

David & Goliath

I remember when our kids were still very young and Jeremy managed to bring two things together in his creative mind. One was the story of David and Goliath, the red-headed farm boy doing battle with the Philistine giant. The other was a plastic model, I think it was the Incredible Hulk. He looked like a fearsome giant, a powerfully-built warrior that you wouldn't want to mess with, but in Jeremy's mind, that was David. It made sense to him to see David as a kind of super-hero, because he had killed the giant that everyone else was paralyzed with fear over.

It does make sense in the natural world to imagine conquerors as powerful people who can physically overcome their powerful enemies. But that's not the story of David and Goliath, nor does it help us learn what we need to learn from this story today.

The people of Israel had asked for a king to lead them, so they could be like the nations around them. They had been led for at least a couple of hundred years by Judges and most recently by Samuel, who was both a judge and a prophet. But Samuel's sons were corrupt and the people didn't respect them. They decided that they needed a king and God granted their request, calling on Saul from the tribe of Benjamin to lead Israel. Saul had started in humility and obedience to God, but became more self-reliant and began to do things his own way rather than trusting fully in God's direction. This led to troubles, both in his relationship with God and with his ability to lead Israel to victory over their enemies:

Finally the LORD said to Samuel, "You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel. Now fill your horn with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be My new king." (1 Samuel 16:1)

When Samuel got to Bethlehem, he asked Jesse to bring out his sons and Jesse brought his seven sons to stand before the prophet. Samuel took one look at the eldest son, Eliab, and thought, "Surely this is Yahweh's anointed!" But God spoke to Samuel at that point and said,

"Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't make decisions the way you do! People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at a person's thoughts and intentions." (16:7)

The same thing happened with Abinadab and Shammah and all the rest of Jesse's sons. And so Samuel told Jesse that none of these seven were the one the LORD had chosen and did he have any more sons. There was an eighth boy, a mere lad who was out in the field looking after the sheep. He was sent for and when he arrived, the LORD said to Samuel, "This is the one; anoint him." So Samuel took the horn full of olive oil and poured it all over David's head, right in front of his seven brothers. Something happened at that moment which would change David's life forever; the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him "from that day on".

At the end of chapter 16 we find that David has musical talent. He plays the harp so well that he is brought into the service of King Saul so that he can calm the king down when he was overcome with depression and fear. David joined the king's staff and was to make himself available to play the harp whenever he was needed.

And then we come to chapter 17 which begins with the introduction of David's adversary, the giant Goliath:

Then Goliath, a Philistine champion from Gath, came out of the Philistine ranks to face the forces of Israel. He was a giant of a man, measuring over nine feet tall. He wore a bronze helmet and a coat of mail that weighed 125 pounds. He also wore bronze leggings and he slung a bronze javelin over his back. The shaft of his spear was as heavy and thick as a weaver's beam, tipped with an iron spearhead that weighed fifteen pounds. (1 Samuel 17:4-7)

In verses 8 - 10, Goliath challenges the armies of Israel:

"Do you need a whole army to settle this? Choose someone to fight for you and I will represent the Philistines. We will settle this dispute in single combat! If your man is able to kill me, then we will be your slaves. But if I kill him, then you will be our slaves. I defy the armies of Israel! Send me a man who will fight me!"
When Saul and the Israelites heard this, they were terrified and deeply shaken.
(8-11)

Goliath continued this defying the army of Israel for 40 straight days. He would repeat the same message day after day, but no one dared to challenge him.

In the meantime, David was running back and forth between his duties at home and serving King Saul. His three oldest brothers had joined the army and were with the king all the time, but David wasn't needed that often; he was "on call".

One day, his father asked him to deliver some food to David's brothers and to their captain, so he left the sheep with another shepherd and set out early in the morning with the provisions. He arrived just as Saul's army was heading out to confront the Philistine army, so he dropped off the provisions and ran to find his brothers. As he talked with them, Goliath came out to offer his regular morning challenge.

The Israelite army began to run away from their enemies, and as they scattered they talked about the giant and about the reward the king had offered to the man who would defeat him. David began asking questions about the rewards the king had offered and someone reported his interest to Saul, who then called David in to meet with him.

"Don't worry about a thing," David told Saul. "I'll go fight this Philistine!"
"Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There is no way you can go against this Philistine. You are only a boy ..."
But David persisted, "I have been taking care of my father's sheep," he said. "When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and take the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the

jaw and club it to death. I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! Yahweh who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!" (17:32-37)

Finally, Saul relents and tells David to go ahead. He offers his armor which is too big and cumbersome for David to wear - plus David has never worn a coat of mail or a bronze helmet before, so would be a useless fighter in those. He opts instead for his sling and five smooth stones from the stream and walks towards the Philistine giant. This is the situation that has become an image for the total underdog going against the super hero - the David vs. Goliath conflict.

The giant and the boy walk towards each other. The giant yells out, "Am I dog that you come at me with a stick?" and he curses David by the names of his gods. David yells back, "You come to me with sword, spear and javelin, but I come to you in the name of Yahweh Almighty - the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied." Both promise to give the other one's flesh to the birds and wild animals, but David doesn't stop there:

"And the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. And everyone will know that the LORD does not need weapons to rescue His people. It is His battle, not ours. Yahweh will give you to us."

As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd's bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it from his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face downward to the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine giant with only a stone and sling. And since he had no sword, he ran over and pulled Goliath's sword from its sheath. David used it to kill the giant and cut off his head. (17:46-51)

This was followed by a rout of the Philistines as they ran away from Israel in panic. They had felt confident and secure as long as their champion was alive and busy intimidating Israel's soldiers, but with him out of the way, they lost their will to engage in battle.

Two other important things happen in connection with this story which occur in chapter 18. Saul had quickly made David a commander in his army, and that choice was popular with the soldiers and the officers. But as the army returned from chasing the Philistines down to their coastal settlements, the women of Israel came out to cheer on the soldiers and to sing their praises. They did it in a way that made Saul very unhappy.

Women came out from all the towns along the way to celebrate and to cheer for King Saul, and they sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals.

This was their song:

*'Saul has killed his thousands
And David his ten thousands.'*

This made Saul very angry. "What's this?" he said. "They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!" So from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. (18:6-9)

The second is just a mention in verses 14 & 15:

David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the LORD was with him. When Saul recognized this, he became even more afraid of him." (18:14,15)

A similar thought is repeated in verse 28:

When the king realized how much the LORD was with David ... he became even more afraid of him, and he remained David's enemy for the rest of his life. (18:28,29)

Now, let's go back through the story and look for key events or statements that can be applied outside just the historical setting of the rise of David son of Jesse.

One of the classic lessons, and one you hear repeated quite frequently, comes from Samuel's search through Jesse's sons to find the future king of Israel. He thinks he's found him - "surely this is Yahweh's anointed" - but he's wrong. I'll read it this time from the NIV - God's response to Samuel thinking he'd found God's king: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (16:7) The LORD was looking for a king who would be concerned about God's interests, not just his own success or popularity.

God was looking for someone who cared about His reputation among the nations of this world, and David was that man. But people wouldn't necessarily have known all that about a red-headed kid who looked after a few sheep. It was God who knew that about him and who called him from minding sheep to being the king of His people and the father of the succeeding kings of Judah, including the coming King of kings.

The second lesson that I see in these verses is the way David fulfilled what God had seen in him. God was looking for someone whose heart was devoted to Him and David's heart was so turned towards God that when he heard the Philistine champion taunting the armies of Israel, he received that like an insult of his God. "Who is this pagan Philistine anyway that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?" he asked the soldiers. "I've done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine too, for he has defied the armies of the living God!" he said to King Saul. "You come to me with sword, spear and javelin, but I come to you in the name of Yahweh Almighty - the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied!" he said to Goliath. This was a challenge that David felt he had to pick up because someone was defying the God of Israel, the God who had rescued them from Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. David's loyalty was strong and it was immediate. In the language that we learned two weeks ago, David was "on God's side", not just looking out for himself or even for Israel. Notice the end of his challenge to Goliath: "And the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. And everyone will know that the LORD does not need weapons to rescue His people. It is His battle, not ours. Yahweh will give you to

us.” There is a confident faith and expectation of the LORD’s victory despite what looked like overwhelming odds against.

The third lesson is the obvious one: everything David said came true. David had very little going for him as he rushed towards the giant, but he only needed one thing; God. God gave him the victory and liberated Israel from the oppression of the Philistines, at least for awhile. The young man He had chosen to be the next king of Israel moved up the ranks, becoming a popular choice to be a commander in the army and was ultimately a popular choice to be King of Israel. The older man that God had rejected as His king was moving down the path of suspicion, jealousy and violent anger. What does all that tell us? That God is always at work, raising up those whose hearts are His, and bringing down those who rebel against Him. It’s not what we can see on the surface that tells the whole story; it’s what God is doing to fulfill His purposes on the earth.

The final lesson is the sad one from the life of Saul. Here was a man who was the unquestioned leader of the nation of Israel. No one doubted that he had the authority as the king. But he wanted more than the position and the authority. He wanted to be loved and admired and respected and honored, and that scene with the women of Israel giving David higher praise than they gave Saul just ate away at him. He couldn’t allow someone else to rise up into the role of king, even though he knew he wasn’t going to live forever. As I think about Saul’s descent into bitter jealousy, I’m reminded of another king, 1000 years later, who also felt threatened by someone who would come after him and become a king ... and so Herod ordered the killing of the babies of Bethlehem.

Because Saul couldn’t deal with this demonic spirit, because he couldn’t get the victory over it, he remained an enemy of David for the rest of his life. What a sad story.

So, what are the lessons for our lives? What can we learn from David, Goliath, Saul or David’s brothers, that could help us in the decisions we face tomorrow?

Let’s start with this insidious thing called jealousy or envy. How do you think David’s brothers felt when the prophet of God bypassed all of them in order to anoint their little runt brother as the future king of Israel? Do you think they were pleased and proud to his brothers? I’ll give you a little hint:

When David’s oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking to the men, he was angry. “What are you doing around here anyway?” he demanded. “What about those few sheep you’re supposed to be taking care of? I know about your pride and dishonesty. You just want to see the battle.” (1 Sam. 17:28)

Jealousy leads to anger. It did with Eliab, it did with Saul and it did centuries later with Herod. People get angry when someone else has something that they want and can’t get their hands on. “It’s not right! It’s not fair! Why should Boston win the Stanley Cup when we were the better team? Why should so-and-so be a leader when I want to lead? Why should that person be promoted when I’ve worked so hard? Why do you seem to favor this man or this woman when I want to have your approval and favor just as much?”

Guard your heart against this kind of thinking because it will poison you and stir up an irrational anger in you that has the potential to destroy your relationships and ruin your life.

The second application is much more positive, and that is the example David gives us about a heart that is on fire for God. David's passion for God's glory and for the nations to know about it and to join His praises, is the inspiration for the global mission of the early church, according to Jesus' brother James in Acts 15. James quotes Amos 9 about the restoration of David's kingdom and then says this:

so that the rest of humanity might find the Lord, including the Gentiles - all those I have called to be Mine. (Acts 15:17)

It is evident, not just in his words prior to joining battle with Goliath, but in the Psalms that he wrote and in the way he conducted himself as leader of God's people. What leads to true success in life is a passion for God's glory, for God's Kingdom, for God's purposes to be made real in the earth. David is often referred to as a man after God's own heart and this is where that comes from - he loved God and wanted his life to bring God glory; not just in Israel, but among all peoples.

Just think about that - what can I do, how can I orient my thoughts, so that my life can be lived for the glory of God? And maybe we can best answer that question by discussing it with a few others in a small group.