

Introduction

Each year in America every major sport crowns a champion. The World Series is baseball's championship. Last night the Houston Astros defeated the Philadelphia Phillies to become this year's world champion in baseball. We crown a champion to recognize them as the victor. This morning as we look back into the life of David we will see that he was chosen as a champion BEFORE he won the victory.

[Read 1 Samuel 17:1-11; 40-41; and 48-51 and Pray]

The narrative that unfolds before us today is one of the most well-known and best-loved accounts from the Scriptures. Our affection for the little guy who overcomes combined with our tendency toward a man-centered focus has resulted in a failure to grasp what this monumental event is really about. What we have here is not an account which teaches us how to overcome the challenges in our lives. We are not to identify ourselves with David here. Rather the central figure in the Bible is Jesus and the hero is Jesus. Alistair Begg says he learned in Sunday School that the whole Bible is about Jesus. In the Old Testament Jesus is predicted. In the Gospels Jesus is revealed. In the Acts Jesus is preached. In the Epistles Jesus is explained. And in the Revelation Jesus is expected. If we are centered upon ourselves then we might come away with an application of the image of David upon ourselves. But if we are determined to latch hold of glimpses of Christ, we simply will not be able to miss that this text is primarily about God and His anointed one.

The setting is conflict. In the midst of the conflict, several key players emerge. I want to work our way through the passage by taking these actors one-by-one.

I. Goliath/The Philistine Champion.

Goliath is called a champion. In that day a champion was a representative. He stepped out from the battle line of his people to fight on their behalf. It was not uncommon in the day in order to avoid mass bloodshed that the champion of one army would fight the champion of the other army. The victory of the one would be credited to the entire army he represented.

It is no wonder that Goliath was the man chosen to represent the Philistines. He was huge! At over 9 feet he was an imposing figure. So large was he that the armor he wore added up to 125 pounds. His weaponry reinforced the impression of power and danger he imposed. His spear's head weighed about 15 pounds. Just think of a men's bowling ball on the end of a shaft and you will have an idea about his javelin.

Those familiar with the location over there in the valley of Elah explain that the air is thin, and the sound of the human voice carries for up to a mile. And the voice of Goliath roared ferociously as he denounced the Israelite army day after day. He scoffed at the Israelites for even bothering to draw up in battle array, for it seemed they did not really want to fight. He challenged them to choose a man to come out and fight him.

Goliath represents the chief spokesman and paramount representative of the enemies of the people of God. He mocks God by mocking his people. His weaponry is designed to do great damage and his desire is to bring God's people under the bondage of slavery. His m.o. is to intimidate through fear. To everyone around he bears all the signs of being indomitable. He induced fear and dismay.

Goliath is the epitome of the devil. He comes across as a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. He has been testing the people of God for 40 days just like Satan tested Jesus in the wilderness. He possesses the power of death over the people if he wins. As Goliath scoffs at God by scoffing at the people of Israel, he presents himself ultimately as God's consummate enemy. He hates God's people because he hates God.

Thinking practically, we who follow the Lord Jesus experience the enmity of Satan. Just as Satan manifested himself through Goliath back in that day, he manifests himself to us today. He works personally but also through the demonic realm as well as through the world and the flesh. He comes with hostility. Thinking today of the persecuted church, we are mindful that Christ-followers around the world face the hatred of the devil through persecution. Some are killed. Some are tortured. Others are threatened. Jobs are taken away. Christians are placed in jail. Many are simply treated with malice and verbal abuse. You can just feel the swelling tide of hostility in this country, once rich with religious freedom, as this nation moves more and more in the direction of secular humanism. But we have been warned. Over and over believers have been alerted that we are destined for affliction from the world. As long we live in this age, there will be Goliaths who rise up to breathe out threats and intimidation against the people of God. Remember where the hate and hostility comes from. It comes from God's arch-enemy the devil.

II. The Armies of Israel.

The description of Goliath and all of his imposing characteristics is extensive while the description of the response of God's people is limited. But the little it tells is all we need to know. Verse 11 says that when Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. Day by day for 40 days the Philistine came out in the morning and again in the evening to address the armies of Israel this way. That's a long time! Day was added upon day and each day the armies came out and lined up, and each day Goliath came out and taunted. He cried out for a champion to come and face him. And all the members of the armies of Israel were no doubt saying to themselves as they lined up, "Here we go again." Just like the day before, no one was volunteering to go. The offer from the king was impressive. Any man who went out and defeated Goliath would get a lot of money, a bride, and tax exemption. But still no one was going. They were scared and they were paralyzed. They were accustomed to live in defeat. Their faith and strength were spent and their hope was all but gone. If they had hoped that Goliath would get tired and just leave them alone, it was becoming obvious that was not going to happen. But it was also obvious that there was no one in the camp who was worthy, able, or selfless enough to go stand before the giant as Israel's champion. There was a growing sense of doom and hopelessness.

III. The Brother of David—Eliab.

David was dispatched by his father to pay a visit to his brothers on the battlefield and bring back word to him. We remember Eliab from Samuel's visit to Jesse and his sons. Eliab was the firstborn son of Jesse. He is the one that had such an impression on Samuel. He had the look, but he was not the one the Lord had chosen. And when David arrived on the battlefield and showed interest in the offer Saul made, the anger of Eliab was kindled. Perhaps there was latent jealousy in his heart, but he thought little of David's ability to come onto the battlefield. He scoffed at David's seemingly insignificant role of taking care of sheep. He could not fathom that David would actually be used here to throw off the heavy hand of Goliath and the Philistines.

When Jesus came into this world in the flesh, his family was not impressed with him either. None of his brothers believed in him until after his death and resurrection. Likewise he was unwelcome in his own home town.

Sometimes the deepest spiritual divides are within the family. It is exactly that point that Jesus made when he said he did not come to bring peace but a sword. Sometimes the greatest challenges will be found in one's own home.

IV. The Rejected King—Saul.

Word gets to Saul that someone has finally expressed interest in his offer. Could it be that someone from within Israel's ranks is actually willing to go up against Goliath as champion for Israel? Saul sends for David but greets him with discouragement. "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth."

Saul was the obvious choice out of the Israelites to go out and fight Goliath. He was the tallest man in Israel. He had the look. He had the armor. He was the king. He had been chosen specifically to fight the people's battles. But he had rejected the Lord and the Lord had abandoned him. He was not able to fight because the Spirit had left him.

When David persisted, Saul acquiesced. But he clothed David with his armor, helmet, his coat of mail, and with his sword. However, David could not function with those and he took it all off.

There is always someone around who has a lot of worldly clout but who misses what is really at stake. They put their faith in human effort. That is Saul here. He is a failed leader. On his abandonment, spiritual darkness has engulfed his thinking. His actions reject the understanding that this battle is all about God and the display of the power of God.

Again, I think of Jesus when he came. The failed leaders surrounding Jesus were the Jewish religious leaders of his day. On one side were the liberals, the Sadducees. And on the other were the self-righteous Pharisees. Both were failed leaders. The one had turned the Temple into a business and the other had sought to be right with God through trying really hard to keep a bunch of rules. They stood in the way and opposed Jesus, believing that he was powerless to overcome the enemy. They rejected him and they rejected his way. He discarded their ways to deal with the enemy God's way—on the cross.

V. The Anointed Champion—David.

In verse 10 Goliath is demanding that the Israelite ranks give him a man that they may fight together. The response of Saul and all Israel in verse 11 is fear and dismay. But notice the subtle mention in verse 12 of David. He is presented as though he is the one who will rise to the occasion. And yet what we are told about David in verses 12-16 indicates that he is nothing like Goliath. He is the youngest of eight sons of Jesse the Ephrathite. And while his three older brothers were part of Saul's trembling but do-nothing army, David spent his time playing music for the king and keeping the family's flock of sheep. It would seem that if Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah were unwilling to stand before the giant then neither would this young, inexperienced shepherd boy. But he is mentioned for a reason, and he will play a role in the events despite his inconsequential appearance.

In fact he is sent by his father to take bread to his brothers who were there on the battlefield. Jesse said to David his son, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers." And without neglecting his sheep, he went away to the encampment. He arrived at just the time when the armies were lining up for battle. He heard the taunt of Goliath and he heard the discussion going on among the soldiers as to the incentive being offered for the man who would step forward and kill this imposing giant of the Philistines. He would obtain riches, Saul's daughter as a wife, and free his father's house from

taxation. Was David interested in the reward? Or was he amazed that no one was stepping forward? It is not clear. But what is clear is that if David were to kill the giant, he would end the reproach that was upon the people of God; he would gain enormous riches; he would gain a bride; and he would spare his own family from taxation. Here David asserts that Goliath is merely an uncircumcised Philistine who defies the armies of the living God. What Goliath appears to be in strength is completely negated by the fact that he stands against the living God and his people.

David then faces his skeptical brother undaunted. The disbelief of his own family would not stand in his way.

David is on next to Saul, the rejected king. David said to him, "Let no man's heart fail because of Goliath. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." David reasoned with Saul that his days as a shepherd had given him just the kind of experience he needed. In the care of his sheep, David had saved the flock from threats from lions and from bears by striking them down. But for David the bottom line was not that he was a great warrior. The reason he was able to protect his sheep from their enemies was the Lord. And this is the reason David is so confident concerning Goliath. He has defied the armies of the flock of God. David declared, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

David then refused to go in the armor of Saul. It was more of an encumbrance than it was a help. But his confidence was not in armor; it was in the power of the Lord. So he went to fight in the appearance (from human estimation) of weakness as a youth, soft, inexperienced, and not protected by armor or a coat of mail. Instead he took a shepherd's pouch and a sling. He went out as a shepherd not as a mighty soldier. And what does the shepherd do? The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

At last David faced Goliath. Goliath belittled David. He cursed him and scoffed at him. He said he would feed his flesh to the birds and the beasts. David's reply is classic. We see it in verses 45-47.

Then 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. 46 This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And 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, 47 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."

For David the battle is not about human power, human weapons, or human strategies. The battle is concerned with the reputation of God. And God will defend the honor of his name. All the earth will know that there is a God in Israel, and this assembly will know that the way the Lord saves is not through the work of mere humans. The Lord is the one who is doing the fighting here.

And the Lord wins. Without any hesitation, David runs quickly toward the battle line. Using his sling and a stone, David strikes the Philistine giant on the forehead. He falls to the ground on his face. David uses the Philistine's own sword to sever his head from his body. The Philistine army flees and Israel is energized and plunders their camp.

The events and persons about whom we learn in this text work together to present for us one of many acts in the Old Testament of God's salvation. The people of God are under attack. Their land

is at stake. They have gathered to fight but they are afraid and unable to win the victory. Here they are with the kind of king the people have chosen. He has the look. But he had rejected the word of God and God had rejected him. He is unable and unwilling to step forth himself to defend the reputation of God and the people of God. In fact no one who is part of the armies of Israel is man enough to step forward. For 40 days twice a day, the people are in a state of loss and perplexity, fear and cowardice. They risk becoming slaves to the Philistines. The night is dark; hope is grim. But God! But God!

God provides a shepherd to deliver his people and to defend the honor of his name. God sends a young, inexperienced, soft-looking man, who is no more than a shepherd, who cannot even carry the burden of Saul's armor. His anointed one came to bring bread but he brought so much more. By the power and for the glory of God, he is the one who brought an end to the roaring enemy of God and his people. He brought them deliverance from the threat of bondage and death. He did it by a means that defies the thinking of the world. He does it this way in order to demonstrate that the battle belongs to him. It is not a battle of this world for this world. It is a battle of God to free his people from the destruction coming on this world.

Every instance of God's saving work in the Old Testament points us to the ultimate and full saving work of Jesus Christ.

Goliath stood against the people chosen by the living God. In Goliath we see what stands against the people of God. A record of debt stands against every human being. It is the record of sin-debt we owe to God with its legal demands. It cries out for our eternal punishment unless it is defeated.

In addition to this record of debt there is one who stands against the chosen of God. He is God's arch enemy and the accuser of sinners. He is the devil. The devil must be defeated if we are to be set free from his dominion and avoid becoming his servants for eternity.

Where is the man who will step forth to engage with these two enemies? Where is one who is able to overcome so as to fulfill the plan of God to bring many sons to glory? For 40 days the defiant challenge was issued and for 40 days there was no one found. You can feel the despair that filled the air in Revelation 5. A mighty angel proclaimed with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it, and [John says] I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. But finally one of the elders said to him, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

Jesus alone is the ultimate and consummate champion who in behalf of God's people descends into the valley to do battle with the enemies of God's people. David's deliverance from the Philistine prefigures Christ's deliverance from our enemies—the curse of the law and the evil accuser of the brethren. Colossians 2:13-15 declares:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Hebrews 2:14-15 states:

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Will you bear with me for just a minute as I list ways in which David foreshadows Christ?

David was sent from his father to bring bread. Jesus was sent forth from the Father as bread. He said in John 6, "my Father gives you the true bread from heaven . . . I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall never hunger."

David was Israel's representative who fought in behalf of his people. When David went in that valley to face Goliath, his people were with him representatively. So it is with Jesus. Paul writes in Romans 5:19, "by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." It is by our union with Christ in his death and in his resurrection that sinners are counted righteous before God and the demands of the law are canceled.

David was not impressive by the world's standards, but he knew what was at stake. Christ Jesus was nothing special or impressive to look on, but he too was consumed with zeal for his Father.

David valued the reward of victory. So did Jesus. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross.

David was a shepherd. Jesus said of himself, "I am the great shepherd of the sheep."

David was undaunted by the defiance and jeers of Goliath. So Jesus was reviled when he was hanging on the cross. David sunk his stone into the forehead of Goliath, so it was said in Genesis 3 that the coming savior would bruise the serpent on the head—a deadly blow.

The reward for David's victory was riches and a bride. And so it is for Jesus. He was obedient even to the point of death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name. And by his death Jesus purchased for God people from every tribe and tongue and nation. Together these people are the bride of Christ which he purchased with his own blood through the conflict of the cross.

So where are we—you and I—in this salvation story? You and I are soldiers in the army. We are either part of the Philistine army or the army of the living God. We either walk under the banner of the devil or under the banner of the Christ. By nature we all belong to the domain of darkness. We are all born Philistines. We oppose God and we oppose his people by nature. A person joins the people of the living God by taking their stand with Jesus as their representative. This occurs by faith. We turn from Philistine defiance to love the kingdom of Christ and we trust in Jesus as our champion. He is our hope and assurance for forgiveness and freedom from slavery and bondage to darkness.

The account of David's victory over Goliath is a glorious event in history past demonstrating God's victory over his enemies and the enemies of his people. It teaches us not to try harder to please God on our own and to try and defeat our enemies. No. This text teaches us that we cannot save ourselves from our formidable enemy no matter how hard we try. Only God's anointed can save us. Only Jesus who is the root of David can save. We must forsake any hope in ourselves and rest in him and him alone.

Finally, and as we think about the persecuted church today, the work of Christ does not mean our earthly troubles are over. Every generation experiences satanic hostility in which a world that

despises God gathers itself together in opposition to the people of the Lord. Does this text have anything to say to brothers and sisters undergoing severe persecution in the world? Absolutely it does. First, we should never be surprised by persecution. Second, we have no need to fear when persecutors arise. Yes, they may be able to make our lives uncomfortable but because Christ has defeated the enemy, they cannot do us any eternal harm. When troubles rise and affliction intensifies, when Goliaths start to roar and scoff and deride, remember that ultimately their hatred is of God. They are defying the living God. They will not escape his judgment. Those in Christ may not escape the hostility of God's enemies, but we will never face the judgment of God. Remember the words of Jesus, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from you Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

But at the end of the day, when all is said and done, the root of David, Jesus Christ is the victor, and those whom he represents win eternal victory in him.

Prayer

Benediction

May our gracious Lord remind us every day that there is a God in Israel, and that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's. May he strengthen us to withstand whatever this world may throw at us as we trust our anointed champion and his work for us.