

David #5 • Faith

Reading

Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Sokoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Sokoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armour of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield-bearer went ahead of him.

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, 'Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.' Then the Philistine said, 'This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.' On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

1 Samuel 17:1-11

In the previous two talks we looked at the the theme of covenant through the lens of David's life, and how God's promises to David are played out in both the Old and New Testaments.

In particular we saw that God's covenant to bring salvation to the whole world through his chosen people, Israel, is regularly personified in David's kingship, and ultimately fulfilled through Jesus.

Today we're going to look at how David's life helps us better understand what faith in God means.

First Samuel 17 sees us in the middle of Saul's reign over Israel.

Saul began his reign via a series of events, being anointed, receiving the Spirit, winning a battle and being crowned as king. A series of events that is reprised by both David and Jesus.

At this point in the story, David has been secretly anointed by Samuel (because Saul is still king) followed by... not much... David has gone on doing what he has always done, shepherding his father's sheep.

At this period in history (around the 10th century B.C., what we now call the 'Iron Age') the Philistines, a technologically advanced warrior/sea faring nation, were a regular thorn in Israel's side.

They occupied the coastal area between Israel and the Mediterranean, which meant they controlled many of the major trade routes. And they regularly raided Hebrew settlements, and occasionally launched military campaigns to extend their territory.

1 Samuel 17 describes one of these occasions...

Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Sokoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Sokoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.

1 Samuel 17:1-3

The Philistines have invaded Israel, Israel's army has mobilised and the battle line has been established at the Valley of Elah, with the Philistine Army occupying one hill (probably Sokoh) and the Israelites the other.

And today you're in for a treat, because it's story time as we journey through one of the most famous passages of the Bible.

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, 'Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.' Then the Philistine said, 'This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.' On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

1 Samuel 17:8-11

Goliath is Philistia's 'champion', challenging Israel to send their 'champion' for a pre-war fight, knowing that they didn't have anyone who matched his size or fighting ability.

The intention was to intimidate Israel's army and lower their morale. And the tactic was working!

If only there was someone who was willing to take this monster on...

Enter David!

Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul's time he was very old. Jesse's three eldest sons had followed Saul to the war: the firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah. David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

1 Samuel 17:12-15

His three eldest brothers were with the Israelite army at the Valley of Elah. It looks like David was dividing his time between being Saul's musician and looking after his father's sheep in Bethlehem.

For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.

Now Jesse said to his son David, ‘Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them.’

1 Samuel 17:16-18

The stand off between Israel and Philistia had gone on for over a month, with Goliath marching out twice a day to perform his trash-talking challenge.

Back in Bethlehem, Jesse gets David to load up a donkey with provisions for his three sons and (wisely) the commander of their unit.

Jesse is anxious about his boys, and wants David to return as soon as he can with reassurance that they are all OK.

And so David makes the 15 mile journey to the Valley of Elah.

Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.

1 Samuel 17:20-24

Remember, at this point David is a ‘nobody’, a shepherd boy from Bethlehem who occasionally plays background music for king Saul.

Now the Israelites had been saying, ‘Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel.’

David asked the men standing near him, 'What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?'

1 Samuel 17:25-26

The writer of the story ramps up the tension by letting us know that Saul has promised great riches and a place in his family to anyone who will kill Goliath.

David arrives at the camp and is outraged that this Philistine is able to intimidate God's people.

He has almost certainly heard about the bounty on Goliath's head, so his question is probably emphasising that the primary issue is not that Goliath is defying Israel, but that he is defying God.

They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, 'This is what will be done for the man who kills him.'

When Eliab, David's eldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, 'Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.'

1 Samuel 17:27-28

Their reply makes it clear that they really don't understand what David is implying, and probably think he is being an idiot.

Enter Eliab, who wastes no time in trying to put his little brother in his place. His negative attitude is not surprising, especially as he knows that Samuel anointed David and not him.

Again the story is emphasising how David is seen as being insignificant by the people around him.

‘Now what have I done?’ said David. ‘Can’t I even speak?’ He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

David said to Saul, ‘Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.’

Saul replied, ‘You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.’

1 Samuel 17:29-33

David refuses to be silenced by his brother, and continues his questioning of the men around him.

Saul hears that David is in the camp, and gets him brought to his tent.

David immediately offers to fight Goliath. Saul seems more sympathetic than David’s brother, but can see that David is no match for Goliath.

But David said to Saul, ‘Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.’

1 Samuel 17:34-37a

Here we see David’s faith in God being revealed.

He starts by making it clear that he is not some spoiled little boy.

As a shepherd he has regularly killed fierce predators. And David is confident that Goliath will suffer the same fate.

Why?

...because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.'

1 Samuel 17:36b-37a

David is aware that his strength comes from the God of Israel. And he is confident that the God who rescued him from bears and lions is capable of helping him to defeat Goliath.

Saul said to David, 'Go, and the LORD be with you.'

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armour on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

'I cannot go in these,' he said to Saul, 'because I am not used to them.' So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

1 Samuel 17:37b-40

Here we see the writer of the story cleverly showing why David was the right man to replace Saul as king.

Saul says to David, 'Go, and the LORD be with you.' But it would have been plain to the readers of this story that it should have been Saul, Israel's king, going out in the LORD's strength to defeat Goliath.

Saul dresses David in his own kingly tunic and armour, unaware that one day David will be king. The moment is soaked in prophetic irony.

But David is going to be a different sort of king, a shepherd king, and he will face this battle dressed as and carrying the weapons of a shepherd.

Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield-bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he

despised him. He said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 'Come here,' he said, 'and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!'

1 Samuel 17:41-44

When Goliath sees David approaching he must have wondered what was going on. Why have they sent someone so plainly unsuited to fight him?

David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands.'

1 Samuel 17:45-47

Goliath's speech is short, and it is all about him. 'Am **I** a dog?'. '**I'll** give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!'

Even his curses are by **his** gods

David's speech is longer, more eloquent, and all about God.

David knows that physically he is no match for Goliath.

But he has faith that the same God who helped him defend his father's sheep from bears and lions can help him defeat this giant.

David is representing the LORD, the God of the armies of Israel.

It is in the LORD's strength that David believes he will defeat Goliath.

And the purpose of David winning the battle is to let the whole world know that the LORD, Israel's God is the only true God. That even the most overwhelming human power and technology is no match for the creator and sustainer of the universe.

As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.

1 Samuel 17:48-51a

David, in God's strength, defeats Goliath.

David watches as the giant crashes to the ground, then runs over to him, removes Goliath's huge sword from its sheath and uses it to hack the giant's head from his shoulders.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp.

1 Samuel 17:48-51b-53

And this is where the story usually finishes. But the verses that close the chapter are significant.

As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head.

'Whose son are you, young man?' Saul asked him.

David said, 'I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem.'

1 Samuel 17:57-58

Abner, cousin of King Saul and the commander-in-chief of his army, ushers a blood-spattered David, still proudly holding Goliath's severed head, into Saul's tent.

We get some idea of how insignificant David was up until this moment by the fact that Saul didn't even know who David's father was.

But things are changing.

The story of David and Goliath is also the story of David and Saul.

Saul should have been the man who defeated the Philistines.

Instead, David the shepherd boy is standing in front of Saul with Goliath's severed head hanging by his side.

Unlike Saul, David trusted God to bring victory to Israel, and took on Israel's enemy's champion.

David's crowning as king does not come until many years later. Saul quickly realises that David is a threat to his kingship, and does all he can to have him killed.

As a result David spends many years as a fugitive.

And when David faces tough decisions, we regularly see his faith in God as he turns to God for guidance, receives it, and acts on it. (1 Samuel 23:2-13, 1 Samuel 30:8, 2 Samuel 2:1, 2 Samuel 5:19, 2 Samuel 5:23)

David's faith was a living faith, a faith inspired by a deep love for and trust of God.

A thousand years later, Paul, writing in Romans about how no human can be justified by God through their own righteousness, but only by God's faithfulness, talks about David's faith, quoting Psalm 32:1-2

Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.

Psalm 32:1-2, Romans 4:7-8

David's faith in God was based on a deep trust in God's goodness and faithfulness, not on his own righteousness. Many of the Psalms attributed to David express this trust, as we saw when we looked at Psalms 16 and 132 in the previous talk.

And this trust remained, even when David was neither good or faithful.

Later in his life, when he slides into lust, adultery, deception and murder, God confronts him with his sins, and the consequences of them, through his court prophet Nathan.

And at this pivotal moment, we see the essence of David's faith. Rather than having Nathan executed, he confesses his sin. David makes big mistakes, but he has a good heart, a heart that is ultimately searching for, longing for, God's heart. (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22)

This is biblical faith. Responding to God's faithfulness in repentance for our disobedience, and trust that he will forgive and help us.

God has called, and is continuing to call us, to live a life that is an adventure of faith and trust in him.

What does this mean?

It means putting God at the centre of everything we do.

Asking him to help us to want to do this.

To invite him to be involved in our personal life. Our family. Our relationships. Our friendships. People in our community. People we work with.

David believed God could defeat Goliath, but he didn't just pray for God to send someone to kill him. He volunteered to be part of the solution.

Let's pray that God will help us stand up to the 'Goliaths' in our lives.

The things that keep intimidating us. The difficult things that we have given up on ever sorting. It is never too late, in God's strength, to free ourselves from sins that ruin our peace and joy.

If there are areas in our lives where we know we are falling short, to say sorry and ask for God's strength to stop doing things we know we shouldn't be doing, and start doing the things we know we should be doing, even if they are things we've struggled with for decades.

As followers of Jesus, we have the ultimate champion, someone who never gives up on us. And we are never too old, or young, to ask him to help us.

God is faithful. Let's respond by putting our faith completely in him.

Amen.