

Giant Killer

Series on 1 Samuel

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Bible Text: 1 Samuel 17

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Please take your Bibles and turn with me to 1 Samuel 17. Perhaps there is no better story in the Bible, no better known story in the Bible than the story of the boy who kills a giant with his slingshot. It's the stuff of which legends are made. Apparently it's the only story in the Bible that Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer knew. I remember that from reading Tom Sawyer long, long ago as a little boy. It's also true to say that there's no story more abused by preachers or Sunday school teachers than this story. Usually it takes the form of identifying the giants in your life: the giant of worry; the giant of doubt; or the bully down the street; or secularism; or the government of the day wherever you might be. Then, of course, there are the stones that David used. There are 5 of these stones and obviously these 5 stones represent the 5 points of Calvinism. You mean, they don't? That was my sermon for this morning. It's gone. Well, of course, I'm only kidding. Actually very often this mishandling of Old Testament stories is like many people to avoid teaching from the Old Testament altogether.

There are some things about this chapter that we just need to point out before we kind of dive into look at the teaching of it this morning. The first is, of course, that it's very long. You've already discovered that for yourself. It's very long. It's actually shorter in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. This is reflecting the Hebrew which is much longer and, I think, probably is original because it's less tidy than the Greek version. The Greek version looks like somebody who wanted to tidy up the story to make it more accessible for people like you to hear and miss out the untidy bits. So usually in the Bible, if it's less tidy it's more likely to be original and that's true about this chapter.

I think it's big because it's important; it's absolutely a vital story. It's actually one of those turning points in the history of the world. Yes, it's that big. It's that important. And the Bible story is significant in terms of the big picture, what we call the biblical theological picture story of the Bible, moving us forward to the coming of the Messiah. It's a great story. It's not the story about the little guy taking on the big guy, even though it's a good illustration of that principle. It's not even a story about David's faith although David's faith does figure prominently. Rather if you look very carefully at the story and read it over for yourself if you've got a spare weekend, you'll discover that the story is about the honor of the living God.

It falls almost too neatly into 3 points or 3 parts. There is the enemy of the living God; then the focus on the servant of the living God; and then, actually very, very briefly at the end, the victory of the living God. Well, let's look first at the enemy of the living God. It's the Philistines all over again. We've been looking at these characters that figure prominently. They are the people who most pose a threat to the existence of Israel itself. In the Bible, they are presented not just as a physical enemy which they were but what they represent is the combination of every opponent, every enemy that you can imagine to the people of God and to God's glory in the world.

Here we find Saul. Saul has had a kind of speckled history when it comes to these Philistines. He was supposed to go after them but he hasn't. Here we have Saul again with his men camped on one side. The Philistines have now made an incursion into Israel itself. They have come en masse with a huge force. They are now assembled in this valley about 14 miles away from Bethlehem right in Judah, right in the territory of Israel and Saul and his men are camped on the other side and, of course, Saul is, as you would expect, inactive, camped there with his men but doing nothing and the Philistines are posing this massive threat. There is one change this time, something new: there's a champion of the Philistines called Goliath who is absolutely huge in the story as we'll see in a moment. His name or the title that he's given "champion" literally means "the man of the between." The man of the between. There he is standing between the Philistines and the Israelites. He's in the middle and he wants to be the one in whom and by whom the issue of the day is going to be settled. The whole story is going to stand or fall on Goliath's head.

In this first part, I wonder if you noticed as we were reading it together, it goes on and on and on and it goes on and on and on telling us about Goliath. He doesn't call him ill, he calls him by his name twice. Most of the time he's described as the Philistine to underline that he represents the enemies of God. But we are told all kinds of things about him. We're told about his size over and over and over again, how big he was: 9 feet, 9 inches high. He would have made a great basketball player but that wasn't what he was there for, not to play basketball. Then we are told all about his armor and armaments. So his military weapons and his military bearing and he is covered in scale armor from neck to feet. He has a great bronze helmet. He has got various shoulder pads, a bit like an American football player. He's got shoulder pads and coverings. You needed to be here for a while to know why I mention that. The armament that he's wearing in order so that he doesn't get hurt in battle, not like rugby players. That was the reference. So there he is with all of his armaments, his high velocity spear, his super-duper body armor, most likely imported from Syria who were producing the very best stuff in those days and this sounds very like it. He is the model of invincibility, sophistication. He has all the power. It's a little bit like the battleship New Jersey bearing down on some little fishing boats. He's a massive figure and we're meant to get that sense as we read the story.

Not only is he fully loaded when it comes to his armor but he is a one-man amplification system. If George Whitfield could preach in Philadelphia and farmers over the river in New Jersey could hear him preach, then the people on the other side of the canyon could hear Goliath of Gath as he intoned his arrogant bravado which dominates the section in

verses 1 to 11. One word that occurs 6 times kind of underlines what he's doing, the word means "to reproach or to defy or mock or deride."

I want you to notice the reaction of the Philistines to this enemy. I want you to notice why all this description is there. It is there because all anybody could remember about that day was how scary, how terrifying Goliath looked and if you've been following the story so far, that will press a little button or ring a little bell depending on how sophisticated you are, in your brain. Back in chapter 16, chapter 16 is in the Bible because God says something in chapter 16 that is defining of whatever follows after it. The Lord said to Samuel when Samuel was looking at one of David's brothers, the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or on the height of his stature because I have rejected him for the Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart."

You get to chapter 17, this long story, the narrative style of the author, he puts this long story in there about how Goliath looked in order that you might learn that the Israelites could only see what they saw with their eyes. They were terrified by what they saw with their eyes. Everybody was. Even Saul was terrified. I mean, you can't imagine. You listen to the story and here is Goliath saying to Israel, "Choose a man and send him out to fight me. Choose a man," he says. And if you've been following the story, you know a man has already been chosen. A man has already been chosen and set apart specifically with the calling to fight the Philistines and he's the tallest man there is in the nation. Saul himself is the chosen man to fight the Philistines and what is he doing? He is dismayed and he is terribly afraid.

The enemy of God's people taunts the people of God for 40 days; 40 days, that complete number that emphasizes totality. This is the total humiliation of Israel. The total humiliation of Israel. On every side, "The Philistine, the Philistine, the Philistine says this. The Philistine says that." It is underlining, emphasizing, getting it into our heads. Here is Israel utterly humiliated and there is something else in this whole description: there is not one mention of God. There is not one mention of God's name in the whole thing. Why is that in the Bible? Why this whole description of an enemy of God and God's name isn't mentioned in the whole thing? It is because God never entered the minds of the Philistines. What kind of God was he just looking from the perspective of of a Philistine who believed in territorial gods? What kind of God was this in Israel who allowed an alien army to invade it? Here they are, they have invaded Israel. They have come right into Judah. To the Philistines, the God of Israel didn't exist. He was useless. Apparently the God of Israel didn't exist to Israel. His name isn't even on the lips of the Israelites. They are not even thinking of him, praying to him, calling on his name, asking Samuel the prophet to come and guide them as to what to do next which was the usual get out clause. God is not factored in the situation.

Here is the enemy of God terrorizing the people of God and this enemy, of course, fits with a whole stream of biblical story about the enemies of God from the serpent in the garden and the promise of God that one day there would come someone who would deal a death wound, a deadly head wound to the serpent, to the enemy finally, finally putting

an end to his power. That's what we have to have in our mind then, as we come to step 2 in the story. But onto the scene comes the servant of the living God. Now, you notice that in verse 12 we're introduced or we're reintroduced to David. There is a problem there, we've already been introduced to David. Well, keep that introduction that you've had in your head. We've already been introduced to David as God's anointed one. Nobody knows that, however. Nobody there knows that, not even his brothers know that. We have been told that. We have an inside track in the story because we're reading the book of Samuel, okay? But nobody else knows that so here on the day, we're introduced to David as other people would know him and we're given a long introduction. We're given a long introduction because the author wants us to see that when it comes to Goliath, David is nothing. He has nothing to offer, nothing to bring to the table. There's Goliath, his armaments, he is a military man, he is a one man amplification machine. Everybody is terrified of him and then there's this David, the son of an Ephrathite. He doesn't come from anywhere special. He doesn't come from a well-known family. His brothers are the military people. His brothers are there with Saul, followers of Saul. They're all ready for battle. They are men of war but David is a shepherd. I mean, a shepherd. He looks after sheep, for goodness sake. We're talking about Goliath of Gath, fully loaded with his Syrian weaponry and here is David who is a shepherd and he's a daddy's boy. Dad sends him with food, sandwiches, to take to his brothers 14 miles away at the valley where the Philistines are facing them. In other words, what we're having is we have this long story, this long introduction to David and David is really from a human point of view not a match for Goliath. He's weak. He's insignificant. He doesn't factor in the world's scale of things.

Well, David's story unfolds. This young man as he comes to see his brothers and he hears the voice of this man. Let me just summarize what we are told about David here. First of all, he is revealed and, of course, for us who know a bit of the background, he's already been revealed to us as the one whom God chose. He's been anointed by Samuel and he has received the Spirit. Now, all of those things are important to us as Christians because we know someone else who was God's chosen, the one in whom God set his affection and God set his love. We know another one who is anointed, Christed, Messiahed. We know another one who receives the Spirit of God in all its fullness and when a Christian reads this we think of Jesus. He is the Lord's anointed. He is the anti-type of the Messiah that David prefigures here.

Well, all of a sudden then as the narrative goes on for the very first time and you see the buildup of the story, now after the buildup, we now get to hear David for the very first time in the Bible. David is going to have a lot more to say in the Bible. You've got the book of Psalms, for example, right in the middle of that book and he didn't name the book of Psalms after Samuel. I can't say it properly apparently. And David is the first one to introduce the theological reflection into what's going on. Look at verse 26, "David said to the men who stood 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?'" Only one man has spoken like that about the Philistines before and that was Jonathan in chapter 14, verse 6. So he sounds a bit like Jonathan here but he sounds nothing like Saul, that's the point. Nothing like Saul the king.

"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" Now, there is your key line. There's your key phrase that unlocks what's going on in this whole chapter. When you defy the armies of the living God, when you set out to mock the people of God, you are mocking God himself. That's what Saul of Tarsus discovered on the road to Damascus. Do you remember when he had that encounter with the risen Lord Jesus and the risen Lord Jesus said to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul could have said, "Well, I'm not persecuting you, I'm persecuting Christians." "You persecute them, you persecute me," Jesus says. You defy the armies of Israel, you defy the God of Israel.

What are we learning about David? We're learning about David that he's a believer. He is a believer in God and he thinks theologically. He thinks from God's perspective. He thinks in a God-centered perspective on what is going on in his life. The Israelites are behaving as if they don't believe in the living God at all but David, he believes in the living God and this living God, he says, should be taken seriously because Israel belongs to God and the Philistine's words are blasphemous and David is going to resist him.

Well, so David is revealed and then God's servant is resisted. Ralph Davis in his book says that David has to fight 3 Goliaths in this story. First of all there is Eliab. Eliab is his brother and on the surface there seems to be a bit of a brotherly spat here. Eliab's anger was kindled against David and he comes up with all kinds of solutions. "Why did you come down here? Who have you left a little few sheep with? What do you think you're doing? How presumptuous you are, you've just come down here to see the battle." And David replies, "What have I done now?" I mean, you could just hear the little brother responding to the big brother that way.

But we can't stop there, can we? We can't say that's all that's going on here. It's not just a brotherly argument. We've already been introduced to Eliab before and we forget his role in the story to our peril. Eliab is the one that Samuel nearly chose to be king in Israel. Eliab is the one that when Samuel visited the home of Jesse and saw his boys, Samuel looked at, had his eye on Eliab and thought, "You look like a king." And it was about Eliab that God said, "Don't look at his appearance. I look at his heart." Now we find out why God rejected Eliab because here is Eliab doing what Goliath will later do to David: mocking him, scorning him, reproaching him. His own brother, reproaching him. He is a Goliath before Goliath.

Then David takes heat not just from Eliab but from Saul. Saul's response is as discouraging as that of his brother. He hears the talk of David, what David has said and he summons David to him. He tells David he's too young to fight or he's too inexperienced to fight. He has no equipment. He has no experience. He has no chance of winning. And you get an insight into the way in which Saul is thinking here. Saul is thinking like this, "The only way to fight Goliath is to out-Goliath Goliath." In other words, has Goliath got armor? Then you need to wear armor. The only way to fight the giant is to play the game the giant's way. That was Saul's mistake, of course, and so you find David taking charge. Interesting insight into David's leadership skills that he takes

charge even in his encounter as a young man with the king. He refuses to take the armor of Saul, not just because it was too heavy, not just because he hadn't tried them on before and the size was a bit too big for him but because he would not fight the battle in the armor of the person that God had rejected as king.

You listen to what David says. David preaches the Gospel to Israel. He says to them, verse 32, "Fear not. I will fight." Here is David putting himself in the place of the champion of Israel. He's preaching the Gospel to his people and he's saying, "Someone has come onto the field, a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue." Here is David, a greater champion for Israel. Then, you notice, it's the honor of the living God, verse 36, that is in his mind. Verse 37, he says, "The LORD will save." The first time the covenant name of God is used, "The LORD will save."

So David takes heat from Eliab and he takes heat from Saul and he takes heat from Goliath because when the day comes, Goliath pours out on him his disdain and vents his reproach on God's servant. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him and this is what he said, "Look at you. Look at you. You're just a small runt of a boy like a stick and I'm the dog. You're sending a stick out to me, treating me like a dog," says Goliath of Gath.

But God's servant is resolute. You notice that David operates on the level of faith. There was Saul. Saul believed he had to become like a king like all the other nations if he was going to fight them. Saul believed you had to wear the armor if you were going to fight a man with armor and David trusts in the Lord. He goes the Lord's way. He goes as he was, "Just as I am." He goes with his staff and his 5 stones and his sling and he goes on a mission. What does he say? He says, "Goliath has blasphemed the God of Israel." Do you know what you did with blasphemers under the law of Moses? You stoned them to death. David is saying, "I'm the Lord's instrument to bring about the Lord's vengeance on the Lord's enemy." And David acts by faith.

The Lord's servant here is the Lord's anointed. David acts as the Lord's Messiah and in acting as the Lord's Messiah, you see, he is giving us an insight, isn't he, into the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one. He comes as our champion. He comes to act in our place. He comes as our representative. He goes into battle against sin and death and Satan and he goes into battle on our behalf. He fights for us. And he comes in weakness. Like David, he comes from Bethlehem and like David he comes in obedience to his Father and like David, he doesn't look like the great ones of this age. He comes in humility to fight for his people.

Here is the church today: we according to the Apostle John, we have an anointing from the holy one. We have been anointed by the Spirit and we are sent out in Jesus' name to fight the enemies of God in the world: sin, death, the devil. We don't do it with the armor of the world. We don't do it by mimicking or imitating the world's way of doing things. We go in all of our weakness. We go in his strength alone. We go with the armor of God. We go with the shield of faith. We go with the sword of the Spirit which is the word of

God. We go wrapped in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's servant going into the battle.

But then lastly we see the victory of the living God. Did you notice in my description of Goliath, I pointed out that he was dressed from head to toe in scaled armor. That's the language of the original. In other words, he looks as if he's covered in scales. In other words, he looks as if he is a serpent. Here is David coming as a new Adam. He is the beast tamer. He has taken dominion over the bears and the lions and he has guarded the lambs and now he comes as the serpent crusher. He is going to deal a deadly head wound to the serpent and kill it. There are all kinds of echoes of Genesis 3 abounding in this passage.

It's David who comes and puts everything in perspective. David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and a spear and a javelin but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel." Do you see what he's doing? He is contrasting 2 ways of making war: the sword and the javelin and the name of the Lord. Here's what he goes on to say, "Today I'm going to kill you. I'm going to chop your head off. I'm going to give your dead bodies to the birds and the wild beasts that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel and that 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."

Every one of David's speeches clarifies something about the nature of God. Every one of his speeches clarifies what is going on in the story. "I come in the name of the Lord," he says. In Psalm 118, he writes later about someone who will come in the name of the Lord and Jesus picks up that quotation and he applies it to himself, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." David is coming as a precursor to the one who ultimately comes in the name of the Lord to destroy all his enemies.

Well, when it comes down to it, the battle is over before you know it. The stone is hurled. The giant falls face front down to the earth. The head is chopped off. For the boys here, has little gore. I mean, it could do with being a bit gory. Why didn't that bit get stretched out so we could say more about it but it's over so quickly. Girls, you can listen now. No more gory heads.

There's something else going on here. You know, earlier on in the story of 1 Samuel, we saw the God of Israel's ark being taken and placed in the temple of the Philistine god, Dagon, and in the morning, Dagon was lying face down in the dirt. He was put back in his place and then the next day they found Dagon face down, his head severed and now here is their physical Dagon and he has fallen. You know, the Bible says those who worship idols become like their idols. Here is Goliath ultimately become like the idols that he worshiped: face down, severed head. In other words, this is a spiritual victory. It's a real physical victory, it really happened but it's a spiritual victory over the idols of the nations roundabout.

You see, this chapter really is one of the high points in the Bible. It's a point of which the honor of God's name is declared, where God is affirmed as the true King who brings deliverance to his people but he works through his chosen Messiah who wins the victory by his faith in God and even in his weakness. That's how God works. That's how God worked in Jesus: immobile; pinned to the cross; unable to do anything. That's where God worked his greatest victory: in Christ. The principalities and powers were smashed by his very weakness and that's how God wins victories over the enemy today. He takes his church, he takes his people, weak as we are, shot through with sin as we are, failures though many of us have been, not powerful in the world's eyes. He takes his church and uses his church today to overcome his enemies in our weakness. The man languishing in prison in Iran will do more in his confinement by the grace of God than he would in his liberty. That's the way God works. He uses our weakness.

Let me summarize this chapter for you. It's very simple: here is the Lord's anointed facing the Lord's enemy in the Lord's name for the Lord's glory. It refers to David. It points to Jesus. And it enfolds us. The Lord's anointed facing the Lord's enemy in the Lord's name for the Lord's glory. That's our calling in the world, isn't it? It's what Jesus has done for us. We rest in all that he has achieved and we face the enemy of God today which rears its head in so many ways within our culture. We serve the Lord today by facing down the enemies. Oh, unlike David we may fall in the conflict but like David there will be victory because God has promised that one day the God of peace will crush Satan under our feet.

Let's pray.

Father, we pray for the help of your Holy Spirit to learn more about our Lord Jesus from the example of David but also by your grace to be able to take our stand with your people against the enemies of sin and death and hell that we face every day. They work invisibly behind other influences in our society. We pray for the perception to recognize them and to be passionate for the honor of God and for the glory of your name. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.