

Foundations of Fearless Faith

1 Samuel 17

"...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves..."

Introduction: We love this story. You did not have to grow up in Sunday School to know the gist of David vs. Goliath. Rooting for the underdog is built into our being, and standing up to bullies speaks volumes in any gathering of any age. Each year you'll hear of it in sports, where the small school takes on the enormous University, defying the odds and "slaying the giant". Or the mom and pop store taking on the corporate conglomerate, standing up for the little guy. Or the little country surrounded by enemies fending off attack after attack to win and sustain independence. David vs. Goliath stories are popular, speak to our hearts and sense of justice, and are widely known.

But herein lies the challenge with 1 Samuel 17. This story is *so familiar* that everyone knows it, but few have actually studied it. Much like the Christmas and Easter stories, we suffer from familiarity while lacking depth of understanding. The **problem with this** is that we end up interpreting wrongly which leads to a myriad of *applications* that are not ground in the text itself. The easiest mistake we can make with OT stories is to simply **moralize them**, coming up with something to do or not to do as the main take away: DO be kind, truthful, and stand up to bullies, and DON'T lie, steal, or swear. Now there is nothing wrong with morals if they are founded on the right foundation and point to the right object. But most often moralizing simply is a way for people to *be better* based on our own self-focus and standard. Let me give you an example from a **popular teacher and "Bible" teacher** in our modern day when it comes to this story:

*When David saw Goliath on the battlefield, **everything in his mind told him, "He's too big. You better run the other way just like everyone else in the army is doing."** But the Scripture says, "David ran quickly to attack Goliath" (1 Samuel 17:48). David knew that if he didn't confront this giant, if he didn't face his fear, **he would miss his destiny**. He was uncomfortable, **his emotions weren't supporting him**, and it was difficult, but as he ran to the giant, he began to **feel strength that he never felt**, a confidence, boldness, and skill. He slung the rock and defeated Goliath. When you run to your giants, God will make things happen that you couldn't make happen. When you run to what you know you need to confront, you're running to your purpose.¹*

Now we typically do not call out other preachers, but this is representative of how many approach this story, the Old Testament, and the entire Bible. Not only is this NOT faithful to the text, but it pins the focus on the story on US, how God is there to further OUR good, and sees God as a cosmic Genie. "Facing your giants" is a fine principle of morality in all of life, but you can do that without the Bible. Standing up to bullies is good, but that can be taught in any school and fits well on posters. Running toward hard things is something we should all consider, but the "**why**" behind it is what really matters.

This morning we will look freshly at a well-known story, but we will look at it through the lens of **God's glory** rather than **man's accomplishment**, looking at the foundation of the fearless faith David exercised in the midst of opposition from his own brother, Israel's king, and the giant of an enemy who dared defy

¹ <https://www.joelosteen.com/inspiration/blogs/2022/03/18/00/35/run-to-your-giants>

the living God. Instead of seeing how we face the giants in our lives, we will see how we can walk by faith to the **glory of God**, who is the one who **delivers and saves**. This again shows a clash of *worldviews*, one that looks to man first for answers, only to be found wanting, and the other that builds a foundation trust in a sovereign God.

The Fearful Odds, The Man-Centered Response (1-25)

Before unpacking the *theology of David* and his focus on the glory and strength of God, we first examine the setting of the story. It is told intentionally in an extreme manner, painting a specific picture of two nations pitted against each other with one possessing the clear external advantage at every level: *better numbers, technology, and a daunting champion*. Let's look at how the text describes the scene:

The Armies Gathered (1-3) – We are not told *how* we got here, but are only thrust into a battle that has been going on for 40 days (16) with two nations divided by a valley between. The Philistines had taken a position ON a piece of land that belonged to Judah at Socoh, so they had already been invaders. The Valley of Elah separated them, where battles would be fought on flat ground (see *map*).

The Champion Revealed (4-11) – We are introduced to **Goliath**, an imposing figure by any measure, and the text goes into great lengths to show how *intimidating he was*. He was a **champion**, which meant the type of one-on-one combat he was offering was something he was skilled, experienced in, and had bested his share of opponents. His **stature** was immense. Some have questioned the legitimacy of his height, but there is no Biblical reason to question the original Hebrew. *Giants* roamed the earth from before the flood, from the *Nephilim* in Genesis 6 to the 'descendants of Anak' (Num. 13:22) who came from the Nephilim (Num. 13:33). Though the measure of a *cubit* could change a bit, it mainly signaled **18 inches**, meaning Goliath measured around **9' 9"**, give or take (even those who say he was only 6'9" will still acknowledge his enormity). Not only was his size imposing, but he was strong and coordinated enough to lug around armor that weighed in at **126 pounds** and throw around a spear that's iron point weighed **15 pounds**. In other words, without question, this was THE most devastating of adversaries.

The Charge Levied – The idea in this conflict was simple: let's settle the battle with a man-to-man fight, winner take all. This limits the bloodshed and creates simple outcomes, which makes a ton of sense when you have a Giant on your side! But the issue at stake was greater than this. The true challenge was the fact that **Goliath defied the God of Israel**, which meant to "*reproach, mock, or deride*" God, calling into question His greatness and glory. This word becomes a major point of the text (used 6 times – vv. 10, 25, 26 (twice), 36, 45). The fact that a pagan Philistine was publically calling into question the God of Israel **should have** rallied the troops to action, to fight FOR the glory of God. But this was NOT what drove the vast majority of Israel at this time.

The Response Displayed – Simply put, Israel and Saul were shaking in their boots: "*When Saul and all of Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were **dismayed (shattered) and greatly afraid (exceedingly fearful)**.*" (11) Notice that this response is a **culmination of a worldview played out over time**. Israel wanted a king like all the other nations – and they got him in Saul, a man who stood head and shoulders above the rest of Israel. But their trust was in **physical strength** and that which can be seen! The problem with this lens: *there is always someone bigger, stronger, better*. Saul was **supposed to be the warrior king, the soldier to lead and win battles AGAINST THE PHILISTINES!** But when faced

with an overwhelming challenge and challenger, they had no response to being outgunned and outmaneuvered, except to cower in fear. So do all who trust in their own strength, wealth, ingenuity, intelligence, or ability to navigate life apart from God.

The Future King Entered – It is here that David enters the scene, sent by his father to the battle lines to bring sustenance but more importantly to bring news of the battle and well-being of his brothers to his father. With the stalemate going on for 40 days (16), it's no wonder that Jesse's concern grew. David left his sheep with another keeper, ran the 13 miles from Bethlehem, and fulfilled his father's wishes. As he got to the battle lines, the text is clear: *David heard the defying words of Goliath* (23), and it began to stir his emotions, affections, and desire to act. In the midst of the fear, the king had given a promise to anyone willing to fight the giant: riches, his daughter, and tax free living for his family if they were brave enough. It was clear that all Saul had **were worldly means to motivate, since it was NOT God's glory that inspired him**. But earthly riches can only motivate so far, and people will typically not die for something they cannot enjoy after death.

It is here that the text will focus on the words of David, since up until now we have NOT HEARD David speak at all. When David speaks, he explains his **theology**, what he truly believed about the Lord and what motivated him. Far from desiring to run away or acting like everyone else, David had a true understanding of who his God was, what was expected, and what this battle was all about. This theological stance is the difference between fear and fearlessness, anger and contentment, worship and self-indulgence. David's understood and lived out worldview is the point of the story, and his scrap with Goliath was simply the outcome.

David Followed the Living God & Would Not Stand for His Defiance (26)

And David said to the men who stood by him, *“What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”*

Up until this part of the story, Saul and the armies of Israel were crippled with “godless” thinking. It was not that they did not believe God existed or that they were necessarily worshiping some pagan deity (at least at this point), but they were functioning like *practical atheists*, seeing all of life through a lens that kept God at a distance or that cut Him out of life all together. They viewed the scene in front of them through *earthly terms*: an enemy with greater numbers who were bigger, stronger, faster, and thus they had no outs, which led to fear. They also employed *worldly wisdom*, which is all someone has to face problems when God is no longer at the forefront (see James 3:13-15). *This is the plight of so many who claim to know and love God in Christ, but act like He does not exist or has little to no bearing on their life.* In comes David with a boldness NO ONE had shown, which came off like *impetuous brashness*, or at least that is how his brother interpreted it. When David showed up questioning WHY Goliath could be so brash without repercussion, **“Eliab's anger was kindled against David”** (28). Why?! Why did Eliab question David's motives and accuse him of being evil in his heart? Possibly it's the result of natural sibling rivalry, where the youngest can be a bit punky and the eldest rule followers are easily annoyed. But there is definitely something deeper here. Eliab had been caught into the same **pattern and culture** as the rest of Israel and had failed to look to God first and foremost. When David showed convictional resolve, it smacked against Eliab's nominal faith, which stirred up **anger**. This IS what happens when one walks with resolve, by faith, in the truth. Not only does the world not like it, but those who nominally believe will be offended. ***What allowed David to stand out so boldly?***

David had a proper **theology**, which allowed his thinking to be **theocentric**. This is so huge to understand! David knew that his God was a **LIVING GOD**, not a piece of stone or wood like the idols of other nations. A living God is active in our lives, a God who created and sustains all things, who is ever-present and all knowing. It was not only ridiculous that a Philistine would question such a God, but that reproach/defiance should be matched with a response that truly believed that God is living! In other words, David's **orthodoxy matched his orthopraxy**, him living out what he really believed. The truth is we ALL live out our theology, but far too many live it out like the rest of Israel, which leaves them fearful, unsure, directionless, and stuck. David believed so he moved and acted accordingly, even when no one else would.

Church, we remember that we serve a living God, and that has implications in our lives.

*you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, **which is the church of the living God**, a pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)*

*For to this end we toil and strive, **because we have our hope set on the living God**, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe (1 Tim. 4:10)*

David Experienced God's Deliverance in the Past, and Had Confidence for the Future

But David said to Saul, "*Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied **the armies of the living God.**" ³⁷And David said, "**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.**"*

Youth is both a gift and a plight. Energy, idealism, and glorious ignorance categorize our youthful years, which can propel life and ministry, but a lack of wisdom and discernment can easily derail. But the Bible is clear about youthfulness: *no one should look down on it (1 Tim. 4:12)* and it *does not hinder us from real ministry* (see God's call to Jeremiah – 1:6-8). But David's youth stood out as a hindrance to his action at the battlefield.

It was clear by OT law that a soldier had to be a male who was at least **20 years old** (Num. 1:3, 20), and David most likely was a year or few short of this standard. When David boldly told Saul that he'd go and fight Goliath, Saul gave the standard, worldly, and godless responses. "David, you are but a **youth, and he has fought SINCE his youth**". In other words, David, you are too young and inexperienced to take on this task. Again, was David just naïve and impetuous, like all teenage boys who think they will never get hurt or die, and can drive faster and take risks because they are invincible?

But David's response was anything but impetuous. It was grounded in **consistent and persistent trust in the truth and nature of God**, helping him live consistently. ***Where did David's courage come from? A future destiny????!*** No, it was the fact that he knew, believed and experienced the fact that God is a **deliverer**. His argumentation is informative for us. As a shepherd, he would fight off **lions and bears** when they threatened or even carried off one of his sheep. He equated the situation with Goliath as the

SAME, only different by degree. God delivered him from the paw of the lion and bear, why wouldn't He deliver from the hand of the Philistine?! This is faithful thinking, but rare execution.

Faith grows. That is the beautiful part of the gift of grace that God gives to believers. Faith grows as we consistently walk in it, trusting God in the little things to build foundational trust for the bigger ones. David had an **experience of God's faithfulness** in his past which compelled and propelled his trust of God's work in the future. As a youth he established that he would trust the living God with his life and responsibilities when the price was a sheep, which allowed him to face off against a giant and entrust his life to that same living God.

Let me make two principled points here. 1) **When we do not establish faith and trust in little, we are caught unable and unprepared to walk by faith in the big** – Ask yourself this question – can I look back at how I've trusted the Lord alone and saw Him faithfully work in the past? In finances? In marriage and relationships? With your kids? In your job? In this church? In this country? 2) **This kind of faithfulness is established in your youth** (and if not, we start NOW) – To those who are 25 and under, remember that you are not too young to start trusting the LORD for real life and ministry situations. In fact, you are establishing your worldview now, and the rest is merely scope. *Are you preparing for greater responsibility by having integrity and consistency now?* You are the future of the church, and that does not mean you have to strive for greatness, since God will take care of that, but it means you should be striving to know, believe, and live in light of the **living God who delivers us**.

David Believed the Whole Earth Should See the Glory of God

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.*

*⁴⁶This 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,** ⁴⁷and 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."*

After facing opposition from his brother and the king, David was finally ready to face off with the giant. Finding the armor of the king too cumbersome and unnecessary, David strapped on the weapon of a shepherd, a sling that could get a stone going upwards of 100-150 mph. He chose **5 smooth stones** from the nearby brook, most likely since there were four other giants from Gath (see 2 Sam. 21:22). As he approached the giant on the open field of battle, we finally get the Sunday school picture of the story. Notice the offense and disdain that Goliath had for this opponent. He saw David as a *pretty boy, a fancy youth* who was not a worthy opponent. But fine, if he really wanted a fight, a fight he'll get, and he would give David's rotting body to the birds and beasts.

This is where David's **theocentric thinking** was on display, even more than his fighting ability. There is MORE emphasis in the text on David's words spoken to Goliath than the actual fight itself. Three emphases come out of this speech, which was a counter to the Philistine and instructive to Israel:

- **An embracing of weakness** – David would go on in his life and wield a sword in battle as a skilled soldier. Why did he choose no armor and only a sling? The same reason that he emphasized the deliverance of God from the lion and bear. David intentionally did NOT go into battle in kind with Goliath, but emphasized that God's glory and power are exemplified in **human weakness**.

Trusting in God's sovereignty does not mean we do not act, but it also does not mean that we only trust Him AFTER we've exhausted all other options. We are strongest in faith when we embrace our weakness the most (Ps. 33:16-19; Ps. 147:10-11; 2 Cor. 12:7-10), and we are not saved by our greatness or power, but in trusting His.

- **A clash of worldviews** – Notice that David countered Goliath's charges one for one. Goliath cursed David by his gods, David said His God will strike him down and leave HIS body for the birds and beasts. David understood that the battle was both physical and spiritual, that he was facing an enemy that he could see but also a greater enemy that would defy the God of Israel. Our theology compels us two ways: 1) we see all of life as both **physical and spiritual**, knowing God is always working in the latter through the former, 2) our clash is not simply against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers in the unseen realm (Eph. 6:12).
- **A goal of displaying the glory of God** – If this narrative was not in the midst of a duel one could imagine it being preached at a **missions conference**. What drove David? The fact that the God of glory is to be known and magnified in the whole world. *"That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that the whole assembly may know that **the LORD saves.**"* What was at stake for David? How the world would see and understand the true God of the universe. This is exactly what should drive us in life, to make God known through Christ in the church and missions. See Psalm 96:7-10:

*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the **LORD glory and strength!***
8 *Ascribe to the LORD **the glory due his name;**
bring an offering, and come into his courts!*
9 *Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!*
10 ***Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!***
*Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity."*

What is the story of David and Goliath about? It is about possessing and living out a Biblical view of the glory of God, a willingness to stand because of the living God we serve and make Him known in a world that is violently opposed to Him. We CAN stand courageously, not for the sake of wealth gained or strength possessed, but because we serve a God who delivers, who saves, and does all things for the sake of His name. That is why the actual battle is almost anti-climactic, where the stone sinks in the giant's head, falling to his death, and losing his head by his own sword, leading to a great victory for the Lord that day. The **battle is always the LORD's**, and we trust that He is working in each and every situation, all to the praise of His glory!