

## Heroes of the Faith

*David and the Giant* (1 Samuel 17:1-54)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on August 1, 2021

### Introduction

- ❖ This summer we've been in a sermon series we're calling "Heroes of the Faith". We've been looking at OT heroes and preaching on the highpoint in their stories. So far, we've covered Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, and Samuel. They're all well-known heroes and heroines in the Bible.
  - Now every time we do a series like this, it's usually well received. Everyone enjoys studying familiar characters and familiar stories. It's exciting. But it's also risky. **Because any time you teach on a biblical hero, you run the risk of moralizing their story.** Any time you preach on a biblical hero, your sermon can make the mistake of adopting one of the deadly Be's of preaching.
  
- ❖ In Bryan Chapell's book *Christ-Centered Preaching*, he warns against the three deadly Be's<sup>1</sup>. He says some sermons take a biblical text and boil it down to a simple takeaway – either *be* good, *be* disciplined, or *be* like this or that character.
  - In our series, there is a risk of our sermons coming across as "**Be Like**" messages. Where you're simply exhorted to "be like" these heroes of the faith. So you might walk away inspired by the biblical character's faith or courage or perseverance, and your instinct will be to imitate their faith, courage, or perseverance. And there is nothing wrong with imitation – with trying to conform our behavior to match those whom we consider as godly examples, either in the Bible or in our own lives.
    - It's not wrong. It's just not enough. **It's not enough to conform outward behavior – if your inward heart attitude and affections remain untouched.**
  
- ❖ **It's ironic that we focus so much on David's outward behavior when his story is all about teaching God's people to look past outward appearances and into the heart.** David is known in Scripture, first and foremost, as a man after God's own heart.
  - So if we preach on David and the gist of the message is about imitating him on the battlefields of our own lives, facing our own giants, then we very well might miss the main point and misidentify ourselves in the story.
  
- ❖ What I mean is that our instinct is to identify ourselves with David in the story of David and Goliath. **When readers are actually supposed to identify ourselves with the Israelites who were paralyzed in fear.**
  - The original audience of 1 Samuel were obviously the Israelites, the people of God, and they would've read chapter 17 – not primarily as an inspirational story to apply on a personal level – but rather as an episode within the story of the people of God. **Our text advances the overall story of Scripture – the story of God's self-initiative to redeem his creation from the curse of sin by means of a chosen people and particularly by a chosen, anointed leader.**

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching, 2nd ed*, 289-295.

- ❖ David is that anointed leader. **So the readers of 1 Samuel are meant to see him – not primarily as an example to personally imitate – but as a chosen leader who achieves a victory on behalf of God’s people.** His accomplishments established a new reality for them. His subsequent kingship gave shape and identity to what it means to be the people of God. So the point is that the story of David and Goliath has a primary application – not for our personal stories – but for the story of Israel and God’s overall story of redemption.
  - **I think what will help us to properly read and apply 1 Samuel 17 is to consider how David functions as a character in the story.** I believe, by doing so, it will be evident that he functions as more than just as example for God’s people to imitate.
    - Let me show you how David functions in this story (1) as the people’s conscience, (2) as the people’s champion, and (3) as the prefigured Christ.

### **David as the People’s Conscience**

- ❖ Let’s start by considering how David functions as the people’s conscience. **David is Israel’s conscience.** When he appears in the narrative, he makes people uncomfortable. Because his response to Goliath’s challenge convicts them. His faith exposes their lack of it. His zeal for the LORD shames them because they know that’s how they ought to feel. That’s how a conscience works.
- ❖ This is such a long chapter that we won’t have time to go into all the details. But let me briefly set the stage for this encounter of David and Goliath. Now last week, we were in 1 Samuel 15, and there we learned about the pivotal moment in Saul’s kingship where he demonstrated that he feared man far more than he feared God. He concerned himself with pleasing others instead of pleasing the LORD.
  - So in 1 Samuel 16, we’re told that the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul (16:14). **Saul is no longer fit to lead Israel or deliver her from her enemies.** When we encounter him in our chapter, he’s just as fearful as the army he is meant to lead.
    - **This is in contrast to a young shepherd boy that we’re introduced to in chapter 16 who is filled with the Spirit of the LORD and quietly anointed the next king of Israel in a private ceremony.** As readers, we’re queued up with high expectations for this young man.
- ❖ And his moment to shine occurs in the next chapter. Chapter 17 begins with the Israelite army ready to battle the Philistines. The Philistines were a Canaanite people who lived in five capital cities in the coastal plains to the southwest of Judah. They were a constant thorn in the Israel’s side. **Earlier in 1 Samuel 9, we learn that defeating the Philistines had been the principal cause for requesting a king over Israel in the first place (9:16).**
  - And Saul was the man. He was the first king of Israel, and he was initially successful in pushing the Philistines out of Israel’s central highlands. But by this time, the Philistines were gaining ground, and this battle was fought in the foothills between Israel and Philistia. Much was at stake in this battle. The enemy was encroaching on Israel’s borders.

- ❖ **Now in v4, we're given a lengthy description of Goliath, the Philistine champion. He's described as an immense, intimidating physical presence.** We commonly call him a giant, but he wasn't a giant in the fairytale sense. But he was an extremely tall man. The Hebrew OT says he was six cubits and a span, which works out to over nine feet tall. The Greek version of the OT and the Dead Sea Scrolls say four cubits, which is about six feet nine inches. Either way, he would've towered over the average Israelite soldier.
  - His coat of mail weighed over 120 pounds. He was armed with a javelin strapped across his back, and in each hand he held a sword and a spear. We're told the tip of the spear itself weighed 14.5 pounds. He's strapped with muscle and weapons.
  
- ❖ And he issues a bold challenge. **Goliath challenges Israel to representative combat.** It's a contest where each army sends a champion to represent them in single combat. The two men will determine the outcome of the battle and the fate of each army. It was a strategy that ancient peoples used to limit bloodshed and the loss of life on either side.
  - Now you'd think this idea would be a relief to most of the soldiers in Israel's army – knowing they no longer have to fight. But instead, there is a collective response of fear and dismay. Because no one is willing to accept the challenge.
  
- ❖ But then in v12, the spotlight is immediately thrust back on David, the youngest of eight sons of Jesse. **Unlike the impressive, seemingly invincible, Goliath, David is described as a shepherd boy not old enough to be conscripted into the army.** He was just under twenty, which was the cutoff age. He still lived at home running errands for his father. Bringing rations to the front line, especially for his three oldest brothers.
  - Now we're told that for forty days, Goliath has been issuing his challenge twice a day, morning and evening (17:16). One day, David arrives in the middle of one of Goliath's speeches. He hears the blasphemous things the Philistine says about the LORD, and he learns of the substantial reward for the one who will defeat Goliath and is surprised no one was taken the challenge.
  
- ❖ And here, in v26, this is where David begins to serve as Israel's conscience. **His honest questions convict the fighting men of their unwillingness to fight and defend the honor of the LORD.** *“What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”*
  - Now to that, David's oldest brother Eliab gets angry. He essentially accuses David of being a conceited kid who came to the frontline to see some action and to criticize grown men for their inaction. But Eliab's rebuke says more about Eliab than it does about David.
    - Eliab's conscience was pricked. **As someone who was more concerned with his own survival, Eliab was irritated that David is more concerned with the LORD's honor.** David's response to Goliath shames these grown men, who can't deny that this boy has more courage and a greater zeal for the LORD than they do.

- ❖ But don't get the wrong impression. David responds this way – not because he's naturally more courageous or zealous than any other man in the entire army. No, it's only because he sees things from God's perspective. **Apparently that's what it means to be a man after God's own heart – you are someone who sees reality with God's eyes.**
  - Back in chapter 16, the big lesson learned when David was anointed king is that while humans look on the outward appearance, the LORD looks on the heart (16:7). **God sees what cannot be seen nor understood by the human eye. He sees into the heart.** He knows our attitude and affections, the disposition and desires of the heart.
  
- ❖ So as a man after God's own heart, David possessed this kind of spiritual sight. **He saw realities that his peers around him missed.** Let me give you an example. Look in v25. The men of Israel look at Goliath and they see "*this man*" – this man with all of his physical prowess and outward advantages. But look in v26. All David sees is "*this uncircumcised Philistine*" defying "*the armies of the living God*".
  - It's no small detail for David to call Goliath "*uncircumcised*". **Unlike everyone else, David is seeing the situation in covenantal terms.** Circumcision was a sign of the covenant – of being part of God's covenant community and thereby a recipient of his covenant promises. **So while everyone else saw an invincible warrior, David saw someone outside the covenant community who worships false gods (dead idols) and who dares to defy the living God of Israel.**
  
- ❖ **It appears, at this point, that only David has the eyes to see beyond outward appearances.** Beyond how big and scary Goliath appears. Which is why he's suitable to serve as the people's conscience. He can remind them of who they are as the covenant people of God and who God is as the Lord of Hosts. Now how they respond to that is the key question. Is it going to be with annoyance or with repentance?
  
- ❖ Friends, we need to recognize ourselves – not so much in David – as in these Israelites. If we're honest, we'd admit that we react in the same way when we face obstacles in our path – when enemies impede our progress. We respond with fear and resign ourselves to defeat.
  - **Before we can imitate David in his courage – before he can function as our example – he needs to serve as our conscience.** Convicting us. Pricking us. Similarly reminding us to see beyond outward appearances.
  
- ❖ Some of you are being confronted right now with a big and scary challenge, with an obstacle that intimidates you and seems insurmountable. It could be something (or someone) in your workplace or in your school or in your ministry. You wish you had David's faith and courage.
  - But what you first need are David's eyes. To be able to see beyond outward appearances, to recognize that greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4). **You need the eyes of your heart opened to see who you are as a covenant child of God and who he is as the LORD of hosts.**

- ❖ **If you're feeling convicted because you realize you've been looking at your problems all wrong – from the world's perspective and not God's – then now is the time to repent.** And now is the time to pray for a heart after God's own heart and for vision that sees reality with God's own eyes.

### **David as the People's Champion**

- ❖ Now remember we're trying to figure out how to properly read and apply this familiar story, and we said it helps to understand how David functions as a character in it. We just saw how he serves as Israel's conscience. **Now, after he gets Saul's blessing to represent Israel, he goes out to the battlefield to serve as Israel's champion.** But what we're going to see is that not everyone shares the same definition of the kind of champion that the LORD will use to achieve his purposes.
- ❖ Let's return to the story. Saul hears about this young man who is up to the challenge, so he wants to see David for himself. But when Saul looks, he doesn't see a champion. He sees a kid. **But Saul is working with the assumption that God's chosen deliverer would be defined by strength and stature.** He can't see past outward appearances.
  - So when he does consent to David representing them as Israel's champion, Saul wants the boy to at least look the part. In v38, it says, *“Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail,<sup>39</sup> and David strapped his sword over his armor.”*
    - Now this scene, by the way, is ironic. **By dressing David in his kingly armor, Saul is unintentionally moving the plot along – as this chapter's immediate purpose is to narrate the transition of kingship from Saul to David.** Some commentators think a self-serving motive was behind Saul's generosity to offer his armor. Perhaps it would be a way for him to take some credit if David was to somehow succeed.
- ❖ But David ends up rejecting Saul's armor and sword. And he heads out to the battlefield with a sling in his hand and five smooth stones in his pouch. **Now notice with me how there is a particular emphasis on the fact that David doesn't rely on a sword.** A sword being an instrument of human ingenuity and representing human strength. **So David's refusal to use a sword is a way to say that he's not going to rely on human ingenuity and strength.**
  - Later in v43, Goliath is offended that David shows up to fight him without a sword and only a stick (what he derisively calls David's shepherd staff). Then in v45, David points out how Goliath is dependent on the sword. And in v50, the text specifically mentions that *“there was no sword in the hand of David.”*
- ❖ **The point in pointing out the absence of a sword in David's hand is to show how overmatched he was compared to Goliath.** It was to stress how David was *not* the obvious choice as the people's champion. He would've been considered the foolish choice, the weak choice.

- ❖ Some have tried to argue that David was actually a strategic choice to face Goliath, and the same could be said about his weapon of choice, the sling. Consider **Malcolm Gladwell's book *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants***. The thesis is that sometimes what appears to us as a disadvantage turns out to be our advantage. Weaknesses sometimes end up being strengths.
  - Likewise David has hidden advantages (like his speed) and disguised strength (like his deadly accuracy with the sling). So he may not be as overmatched as we might think. Maybe he's not an underdog after all. Well, it's an interesting thesis, but I think it's reading too much into the story. **I don't think you're supposed to read this portrait of David and conclude that he's got some sneaky strengths.**
  
- ❖ **David himself makes it clear that he wasn't going into battle relying on some hidden advantages.** Listen to what he says to Goliath in vv45, "*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.*"
  - So unlike Goliath, who relies on instruments of human ingenuity and strength, David relies on the LORD of hosts. The Lord is what gives him courage and optimism – not hidden strengths. **David's trust is in the powerful name of the LORD.**
    - He goes on in vv46-47 to tell Goliath that, "*<sup>46</sup>This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup>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.*"
  
- ❖ The point is that David doesn't beat Goliath because his "weaknesses" are subtly strengths and that it turns out he's actually the stronger character. **No, the narrative is making every effort to communicate that David actually *is* weak, and the choice of a shepherd boy as your champion *is* foolish.** But that's exactly how the LORD saves – by using the weak to shame the strong and the foolish to shame the wise (1 Cor 1:27).
  
- ❖ Now why does God do that? Why does he save that way? Because he's sending a message. Look back at vv46-47 and note two audiences in view. David tells Goliath that the LORD is going to deliver you into my hand – as improbable as that sounds – because he has a message, first of all, for all the earth, "*that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.*" **So David's victory will be a word of gospel to the unbelieving world.**
  - If you're not yet a Christian, the story of David and Goliath is telling you that you're building your life on the wrong foundation. You're relying on human strength – a strength that will eventually fail. As you age, your strength will fade, and one day death will steal it away. **The only One whose strength will never fade and never fail is the LORD. He's the firm foundation that you can trust and build your life upon.** So the first audience is the unbelieving world, and the message in this story is to know and to trust in the God of Israel, the God of the Bible.

- ❖ **The second audience is the people of God.** This improbable victory will send a message to Israel, *“that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear.”* (v47) **This victory serves as a word of correction to God’s people.** The story of David and Goliath is a rebuke of our fixation on human strength and outward appearances.
  - **Even to this day, the people of God continue to measure success in our churches and ministries by metrics that are solely tied to outward appearances.** We’re so focused on attendance numbers and the size of our budget. We assume God only achieves his purposes through big churches and impressive, charismatic leaders.
    - The story of David and Goliath is a needed word of correction for the Church. **Calling us to repent of a dependance on worldly strength and a fixation on outward appearances.** Reminding us that God can accomplish mighty things with weak people and small churches. This story reminds us that God loves to use the weak to shame the strong and the foolish to shame the wise.

### David as the Prefigured Christ

- ❖ So we’ve seen how David functions in this story as the people’s conscience – convicting them for their lack of faith and vision. And he serves as the people’s champion – challenging their assumptions for who God can (and will) use to achieve his purposes. So now let’s consider how David functions in this story as the prefigured Christ.
  - **What does it mean to be a prefigured Christ?** Remember, the word Christ is a title, not a last name. It means “the Anointed”. Long before Jesus the Christ came, David prefigured him. He serves the overall story of Scripture by pointing us forwarded to another. **His battles and victories, his life and kingship, contribute to the larger concept of God’s Anointed One.** David give us a better grasp of who Christ is and how he will one day fight and defeat our greatest enemies: sin, death, and the devil.
- ❖ As I mentioned earlier, our instinct is to read ourselves into the story as David. We assume that we should identify with the central figure in the narrative since we’re the central figure in our own stories. But if David is the prefigured Christ, then a proper interpretation places Jesus in center stage. **He is the David figure, and we’re the cowering Israelites.**
  - When faced with the enemy – with sin and Satan – like the Israelites, we have no answer. No chance of success. We can only stare at each other in disbelief. But thanks be to God that we have a champion!
- ❖ **Like David, Jesus stepped forward to do what no one else would – what no one else can.** Like David, Jesus was a weak choice, a foolish choice. Because he too rejected the sword. In fact, he chose to carry no weapons in his hands. Because his strategy was to win by losing. **His plan was to achieve victory by being defeated.**
  - Because his plan was to experience the defeat that we deserved. He functioned as our champion, as our representative. He took on our sins and counted them as his own. And he accepted defeat. But by his blood, he forgave our sins. By his death, he conquered death and disarmed the devil. **His victory means victory for all of God’s people.** His triumph is counted as our triumph!

- ❖ **Church, it's in light of your Champion's victory over your greatest enemy that you now engage your own enemies and face your own set of obstacles.** You can continue the good fight of the faith knowing that the final victory is already won. That knowledge, that perspective, makes all the difference.
  - All the fear and anxiety that we typically feel can be replaced by a deep joy and blessed assurance. **Because we're no longer engaging the battles of life with an uncertain victory in front of us. Rather, we're engaging those battles with a decisive victory behind us won by our champion.** That change of perspective makes all the difference.
  
- ❖ When we're studying this text, we usually focus our attention on the epic showdown between David and Goliath and all the events leading up to it. **But we rarely think about what happened afterwards.** So imagine if you were a soldier in the army of Israel.
  - Now before the battle begins, you're understandably nervous. You've got to fight the Philistine army, and they've got a giant on their side! You're feeling scared, overwhelmed, and totally unprepared. **But then you're told someone has volunteered to be Israel's champion – to engage in representative combat on your behalf.** You're relieved that it won't be you having to fight.
  
- ❖ But when you see your champion step onto the battlefield – a shepherd boy without any armor and armed with only a sling and staff – all that fear and anxiety overtakes you again. Up against a giant, this kid has no chance. The odds don't look good. **But when the dust settles, it's your champion standing victorious over his fallen opponent.**
  - Suddenly, there's a resounding shout of victory on your side. Trumpets blare and a battle cry is issued. You and the rest of the army go rushing down into the valley in hot pursuit of a retreating enemy.
  
- ❖ Now think about it. **The victory is won. The enemy is defeated. But you still need to subdue them, and they'll still put up a fight.** They'll be smaller skirmishes you'll have to face. You still might get a few wounds along the way. It won't be a cakewalk.
  - **But it's a very different experience engaging the enemy with an uncertain victory in front of you versus engaging those enemies with a decisive victory behind you.** Do you see the difference it makes to rush into battle, right into the thick of things, knowing that your champion has already won and the victory is already yours?
  
- ❖ **Friends, that's the same perspective we need to embrace when we're engaging enemies and facing obstacles in life.** Your Champion has already won! Victory is already yours! There are smaller battles and skirmishes that you'll have to experience, and you'll need to persevere through them. But you won't have to muster up the faith and courage you'll need. They will be your natural response to the decisive victory your Champion has won for you. Your heart is changed. And now you're ready to imitate – to be like David.