

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

1 Samuel 17:41-54

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“You come to me with a sword and 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” (1 Sam. 17:45).

The story of David’s victory over Goliath has launched many five point sermons, one point for each of the smooth stones David took from the brook and put into his pouch. Usually these sermons list principles or behaviors by which even the skinniest Christian can take down the brawniest spiritual enemy. But David’s victory was anything but the triumph of an “everyman.” David was not just anyone in Israel, but the one man God had specially anointed to lead and deliver his people, for which God had equipped David with the Holy Spirit (see 1 Sam. 16:13). Thus when David declared to the giant, “I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts” (1 Sam. 17:45), he meant in part that he came as God’s specially anointed deliverer. This reminds us that David’s gospel – his message of salvation – was not merely the good news that those who trust in the Lord will be saved. His good news also declared that those who trust in the Lord will be saved by the anointed one – the Messiah – that God has promised. In the Valley of Elah, this anointed deliverer was none other than young David, and it was through his arm that God revealed his power in slaying the giant Philistine.

The message for Israel’s army therefore did not consist of what each of them could and should have done. True, they should have defended God’s honor and they could have triumphed had they acted in David’s bold faith. The problem was that they lacked the Holy Spirit, whereas David had been filled with the Spirit at his anointing.

In the reality of their weakness and sin, the message for Israel was that they needed a Savior, which God provided by the man after his own heart. On the heels of David's victory, following as his disciples, we might say, the Israelites rose up and slew the enemy host. David's victory points to our need of a champion, as we face the greater foes of sin and death. For this, David typifies the true and greater Messiah, God's Son, Jesus Christ, of the house of David, in whose power we may enter the victory he has won by God's grace.

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

After gaining King Saul's blessing to go forth as Israel's champion, David took five smooth stones and with sling in hand approached the giant Goliath. The Philistine had been coming out twice a day for forty days, challenging Israel to single combat, so we might think he was relieved that someone had finally answered. But seeing only a youth, with a staff and sling, Goliath was infuriated with the greatest contempt. Like King Saul before him, Goliath looked only on the outward appearance, little considering the heart: "he despised him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance" (1 Sam. 17:42). The battle-hardened Philistine "sought a warrior to fight with; he gets a boy to annihilate."¹ Moreover, David's meager weaponry insulted Goliath: "Am I a dog," he jeered, "that you come to me with sticks?" The giant then cursed David by his gods, promising to skewer him and leave his body as carrion-fodder: "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field" (1 Sam. 17:44). We see in Goliath the literal fulfillment of Proverbs 16:18, that "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Undaunted, David not only approached the menacing giant, but he gave one of the classic speeches in all of the Bible, one that rebuked the Philistine for his mocking, expressed his confidence in the Lord's power to save, and announced his purpose in slaying the giant champion.

¹ William G. Blaikie, *Expository Lectures on the Book of First Samuel* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 1887, reprint 2005), 286.

First, David rebuked the giant for his blasphemies against the true God: “David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword and 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’” (1 Sam. 17:45). In short, David was pronouncing sentence on Goliath for the capital crime of blasphemy: “This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head” (1 Sam. 17:46). Goliath might think that he could blaspheme the true God, but David had come on God’s behalf to inform him otherwise. Leviticus 24:16 ordained the penalty of death by stoning for blasphemy, and David had come to single-handedly enforce that censure.

Most notably, David expressed his confidence in the Lord to deliver him in this battle. Goliath had impressive weapons as Philistines saw such things – a sword, spear, and a javelin. But an Israelite who saw with the eyes of faith was not impressed: these were hardly weapons with which to stand against the Lord. Disdaining all such mighty weapons, David expressed his full confidence in “the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel” (1 Sam. 17:45). By referring to the Lord’s “name,” David speaks of God’s character and being. We get David’s idea when we consider the Aaronic blessing that the priests regularly invoked over Israel: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num. 6:24). When God first gave that blessing he said, “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them” (Num. 6:27). To bear God’s name is to live under his blessing, the first of which was to “keep” his people from their foes.

So in proclaiming the Lord’s name, David was invoking God’s promise to protect those who trust in him, a blessing that David considered a mighty armament in the face of Goliath’s mere bronze and iron. Robert Bergen comments: “As David viewed it, Goliath was outnumbered and would soon be overpowered, for the Lord would fight with David against the giant.”² David’s expression, “the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel” (1 Sam. 17:45), recalls

² Robert D. Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 196.

God's command of the legions of heaven and God's past demonstrations of power to overthrow his enemies. The God who parted the Red Sea for the Israelites under Moses, swallowing the host of Pharaoh, would overwhelm one Philistine giant easily enough. So certain was David of victory over Goliath that he vowed to cut off the giant's head with a sword, even though the only sword was in the hand of the Philistine: "This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head" (1 Sam. 17:46).

In our battle with the greater powers of sin, death, and spiritual enemies, Christians are likewise to rely on the name of the Lord in the place of worldly weapons. Paul described Christians as those who "worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). This means that we have laid aside every worldly merit in claiming God's favor. Paul looked upon his attitude prior to embracing Christ and recalled how he once relied on the merits of his lineage, his covenant membership, his ritual performance of religion and his persecution of the first Christians. Looking at himself as a kind of spiritual Goliath, Paul repented so as to declare, "whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord., not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil. 3:7-9). Paul renounced all the weaponry of self-righteousness before God and instead trusted in the name of the Lord, that is, in the promised salvation by grace that comes through faith in Christ.

THAT ALL MAY KNOW

Important as was David's proclamation of Israel's salvation to Goliath, his first points are matched in importance with the following statements, which convey David's purpose and goal in standing forth to slay Goliath.

In fact, David had a number of goals in defeating the giant, the first of which was evangelistic. David wanted all the world to know about Israel's God: "I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines

this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Sam. 17:46).

David had good news to spread. The famous God who had delivered Israel so many times in the past and with such great displays of power was still present with his people to deliver them from defeat. The further good news was that in the person of David, an anointed king had come who would bear the name of the Lord against the enemies of God’s people. The bad news for Goliath was that as the mocking defier of the Lord and the Satanic enemy bent on Israel’s destruction, he would be slaughtered and disgraced at the hand of the Lord’s anointed. The aim of this gospel call was to call the nations to cease their foolish violence against Israel and their defiance against Israel’s God, lest they too should suffer God’s just verdict and the judgment of death. Walter Brueggemann summarizes: “The purpose of David’s victory is not simply to save Israel or defeat the Philistines. The purpose is the glorification of Yahweh in the eyes of the world.”³

David’s slaying of Goliath was intended to have a message for Israel as well: “and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hand” (1 Sam. 17:47). For a youth, David understood his times. He knew that Israel had sought for Saul to be king because they were seeking after tangible, worldly sources of salvation. Israel had wanted “a king like the nations,” because Israel itself wanted to be like the nations – at least when it came to salvation. They wanted to hold sharp iron in their own hands and look up to see their own tall king before them. These had failed Israel miserably in the Valley of Elah, as it must always fail God’s people when they turn from the salvation of the Lord and reliance on his holy methods. The Lord wanted his people to rely not on having the best of weaponry but the best of Saviors. To likewise wants his church to succeed today by humble, holy methods by which only he can be praised.. The prophet Jeremiah would sum up the one principle that David sought to demonstrate before both the nations and Israel:

Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who

³ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 132.

boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD (Jer. 9:23-24).

In this way, David was calling Israel “away from its imitation of the nations,” even as he called “the nations away from their foolish defiance on Yahweh.”⁴

THE HEAD OF GOLIATH

The battle itself between David and Goliath was so brief as to hardly be worth the admission price. The main action had in fact been David’s speech: the felling of the giant was merely a necessary but inevitable conclusion.

After David’s words, Goliath began his ponderous advance on the Israelite youth. David however, being lightly equipped, moved quickly towards the Philistine. With no further ado, “David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead” (1 Sam. 17:49).

David wielded a deadly weapon. After whirring the sling around his head, David released one loop of the sling and sent a tennis-ball sized stone – two to three inches in diameter – at a speed ranging from 100 to 150 miles per hour at the Philistine. David’s weapon might not have inspired fear but it certainly rained death! With the accuracy that came with long practice and a hand calmed by faith, David’s stone sped to Goliath and struck him in the forehead, blasting its way through the bronze helmet the Philistine wore: “The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground” (1 Sam. 17:49). The narrator’s comment is as brief and direct as was the battle itself: “So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him.” Of special note is the absence of any heavy weaponry: “There was no sword in the hand of David” (1 Sam. 17:50). Goliath was almost certainly dead before his break bulk smashed against the ground. But just in case, David sprang forward, drew the Philistine’s sword, and immediately hacked off the giant’s head.

⁴ Ibid.

Reading this, we realize that Goliath really did not have David out-weaponed, for in this kind of fight David's sling conveyed to the youth an actual advantage. As long as David could make the shot, he should have slain the ponderous infantryman. So it often has been when Christians have faced the weapons of the world. Believers quail at the thought of wrongful arrest at hands of wicked governments. But Christians under persecution have learned not to fear such mere worldly reprisals. This has been the recent experience of the house churches in China, among whom Christians think little of facing arrest and imprisonment, happily pitting against their secular enemies the power of prayer and the preaching of God's invincible Word. Like David in his battle with Goliath, the weapons that God has given the church are actually more potent than the weapons wielded by our unbelieving, worldly foes. More important than the relative potency of our weapons, those who trust in the Lord have the power of God on their side: it was God's hand that truly wielded David's sling and gave it unerring accuracy. As Dale Ralph Davis comments: "What matters is not whether you have the best weapons but whether you have the real God."⁵ With this in mind, we see that David's victory was as unsurprising as he declared it to be inevitable.

Likewise, Christians who enter into spiritual battle trusting the Lord are armed with divine equipping. Paul described the "whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:13) as consisting of: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes made fleet by the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:14-17), along with our mighty resource in prayer. Perhaps more important than the details is the overall impression: we are protected by our salvation in Christ, with our head and chest strongly guarded, we wield faith to block arrows and the Word of God to strike and smite our foes, held together with truth and made as agile as young David by our gospel good news. Christians so armed, who know and trust the saving power of our Lord, not seeking worldly armor and weaponry, are fully equipped for spiritual battle and able to see many victories by the power of God.

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *I Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2000), 153.

So it was in the Valley of Elah, for when David displayed Goliath's severed head, the shocked Philistine army rose up and fled in panic. The Israelites, suddenly energized by the triumph of their unlikely champion, also rose up and pursued the fleeing enemy, strewing the paths between Elah and the Philistine cities with enemy bodies. Then they returned to plunder the enemy camp.

David, curiously, left the pursuit to the other soldiers. In an action that has puzzled commentators, "David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent" (1 Sam. 17:54). We are so accustomed to the name of Jerusalem that we may not realize that this fortress city was not yet in Israel's hands. It had been given by Joshua for both the tribes of Benjamin and Judah (between which it lay) to conquer and drive out the entrenched Jebusites there. The lingering presence of this Canaanite fortress was an embarrassment to Israel and a sign of the unfulfilled legacy of the original conquest of the promised land. David, plainly realizing this, took advantage of his victory over the giant to declare future triumphs that would follow in due time, as Israel took up once more the mantle given by the Lord in earlier days. His declaration of coming destruction to the Canaanites in the fortress on Mount Zion served notice that Israel would be returning in faith to the Lord and that with the Lord her destiny would finally be fulfilled.

SO GREAT A SAVIOR

There are two different ways for us to draw conclusions from David's triumph over the giant Goliath. The first, and most important, is to focus our faith in the anointed Savior that God has sent to us in our battles, the true champion and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

William Blaikie lists a series of comparisons by which we may better see Jesus through the lens of young David. First, "we find an emblematic picture of the conquests of Messiah and His Church." The arrogant disdain of Goliath is the very spirit with which the world opposes the church today: "the contempt shown for the lowly appearance of David, the undisguised scorn at the notion that through such a stripling any deliverance could come to his people, has its

counterpart in the feeling towards Christ and His Gospel.”⁶ Second, the “calm self-possession of David,” coupled with a thorough reliance on the faithful intervention of God mirrors the demeanor of Jesus towards the spiritual enemies of his own day, even as they nailed him to the cross. Third, “the sword of Goliath turned against himself, the weapon by which he was to annihilate his foe, employed by that very foe to sever his head from his body, was an emblem of Satan’s weapons turned by Christ against Satan.” Hebrews 2:14-15 thus states of Christ: “through death he [destroyed] the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver[ed] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

Furthermore, we see the fourth and vital comparison in that like David, Jesus waged war against Satan, sin, and death in a representative capacity. David fought not only for himself but for the whole of his people. Likewise, in Christ’s triumph his followers gain our salvation, received through faith alone.

Fifth is the salvation joy achieved by God’s anointed Savior. Blaikie writes:

the shout that burst from the rank of Israel and Judah when they saw the champion of the Philistines fall, and the enemy betake themselves in consternation to flight, foreshadowed the joy of redeemed men when the reality of Christ’s salvation flashes on their hearts, and they see the enemies that have been harassing them repulsed and scattered – a joy to be immeasurably magnified when all enemies are finally conquered and the loud voice is heard in heaven, “Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ, for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, that accused them before our God day and night.”⁷

THIS IS THE VICTORY

Looking upon David’s victory in Holy Scripture and knowing the victory already achieved for us by the greater triumph of the cross of Christ, we may look on our future and final salvation with certainty and joy. Knowing ourselves “more than conquerors through

⁶ William G. Blaikie, *Expository Lectures on the Book of First Samuel* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 1887, reprint 2005), 289-290.

⁷ *Ibid.*

him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37), we may rise up to put the enemy to flight even now.

In the meantime, we may realize that being joined to Christ in saving faith, and having been sealed by the same Holy Spirit that filled young David, we now are anointed by God and equipped to fight in his cause. As such, we should live with the same confidence that emboldened David in his approach to the Philistine champion, declaring to every foe and temptation: “You come to me with a sword and 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” (1 Sam. 17:45). Through saving faith, the benediction of God now rests on us, and he has promised to keep us from all harm. This David’s triumph calls for us to know the same power of God available to us in Christ, so that through this same faith we may be strong against our foes.

Meanwhile, David’s stated purpose in fighting Goliath supplies us with a noble purpose for our own battles of faith: that God might be glorified among the nations and that God’s own people would be strengthened in their faith. David sought that “that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Sam. 17:46). We likewise should seek that through our holy lives, joy amidst trials, love among believers, and fidelity to truth, the world should know that the cross of Christ is no mere relic of history. We should endeavor to prove to our neighbors and other onlookers that the great Christian faith continues to give life, that the spiritual power unleashed in the early church continues to win converts today, and that David’s spirit of conquering faith lives on amongst God’s people. Most of all, we desire for many to see that all this is true because the Lord of hosts is truly in our midst, that there is a God in our churches, and a living Savior, Jesus Christ, whose death has won forgiveness and who in undying life continues to reign from heaven. Let this be our goal, and we may go forth into every battle confident in the power of the name of the Lord of hosts.

Likewise, let us seek to embolden many a disheartened Christian, showing that even in our weakness the Lord remains mighty to save. Instead of fretting over our own well-being, knowing that our eternal safety is secured in Christ, let us seek to strength the faith of other

believers. Let us seek to make known to other Christian churches that the Word of God remains mighty to convert the lost, build up the saints, and guide the church. Let each of us, through the battles that God places before us, encourage one another, and let us together raise tall the banner under which so many believers have stood before us, knowing that “this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith” (1 Jn. 5:4).