

CHRIST CHURCH BEACON – July 12, 2009
Bible Text: 1 Samuel 17-18
Title: God's in Control

Introduction

We are all familiar with the story of David and Goliath. We learned it as children, but it is much more than a children's story. As with any story or event in the Bible, underlying it are principles we should understand and apply. This morning I want to discuss some of those principles and how they apply to you and me 3,000 years later.

Background

Before discussing these important principles, let me provide a little background to this familiar story.

1. Chronology

This story appears in the Bible in the chapter following David's anointing by Samuel to be Israel's next king. Therefore, we can assume that this confrontation with Goliath took place shortly after Samuel's visit – but we don't know how long after. I think we can also assume that King Saul was unaware of the anointing, and David's brothers didn't appear to understand what it meant. Otherwise, the brothers would have treated David with a little more respect.

2. Giants in Scripture

We may think of Goliath as either fictitious or a freak. However, giants are mentioned several times in the Bible, so they had been around the Land of Canaan for some time. The first mention of giants is in the introduction to the story of Noah, where it says in Genesis 6:4a:

There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward... NKJV

The Hebrew term translated as "giants" in that passage is Nephilim. Anak and the Anakites were also understood to be giants, or Nephilim. They are mentioned by the spies reporting about the Promised Land to the Israelites in the wilderness (Numbers 13:27-28, 32-33):

"We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there..."

So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." NRSV

This report scared the Israelites and they were afraid to go into the land the Lord had promised to them. As a result of their lack of faith in God, they were punished by not being allowed to enter the land for 40 years, until that generation had passed away. Goliath wasn't the only of those giants still around during the time of David. Here's the mention of two battles between David's forces and the Philistines from 1 Chronicles 20:4, 6 (NRSV):

After this, war broke out with the Philistines at Gezer; then Sibbecai ... killed Sippai, who was one of the descendants of the giants; and the Philistines were subdued...

Again there was war at Gath, where there was a man of great size, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; he also was descended from the giants.

So that we don't think these giants are just legend or exaggeration, here's a brief report on giants in the Land of Canaan from the IVP Bible Background Commentary:

Champions of this size are not simply a figment of Israelite imagination or the result of embellished legends. The Egyptian letter on Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century B.C.) describes fierce warriors in Canaan who are seven to nine feet tall. Additionally, two female skeletons about seven feet tall from the twelfth century have been found at Tell es-Sa'ideyeh in Trans-jordan.

3. Accuracy of Slings

Regarding the sling, it is estimated that a skilled slinger could hurl a stone at more than one hundred miles per hour. The effective range was probably about one hundred yards. These ancient slings were not like the Y-shaped slingshot we think of. The stone was held in a leather pouch with cords attached at opposite ends. The sling was whirled over the head until the person let go of one of the ends, opening the pouch and sending the stone flying.

4. Psychological Warfare

Goliath's insults and curses against the Israelites, David and his God reflect an early type of psychological warfare. These insults were intended to demoralize and intimidate your opponents. In those days the warriors were generally understood to be stand-ins for their gods, who were really the ones who were doing battle. The insults were aimed at the opposing army's gods, and they were calling down curses on the enemy from their own gods. That's why David reacted to Goliath's insults the way he did, saying:

“Who is this heathen Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26b)

Now let's take a look at what we can learn from this story of David and Goliath.

Faith in God

I think the main lesson from this story concerns faith in God.

You can see David's faith in that he didn't hesitate to volunteer to do battle against this formidable warrior. David knew his God Jehovah would give him the victory because God had helped him before, against wild animals. He knew God had given him the skills, tools and experience to be victorious. He knew that his God was more powerful than the pagan gods. He knew he had been chosen by God to be the next king – God wasn't going to let his anointed be killed before he even had a chance to take the throne. We see that faith expressed in Psalm 18:50, which David wrote:

Great triumphs [God] gives to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever NRSV

We also see David's faith in God for the victory, not weapons:

Now I know that the LORD will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand. Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the LORD our God. NRSV

When you and I face problems, it will help us to recall how God has helped us in the past. We can take heart because God gives us strength, the courage, and the guidance we need to deal with what we are facing, if we ask him.

The Right Perspective

What a difference perspective can make. Saul and his troops saw only a giant who was mocking them and their God, and they cowered in fear. David, however, saw a mortal man defying almighty God, and was ready to stand up to him. David viewed Goliath as a target too big to miss – the bigger they are, the harder they fall. He knew he would not be alone when he faced Goliath, because the battle is the Lord's. Proverbs 21:31 says:

The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD. NRSV

In one particular situation, the Lord said this to the Israelites in 2 Chronicles 20:15b):

“Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's.” NRSV

David looked at his situation from God's point of view. For you and me, viewing what appears to be impossible situations from God's point of view helps us put our “giant” problems in perspective. David didn't see an unbeatable giant, but a vulnerable man whom God would defeat through David.

Not Discouraged

David was not discouraged by the insults of his brothers, who told him he had no business being there and he should go home to his sheep. He wasn't discouraged by Saul, who said he was only a boy and shouldn't even think of fighting this experienced warrior.

David wasn't discouraged by Goliath's taunts and, most likely, by the laughter and insults coming from the Philistines.

David wasn't discouraged that this giant was armored with a helmet, coat of mail, armor on his legs, a huge spear with an iron tip, a sword and shield. This guy was formidable, but that didn't discourage David. We, also, shouldn't allow ourselves to be discouraged or overwhelmed by things in life, even when they seem too large to handle. Let us always keep our eyes on God, who is our ever-present help in times of need, as we read in Psalm 46:1-3:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. NRSV

God Prepared David

Finally, God prepared David. First, God prepared David for his battle with Goliath by his experience with the wild animals while tending his father's flock. This experience gave him the skills to bring down the giant with a stone.

Second, God prepared David to be the future king by having Saul bring him into the army. David learned leadership skills, military tactics, and got to know important people. David also spent time in Saul's court, so David learned about that as well.

We can see that God arranges circumstances to fit with his plan.

Conclusion

You and I might not be fighting physical battles like Saul and his army, but we are fighting spiritual and emotional battles all the time. We are battling temptations, discouragement, frustration, and feelings of helplessness and being overwhelmed. Yet God assures us in Romans 8:37 that "...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." NIV Let us always keep in mind the words of David in Psalm 18:2-3:

The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
so I shall be saved from my enemies.

In his battle with Goliath, David fought for the glory of God. He came to the contest in the name of the Lord, the God of the armies of Israel. He wanted Goliath, the Philistine army, and all the earth to know that the true and living God was Israel's God. Goliath had ridiculed Israel's God and blasphemed his holy name, but David set the record straight. David saw this as a contest between the true God of Israel and the false gods of the Philistines.

Our life is also a struggle against the false gods of this world: greed, jealousy, materialism, and self. Rather than giving in to these false gods, let us always do things for God's glory, and not for our own.

“To God be the glory, great things He has done.” Amen

The Story of David and Goliath

(Paraphrased from 1 Samuel 17-18)

King Saul and his army were camped in the Valley of Elah. They were on one side of the stream that ran thru the valley, and the Philistines were on the other side. Saul's army was terrified because the Philistines had a secret weapon – a giant warrior called Goliath. As part of their psychological warfare, Goliath would shout curses and insults at the Israelites every day (1 Samuel 17:10-11):

“What's the matter with you? Are you a bunch of cowards? Send somebody out to fight me. Let the two of us battle it out! Winner take all. Come on! What are you waiting for?”

Every time Saul and his troops heard Goliath's challenge, they were terrified and lost all hope. For forty days Goliath came out every morning and evening and hurled his insults and his challenge to the Israelites. While this was going on, young David showed up at the camp. He had been sent by his parents to bring food to his brothers and report back on how the boys were doing.

While David was there, Goliath made his usual appearance. David asked his brothers what was going on. His brothers said it was none of his business and put him down, telling him to go back to his sheep, but someone else told him (1 Samuel 17:25):

“The king will give great wealth to whoever kills this Philistine. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father's family from taxes.”

David was incensed at Goliath's insults, asking “Who does this heathen think he is, to defy the army of the Living God?” He then went up to Saul and said he would fight Goliath. Saul replied, “You can't go out against this giant and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.” (1 Sam 17:33) But David said to Saul,

“Look, I've been keeping my 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 ... killed it. I've killed both the lion and the bear; this heathen will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “All right, go, and the Lord be with you.” (vv 34-37) David went out, without any armor on, carrying his shepherd's staff and sling. When the heavily-armored giant looked at David and saw that he was only a boy, he looked down on him with disgust. He cursed at David and said,

“Do you think I am a dog, that you come at me with a stick? Come here. I’ll feed your body to the birds and the wild animals!” But David said to him,

“You come using a sword and spears. That’s nothing! I come to you in the name of Jehovah, the All-Powerful God of the armies of Israel! You have spoken against him and you’re going to pay the penalty. Today the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll cut off your head... Then all the world will know there is a God in Israel! Everyone gathered here will know the Lord does not need swords or spears to save his people. The battle belongs to the Lord, and he will hand you over to us.” (1 Sam 17:42-47; see Zech 4:6 and Ps 20:7)

When Goliath moved closer to attack him, David ran toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, David put it in his sling and slung it at him. The stone struck the Philistine right on his forehead. Goliath fell facedown on the ground. So David triumphed over the giant with just a sling and a stone; not the usual weaponry of a sword or spear. David ran over to where his body lay, took hold of the Philistine’s sword, drew it from its scabbard, and used it to cut off his head. When the Philistines saw that their main man was dead, they turned and ran. Saul’s army surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines.

Earlier, when Saul was watching David going out to meet the Philistine, he asked the commander of his army, “Abner, who is that kid?” Abner replied, “Beats me. I’ve never seen him before” Saul said, “Find out whose son this young man is.” As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner 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.”

Saul’s son Jonathan was there, and from that time forward, David and Jonathan became best friends. Moreover, Saul decided he could use somebody like David in his army. Saul gave David command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns.

Word of David’s victory spread like wildfire, and the people were praising David and singing songs about him. This popularity of David made Saul jealous, plus he was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had left Saul. In everything he did David had great success, because the Lord was with him. When Saul saw how successful he was, he was even more afraid of him. Hence the love-hate relationship that Saul had with David. One minute he would summon David to play his harp to soothe his tormented soul, and the next minute Saul would try to kill him.