

The Life of David 3: David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17:23-51

The story of David and Goliath is one of the most famous and memorable stories in the world. After 3000 years, the names and story live on. The story is often reclaimed and repurposed. Take the sporting world for example! 25 years ago, Inverness Caley Thistle famously beat Celtic. Do you remember the classic headline? *super-caley-go-ballistic-celtic-are-atrocious*! It was talked about and still talked about as a David and Goliath story. There are countless David and Goliath sporting tales. Some of these tales make the big screen because folk love this kind of a story. In the business arena, the same is true. For example, in telling the story of tech company Apple (who were once just a small innovator), Apple is often likened to David who took down (once upon a time) computer Giant IBM.

The David and Goliath story in many ways is the archetypal story of the wee underdog goodie beating the big baddie. In the retelling, the story has often been reduced down to just a moral lesson about ‘facing our giants’. It’s really easy when reading the story or preaching from the passage to jump straight to this application. But there is much more going on in the story on a human level and on a divine level. And what if the David and Goliath story is not the archetypal story but a copy or a shadow or an echo of THE original story.... THE Story that is woven into the fabric of the universe, THE Story that every human heart instinctively recognises because it involves our Maker who came to the world and people he loves on the ultimate rescue mission to defeat the ultimate enemies? What if the reason that we love David and Goliath stories so much is because it touches on THE Ultimate Rescue Story and our deep longing and need for a greater shepherd, a greater king and ultimate Saviour and perfect hero...who is Jesus!

So, what do I, what do we make of the original David and Goliath story now? Because this isn’t two teams lining up against each other over the halfway line waiting for the ref to blow the whistle and the ball to be kicked. This isn’t Apple vs IBM. This is two deadly enemies facing off against each other – life and death. To us, the word ‘Philistine’ means uncouth, unenlightened unsophisticated people who don’t appreciate the finer things we do! To the Israelites the word Philistine meant impending danger and doom. The Philistines also self-identified as enemies of Israel’s God.

For us in the W.E.I.R.D.E.R. world this is hard to relate to. I spoke about this in the introduction sermon to this series and it's worth going over again briefly.

We come to the Life of David and the Old and New Testament with the views, values and assumptions of those who inhabit the W.E.I.R.D.E.R. world. By W.E.I.R.D.E.R. I mean...W - western, E - educated, I - industrialised, R - rich, D - democratic, E - Ex-Christian (which is not the same as ex-Christ), R – romantic.

Those of us who inhabit the W.E.I.R.D.E.R. world are shocked and react and are able to critique the brutality of the Old Testament because the air we currently breathe and the water we have swum in for centuries is saturated with Judeo-Christian values and Jesus' teaching, like... every person has inherent dignity and value and worth (because they are made in the image of God)....like the meek are the ones who inherit the earth, peace makers are blessed and the weak shouldn't be trampled on.

Many people in the rest of the world don't share these views, disagree that they are 'self-evident' and are not shocked in the same way as we are when they read the Old Testament, because...subsistence farming, a hand to mouth existence, raiding, pillaging, warring factions, a lack of social cohesion and a lack of national well-being structures, systems and institutions and unjust governance is their lived experience.

I imagine those living through the Blitz and seeing loved ones killed would relate to this passage differently. Same goes for those living in Ukraine and other war torn parts of the world today.

Before reading the Bible passage, it's worth giving some context and clarifying somethings. I've got 6. In doing that now I think it will help us to focus on what really matters.

- 1. The Valley of Elah** **Show pic** The showdown takes place in the Valley of Elah. Here is how it looks today. It's 18 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Elah is Hebrew for the Terebinth Tree. So, the Valley of Elah means the valley of the Terebinth trees.

- 2. Goliath's height.** How tall was he? Some of the ancient biblical manuscripts record Goliath as *9 cubits and a span* and some record him as *6 cubits and a span*. That's 9ft tall like Robert Wadlow [Show pic](#) (The Guinness book of records tallest man) Or 6'9" tall like Basketball players Le Bron James or Magic Johnson.

Some have speculated (like the new Amazon House of David series) that Goliath might have descended from the mysterious Nephilim mentioned in Genesis chapter 6 which is a very peculiar passage indeed. The Bible says nothing about this by the way. Or could it be that the measurements are symbolic. In the way 24/7 is shorthand for 'all the time', does 9 cubits and a span or 6 cubits and a span mean 'as tall as tall can be'.

The answer is...to make Goliath's height the main focus and argue about it! No! It's to acknowledge that Goliath was really big from a human perspective but not big compared to God. And that perspective really matters when it comes to living our life and relating to God. This book *Scribes and Scripture – the amazing story of how we got the Bible* is really helpful if you want a deeper dive on this. It's also worth pointing out that in 1 Samuel Chapter 9 verse 2 we are told that Saul (King Saul) is a head taller than everyone else. The natural person to fight Goliath (according to the narrator) is....Saul!

- 3. Fighting Champions** - Champions being used to fight on behalf of or instead of an army, was a common practice in the bronze age. If you've watched the film *Troy*, you may remember that the film starts with Brad Pitt as Achilles facing down an enemy warrior who happens to be very big. If you are familiar with Homer's *The Iliad* you may know that Achilles faced Troy's Champion Hector in one-on-one combat. The Iliad is widely acknowledged as mythology and legend; the claim of the Bible however is that the Story of David was/is real. Even the most sceptical historians whilst not agreeing with the content of the story, acknowledge that David was a historical figure. (e.g. Bart Erhman).
- 4. How do chapters 16 and 17 fit together?** If you've read chapters 16 and 17 you might be left wondering how these chapters fit together. You might have been left thinking...was David a musician in the King Saul's court before or after killing Goliath? Does Saul really not recognise David later in chapter 17? What's going on? Professor of the Old Testament Bill Arnold whilst acknowledging that questions naturally arise in terms of how these chapters fit, says that there are ways of understanding or harmonising these accounts.

He suggests that, “It is possible that Ch 16 originated and circulated in Bethlehem and Ch 17 was preserved among later military records of Jerusalem” [and at a later date they were brought together] (1 & 2 Samuel NIV Application Commentary p251).

Some commentators have suggested that Saul seemingly not recognising or remembering David was to do with his mentally unstable condition. But more likely Saul’s question “whose son are you?” is a question that shows Saul’s interest in David the warrior and his pedigree and lineage rather than his initial interest in and appreciation of David as a court musician.

5. Pay attention to the sibling dynamics. In the passage we’ll discover that David’s relationships with his brothers are not straight forward. Their interactions read like...real family life.

6. How not to read 1 & 2 Samuel and how the Bible reads us. This is worth reiterating.

It is possible to read 1 and 2 Samuel in such a way that...

...idolises David and Israel

...turns a blind eye to their misdemeanours

...justifies their despicable actions

...depicts David and Israel as faultless instruments carrying out God’s good purposes

...finds fault only in those Philistines, that evil, those enemies out there

But what we find as we read the books of Samuel is, the Bible critiques not just...

...their social and political systems but ours,

...their destructive tribalism but ours

...their dysfunctional family dynamics but ours

...what’s wrong in their hearts but what’s wrong in ours.

So, on to today’s text. 1 Samuel 17:23-51. This isn’t the whole story but most of it. I thought it might make things interesting if you all read a part! Would you like to read David’s part or Goliath’s? Well, I guessed David. That part is in yellow. This is the word of God.

²³ 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. ²⁴ Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.

²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ 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?”

²⁷ They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, “This is what will be done for the man who kills him.”

²⁸ When Eliab, David’s oldest 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.”

²⁹ “Now what have I done?” said David. “Can’t I even speak?” ³⁰ He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. ³¹ What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

³² David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

³³ 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.”

³⁴ 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, ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ 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.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you.”

³⁸ Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armour on him and a bronze helmet on his head. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. ⁴² He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. ⁴³ He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷ 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.”

⁴⁸ As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. ⁴⁹ 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 facedown on the ground.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ 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.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

Here are some questions to help us think about the passage and perspective.

Q. What did Saul and the Israelites including David's brother Eliab see when they looked at the Philistines and Goliath?

A. A formidable enemy. Goliath and the Philistines were not illusions. They were real and present and looming. They were front and central in their field of vision.

Q. What did Saul, the Israelites and Eliab see when they looked at themselves and into their hearts?

A. They saw themselves in comparison to the Philistines and Goliath. They saw weakness, doubt and defeat. Saul did not see himself as the head and shoulders above everyone else leader and king.

Q. Who or what did Saul, the Israelites and Eliab not see or take account for? Who was missing in their field of vision? Who was not in the frame?

A. God. They didn't see or call to mind or call on God. God of the past. God of the present. God of the future. The God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. They did not see the God who had been with them and recall all the ways He had brought them through challenge after challenge and difficulty after difficulty. They did not see or call to mind or call on God who had been faithful even when they had not been or who had promised over and over again to be with them.

Q. What did David see?

A. He saw the same Philistines and the same Goliath. He saw himself in Saul's armour and how that was not him. He saw that acting and pretending to be someone he was not was not the way. He saw and called to mind fighting skills that he had honed as a shepherd and battles against bears and lions that God had brought him through. He saw that God could use human experience and skill and be the decisive saving power to bring about an against all the odds victory. David saw Goliath in defiance of the Living God. He saw that taking a stand against forces of evil was the right thing. He came as he was asking God to help and to intervene.

Q. Was David's sling practice and participation in events important? Yes!

Q. Was God's intervention important? Vital!

The human and divine met, the sling was slung and *whack* Goliath was dropped.

Q. Then did Saul, and the Israelites and big brother Eliab see that David did it all?

A. No. They saw (at least for a while) that the Battle belonged to the Lord.

A. They saw that the Lord, despite their weakness, doubt, unfaithfulness was faithful and that He intervened decisively.

In this moment, David saw clearly. He saw...

...the enemy and that it was real and dangerous.

...himself - who he was and who he wasn't. He saw himself and as God saw him

...and called to mind who God was and is and promised to do.

And he had a sense that God would come to the rescue.

Q. Did David go on seeing this clearly?

A. As we continue on with the Life of David story, we will find out that David did not always see this clearly. He was as we all are tempted to frame things without God, to put himself at the fore and push God out. He was, as we all are tempted to act as Goliath to get his own way and force his will on others.

It's possible to do that by appealing to strength and threaten from our position of power and privilege and do so in a physically imposing way. It's also possible to manipulate, coerce and threaten others in an emotional way from a place of self-pity – *Behold me! I've had it worse than you, so you should pay* kind of self-righteousness.

Both come from places of self-centred entitlement and brokenness. Both kinds of self-centeredness and brokenness make enemies of others and an enemy of the living God. Both kinds of self-centredness leave us shaking our fist and defying the living God and his ways.

What this shows us is the depth our human brokenness and our neediness. It shows us that life and us humans are complicated. Best of the best (man after God's own heart) David who was the underdog goodie also had a Goliath - God defying sinful tenancy. Same with us. We can pronounce people as 'Philistines' or 'baddies' when they fail to meet our standards. And we do this whilst failing to the exact same standards and declaring ourselves as one of the 'good ones'!

Russian Communist dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who challenged the brutal regime, spent 8 years in the awful gulag prisons reflected on this and concluded...
"The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts. (The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956)

So where does this leave us? It leaves us needing a hero and Rescuer who loves us and can save us from the ultimate enemies of selfishness (which the Bible calls sin), and evil and death.

Apostle Peter in his Day of Pentecost speech says we need the greater David – Jesus! This is from Acts chapter 2.

²⁹ “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

**““The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand
³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.””^[f]**

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

The real hero is...Jesus. The ultimate saviour is...Jesus.

In love he came as a servant to save.

God came from heaven to earth not to be head and shoulders above us but to our level.

He came not dressed up in kingly battle gear but as himself and as one of us.

He was willing to be disrobed in dishonour and so that we could be robed in the righteousness of God.

He was willing to face down the ultimate enemies of sin and hatred and the forces of evil. On the cross He took their absolute worst and our absolute worst, giving in return his best.

Here's what Apostle Paul says in Colossians 2:13-15

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you^[d] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Do you see...

...that Jesus is the greater David?

...that more than we need a David type hero in our lives we need Jesus?

...that we need saved from ourselves and sin and evil and death and we can't save ourselves?

...that because Jesus rose we can follow him through death into life everlasting?

Do you see...

...that it is in Jesus that we saved and loved and find our true and rightful place.

And when we know this, we are able to see and admit our flaws and repent from them without being crushed and enjoy using our gifts and skill without being showy-off, *look at me!* proud.

In Christ and with him we can go for all that is good and take a stand against all that sets itself up in defiance against our King and his kingdom.

I'm going to invite you to pray along with me. Anyone who has done the 24/7 Prayer course (which we run every so often) may recognise this. It's a battle prayer – a Spiritual Warfare prayer. It's a prayer that refers to and draws on Ephesians Chapter 6. If after the prayer you are thinking *what the heck was that all about?*, I invite you to watch online the sermon that Cat preached on Ephesians 6 on 26th June 2024. Before we did our Questions that Jesus asked sermon series we did a sermon series on Ephesians. Here is the prayer. A prayer that calls us to put on God's armour. This armour is divinely made to fit you.



Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:10-12

Heavenly Father, I come to you today as your beloved son/daughter. I worship You, and I give You praise; You are worthy to receive all the glory and honour and praise. Today, I renew my allegiance to You, Jesus – my Saviour, my Friend, my Lord and my King. I thank You for saving me Jesus, and for the forgiveness of sins through the victory of the cross and resurrection.

Thank You that You triumphed over all principalities and powers and made a show of them openly. I stand in that victory today believing that no weapon formed against me can prosper. *Note - here, you might also want to declare this over your family /friends /church – name them before the Lord.*

I put on the armour of God today. I put on the belt of truth – I believe You are the Truth, Jesus. Your words are true and I am in You. I put on the shoes of the gospel of peace. By faith I stand, firm-footed, in Your ‘Calvary-love’ that forgives my sins, and I walk forward today in confidence to share this good news with others.

I put on the breastplate of righteousness. Protect my heart. I am a new creation and I have received the righteousness of Christ. I choose to ‘die to self’ again today and display Your righteousness through my words and actions.

I put on the helmet of salvation. Renew my mind afresh today. I declare my mind set apart for You and therefore I reject the insinuations, the accusations and lies of Satan. You have not given me a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

I lift up the shield of faith to resist all the fiery darts of the enemy. Deliver me from evil and work in my life that there be no ground to give Satan a foothold against me.

I take up the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, and in the victory of Jesus I advance today knowing that the weapons of my warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God to the pulling down of strongholds, to the casting down of imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ.

I break the strongholds of Satan formed against my body, soul and spirit today, and choose to make Godly decisions today, by the grace of God. I rejoice in You today Jesus; may Your joy be my strength as Your grace and mercy follow my life. Jesus, You are my Vision.

SONG: Behold the Lamb.

*All hail the lamb enthroned on high,
His praise shall be our battle cry,*

*He reigns victorious, forever glorious,
His name is Jesus, He is the Lord.*