, and not with fear as if God does not exist or care about us. Now I want to start off my sharing with you the fact that:

I. MANY FACE THEIR GOLIATHS WITH FEAR

One thing that stands out in this chapter is the great fear of Saul and His army. We read of their fear in v.11, “When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.” Likewise, in v.24 we read, “And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid.” Big, tall Saul was afraid right along with his army, though his height made him the best match for Goliath. His fear made him powerless. Since their leader was a coward before Goliath, we cannot expect his followers to be bold. This was part of Saul’s downward spiral after God rejected him as king due to his own rejection of God’s authority in his life.

Why were the king & Israel so afraid? Notice first of all:

A. The Challenger

1. His Great Size – It says in v.4 that his “height was six cubits and a span.” Goliath was truly a giant. He was about nine feet, nine inches tall. He was about four feet taller than I am. His height would strike terror in the hearts of his potential foes. Based on the weight of his armor and weapons, he must have also been very big and strong. Because of his size, he would have had a great advantage in a one-on-one fight.

2. His Great Armor – He was well protected. We read in vv.5-6, “He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was
five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had bronze armor on his legs….” His “coat of mail” literally had the look of the scales of a fish or serpent. His armor alone weighed about 125 pounds! That’s more than my entire body weight when I was a senior in high school! Very few Israelites had such armor. He also had a shield, as the last of v.7 indicates. With such protective armor, he would have been very difficult to defeat.

3. His Great Weapons – We read about them in vv.6-7. He had “…a bronze javelin between his shoulders. Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels….” That heavy spear had a head weighing as much as a fifteen-pound sledgehammer. Later in vv.45 & 51 we also read that he had a sword.

No wonder, humanly speaking, they were so afraid. He must have looked overpowering, even invincible.

B. The Challenge – We read in vv.8-10, “Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, ‘Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.’ And the Philistine said, ‘I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.’” The challenge of Goliath seemed like a good deal, at least for the Philistines. Only one from each side would fight to the death, and everyone else would not have to risk dying in battle. In exchange for life, the losing side would have to give up liberty, & many of their property rights.

Even so, the history of the world has seen many tyrants who offer life if we give up our liberty. When Patrick Henry faced a similar choice, he said, “Give me liberty, or give me death!”

Yet some people today have a different philosophy. They say, “Better red (communist) than dead.”

As we have seen from v.11, the effect of Goliath’s size, equipment, and his words was devastating. In v.16 we see that Goliath’s challenge went unanswered for 40 days. All were too afraid to step out to challenge Goliath. Even the King’s offer found in v.25 did not help. If anyone would defeat Goliath, he would receive riches, the king’s daughter in marriage, & his family would be exempt from taxes. Yet all were too afraid.

Just as fear made Saul & his men powerless, even so fear will make us powerless before our enemies & problems. We must recognize how great a problem fear is, and learn how to overcome our fears before we can overcome our problems.

The first step is to realize that fear indicates a lack of faith. Their eyes were on Goliath, and their ears heard his powerful voice, and God was not even in the picture, as far as they were concerned.

You remember the story of the storm at sea, & how Jesus came to His disciples, walking on the water. Peter was invited to walk out to Him on the water. He did for a few steps, but he took his eyes off Jesus & on to the waves, & he began to be afraid and he began to sink. After Jesus saved him He said, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Mt. 14:31).

That leads to my next point:

II. WE SHOULD FACE OUR GOLIATHS WITH FAITH IN GOD

David was certainly a great example for us in this regard. First, let me give a little background. Verses 12-20 explain how young David came to be at the battle scene. Here we see
the providence of God at work. God had brought David to the camp for such a time as this. Jesse was too old to fight in the war but supported the war effort by sending supplies by David (v.15). Each family sent provisions for its sons and additional supplies for the army in general (v.18). Thus, David was placed in a situation where he was able to hear the taunting words of Goliath.

Notice how David responded due to his faith in God. We see first of all:

A. The Concern of Faith - The words that struck terror in the hearts of strong men failed to awe the young David. What concerned him is found in v.26. He was concerned about taking away “the reproach from Israel,” and the fact that Goliath, an “uncircumcised Philistine” was defying “the armies of the living God.” He was fired up with holy indignation over the way this whole situation was a bad witness for the God of Israel. Goliath should be stopped because he defied Israel’s God. We must remember that ancient Near Eastern philosophy equated military strength with a nation’s deity. The defeat of Israel’s army was viewed as a defeat of Israel’s God, & a victory for the Philistine god Dagon. In v.45 we see another evidence of David’s spiritual motivation in facing the giant in battle. He said, “You come to me with a sword, 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.” David could not stand by & allow this man to belittle the great God of Israel.

Note, too, in the last of v.46 the result which he expects—no glory for himself, but to God. He says, “This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, …that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.” David wanted everyone to know that the God of Israel was not a weak, local deity of the Judean hills, but the God of all the earth who is mighty to save. David saw this as a contest between the true God of Israel and the false gods of the Philistines.

Are you concerned about the way God’s name is taken in vain with regularity in so much public speech, even here in America? Are you concerned that many churches appear weak, and our numbers are small, while the followers of darkness grow in numbers? We need to speak up for God, and we need to show up at church when the doors are open to let people know whose side we are on! God wants to work in & through us to magnify His name to all the nations of the earth.

B. The Determination of Faith – David clearly implied that he could not stand by & do nothing. He was ready & determined to fight Goliath, yet he quickly faced opposition from his own people. Here we see that he fought Goliath:

1. In Spite of Objections from His Brother – We read in v.28, “Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger was aroused against David, and he said, ‘Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.’” Eliab was now vexed that his younger brother should speak such bold words against the Philistine which he himself dared not say. He bristled at what he perceived was a rebuke of his own cowardice by his kid brother.

Whenever you step out by faith to fight the enemy, there’s always somebody around to discourage you, and often it begins in your own home. Yet David didn’t allow Eliab’s harsh words to discourage him, for he knew that God could help him defeat the giant.

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1 Jesse sent David to his brothers with about ten gallons of roasted grain and ten loaves of bread. In addition he sent ten cheeses for the entire unit of soldiers.
2. In Spite of Objections from Saul – Notice what Saul said to David in v.33, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he is a man of war from his youth.” It is quite true that David is but a youth, and Goliath a giant and a veteran; but is that all that is to be said? If it be, then the lad cannot fight the Philistine bully; but if Saul has made the “small” omission of leaving out God, that makes a difference.

3. In Spite of the Ridicule of Goliath – We are moving ahead a bit in our story, but look at vv.42-43, “And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking. So the Philistine said to David, ‘Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?’ And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.” Goliath’s rant is full of contempt of David and self-confidence. He disdained his youth, and older adults have continued to do that to this day. That is why Paul told Timothy, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers…” (1 Tim. 4:12). And as a good looking young man, he was more suitable to accompany the virgins of Israel in their dances than to lead the men of Israel in their battles.

Even so, every Christian here today should be prepared for the fact that those with less faith or no faith will throw up numerous objections when you attempt to do something great for God. They give this reason & that reason why something cannot be done, for they walk by sight, and not by faith. They say you’re too young, or too old. So you need to recognize the voice of unbelief that leaves God out of the equation. [Give example]. It is sad when objections come from family & from people within the church!

C. The Confidence of Faith - One quality that is very much needed to gain victory is confidence. That is true not only in battle, but also in sports & in other endeavors. Some have great self-confidence. But great faith in God gave David a different kind of confidence & courage. Though he was a young shepherd, probably 16-18 years old, he had more courage than all the mighty men of Israel. Look at the confidence of his faith in v.36, “Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” I believe that David is contrasting a man who believes in false gods with his own faith in the true & living God. No god will help Goliath, but David was confident that his God would help him.

This confident faith was not just expressed among the soldiers of Israel. Later, as he stood face to face before the giant, he still expressed confident faith in v.46, where he said, “This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you….” Though he has no sword, he believes that somehow he will hack Goliath’s big head off. What confidence! His faith sees the victory before the battle is begun, and trusts, not in his own weak power, but only “in the name of the Lord,” as he says in v.45. David has learned to see things others cannot see.

Why did David have such confident faith? There were two main reasons:

1. Based on Past Victories – In vv.34-35 David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it.” By faith in God, David already had experienced great victories against formidable enemies. Who among us would risk our lives against a bear or lion just to save a sheep? David did, for he was responsible for his sheep, and he believed that God would help him protect his sheep from any enemy. So based on past
experience, he said in v.36, “Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them.”

There is an important lesson here. We face trials in life to prepare us for greater trials. God allowed David to face a lion & bear to prepare him for the day he would face Goliath. So when you face a new challenge, just remember what God has done for you in the past. If He helped you in the past, can’t you trust in Him today? That’s one reason why David had such confident faith as he faced Goliath.

2. Based on Faith in God’s Power - He was confident, not in his own ability, but in the continued help from the Lord. He said in v.37, “The LORD, 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.” The Hebrew word translated “paw” is the same for “hand” (yad). Just as the Lord delivered David from the hand of the lion and bear, so he will deliver from the hand of Goliath. In young David’s mind, all the enemies of God are reduced to the same level. Again, he said to Goliath in v.46, “This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand.” David was well aware of Goliath’s size & armor, but he believed that God was far bigger! Compared to God Goliath was as an ant before a grown man. With such faith in almighty God he had no need to be afraid of an army of Goliaths!

D. The Equipment of Faith - David is confident of victory, but what arms and ammunition is he furnished with? King Saul offered him the best armor he had available. It says in v.38, “So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail.” Since Saul was a big man, his armor no doubt did not fit him. In fact, v.39 says that he “tried to walk” in that armor. Imagine how difficult it was for young David to walk in armor made for a much larger man. So after expressing a good excuse, he took off the armor. It was too restrictive for the kind of warfare that David was best able to carry out. Furthermore, David did not place his faith in conventional armor & a sword, but in the power of God.

So what weapons did David choose fight the giant? Truly none but what he brought with him as a shepherd. According to v.40 all he had was his staff & a sling. He also picked up five smooth stones for his sling from a nearby brook. The fact that David held on to his staff is indicated in Goliath’s question in v.43, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” Is this faith or foolishness? With God helping him we are going to see that all he needed was a sling & a stone, as the author affirmed in v.50.

We are engaged in a great battle against the forces of evil in this world. Many would have us rely on conventional, worldly methods. Radicals in politics & religion advance their cause with bombs & violence. Politicians advance their partisan agenda with lies & deception. Yet Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:4-5, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.” The greatest weapons against evil that we have are prayer & the proclamation of the Word of God. When men & women of faith use these weapons with faith we

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2 Why did he select five stones? Did he want 4 extra stones in case he missed the first time or two? The answer may be found in 2 Samuel 21:22: “These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.” Goliath had four sons, and David was sure they would come out when he killed their father. So he picked up the number he needed.

3 Actually, this is the same Hebrew word translated “staff” in v.40.
can change the world! We need to do what God has called us to do in the way He has called us to do it if we are going to have the blessing of God upon our lives & our churches.

Finally, let us witness in our minds:

E. The Victory of Faith – Let’s see how God gave David the victory because of his faith. Notice:

1. Victory Was Eagerly Sought by David – We read in v.48, “So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hastened and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.” There was no fearful hesitation on David’s part. He ran with eagerness because by faith he fully anticipated the victory. As a result:

2. Victory Was Quickly Secured by David – David knew that he had to kill Goliath quickly. Look at v.49, “Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth.” I believe that David was praying as he slung that stone, trusting that God would guide the stone to just the right spot. Well, the battle was over before the Philistine could throw his massive spear. Goliath’s self-confidence led to his defeat. Goliath fell on his face before the Lord’s onslaught just as the Philistine idol, Dagon, had fallen before the ark (5:3). This is just another evidence of the fact that God gave David the victory. The battle was the Lord’s.

3. Victory Was Clearly Sealed by David – We read in v.51, “Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it….” Once David cut off Goliath’s head, there was no doubt but that he was killed and defeated. He was not just knocked down unconscious. Clearly David had utterly defeated him. That led to the final aspect of the victory:

4. Victory Was Shared by Israel – Notice beginning in the last of v.51, “And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines as far as the entrance of the valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell along the road to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath and Ekron. Then the children of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their tents” (vv.51-53). Inspired by David’s victory & the Philistine flight of fear, Israel attacked with confidence, & shared in the victory.

There is a lesson here about leadership. All it takes is for one man or woman to step out in faith, and God will bless that, and many others will follow. Will you be that man or woman of faith? Will you be one of the few who really believe God? A leader is also happy for others to share in the victory.

Based on David’s own words, the real hero of this story is not David, but God. He gave David the faith & courage to face the giant. He gave David the victory. David did what he did for the glory of God.

One lesson that flows from this truth is that God uses the unlikely and unexpected to confound and defeat the more powerful enemies of His purposes. Likewise, when the apostle Paul described the qualifications of the early believers in Corinth, he stated that God had chosen “the foolish things of the world to shame the wise” and “the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:27). Don’t let your human weakness or lack of resources keep you from accomplishing great things for God.

David’s victory over Goliath was also a prophetic type of the triumphs of the son of David over Satan and all the powers of darkness, whom He spoiled, and made a show of them.
openly (Col. 2:15), and we through Him are more than conquerors. Yes, we can & will share in the victory of that greater son of David.

Conclusion: Are you facing a giant of a problem right now? Are you responding with fear, or with faith?


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