

David and Goliath: our strength or God's?

1 Samuel 17.32-49

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The beautiful story of David and Goliath has been used by many Christian peace movements. David has become a symbol of many small movements who believe in non-violence against a massive military system of the enemy.

Or he is a symbol of protest movements that face a strong monolithic state apparatus.

The enemy is a giant, a Goliath, yes, but we must not counter that by being a Goliath, is the argument. Stop the arms race. Let us be like David.

Little David. Innocent, singing to God with his little harp. The sweet boy who faced the beast and he won by a pure miracle.

I think if this is how we approach the biblical story, we miss out on a few crucial aspects of the story. Aspects that can help us live our Christian life today.

We also have our enemies. We face problems, and some of them are big. Goliath-sized.



1. David knew he could beat Goliath

Why did David know he could beat Goliath? He was very confident that he could do it.

He said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of Goliath. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

So he had self-confidence. He was not one of those people who said: 'I cannot do anything, the Lord has to do it.'

When King Saul told David that he was too young and that he did not have enough battle-experience, David did not say: 'I am weak, but God will do it.'

If you read what David said, he really contradicted Saul. 'I am a shepherd, for goodness sake. We are strong people.'

And he points to his fights with lions and bears. To keep his sheep safe, he had entered into fights with those dangerous animals and he had killed them.



‘So why can I not fight this Goliath. I can do it. I can beat him.’

David’s confidence was based on his experience. He was trained for this fight, and he had done it before.

I have met with many Christians who have great dreams of what they hoped to achieve. They like to fight a Goliath, they dream of a big ministry. And they believe God will help them do it.

To dream of achieving great things, to wish for defeating great enemies, to do away with obstructions to success, is good. God created this desire in us.

And if we like to do things in life that honour God, that is even more excellent.

David was agitated because of the honor of God. “This uncircumcised Philistine has defied the armies of the living God,” David gave as his motivation for accepting the challenge.

The name of God was at stake. If only we all had the motivation to undertake great things for the sake of the name of God. To achieve mighty things for His kingdom.

But if you want to achieve anything in life, something much bigger than where you are now, I think it should always be related in one way or another to your past experience. Not just to your faith in what God can do.

What have you learned. What are your abilities. Who are you. What can you do.

David knew his abilities. He was a fighting machine. He knew he could kill a lion, a bear. That is why he could with confidence solve this big problem for the glory of God.

You have your own abilities. There is no reason to be shy about it. The challenge for us is that we, first, ought to be motivated by a desire to serve God. And secondly, that we should not try to bite a bullet that is too big for us. Don’t underestimate yourself, and don’t overestimate yourself.

A right motivation and a right self-assessment. These are important in our Christian life.

But did David not say he trusted in God to make him victorious? That sounds contradictory. Is it David’s strength and experience, or was it God who made him win?

2. David trusted God to do it

Yes, David trusted God to make him defeat the enemy.

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.”

And David himself said to the giant,

“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. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand. [...] 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.”

David confessed that the Lord does not save with sword and spear. Some people see the fact that David did not like to wear the armour that was offered to him in this light.

But I think that is really not what the story tells us. David rejects the armour because it hinders him in his movements. He wanted to use a very effective weapon for which he had to be agile.

And the weapon that David used was really not a BB gun, was it? He used the slingshot that he was so trained to use. Slingshots are forbidden by law in most countries nowadays - certainly in The Netherlands - because they are killers.

And the pebbles that David had taken from a brook, they were lethal.

Nowadays we often see Palestinians in the news, when they fight Israeli soldiers, use that very same old method. Get a stone from a slingshot at full speed against your head and you drop dead.

So in the story of David and Goliath, I suggest we see a strong David with a lethal weapon in his hands. Versus a strong and equally lethal giant with a sword that had killing power.

The real difference was not between the ability of the two fighters, neither between the lethal impact of their weapons of choice.

The real question was, whose God or gods can be trusted to give the victory.

David said, “The LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give you into our hand.”

Often enough in the Old Testament we saw how God did save Israel with sword and spears.

David did not say that he was just a small weak boy with no abilities. He did not suggest that he could just pray Goliath away.

He suggested that the outcome of the battle was in the hands of God.

Just as the outcome of what you hope for, and what you work for, is ultimately in the hands of God.

In your everyday battles, in the mountains of problem you may face, or the enemies you are confronted with, in those everyday battles, you may trust in God.

But you have to do whatever you can, you have to use the best of your own abilities, to get it done.

David was battle-trained by lions and bears.

David used the weapon he could handle best.

David did not wear the armour in order to fight better.

And he took five pebbles from the brook.

Why five? Why not one? Because if David missed the first time, he could try again. And again. Up to five times.

Because to trust in God's presence and help does not take anything away from our personal responsibility to do our level best to serve Him and to live our best daily life.

3. A deeper level of understanding



And this brings me, finally, to a deeper level of understanding our reality and of the work of God in our lives.

It seems we often see David's great abilities as a fighter and God blessing David to win the victory over Goliath as if they are two extremes on the spectrum of understanding what happened there.

But they are not two extremes - they overlap.

As Christian we have in many ways gone along with the process of secularisation. We think and live as if we have here, around us, our normal life, and above and beyond that, is God.

God as the icing on the cake.

God as the stop-gap solution when we do not understand reality anymore.

God as the miracle when doctors cannot help us.

God as the extra to help us miraculously to do our exams well if we have not studied well enough.

But God is not the extra.

When He created our world, He made all things as an expression of himself. His handiwork is everywhere.

Nothing in your world, nothing in your life is not in a mysterious way related to God.

No, our world is not God; nature is not divine; but all things are filled with his self-expression, with his presence.

God is never not present. The only place where God is absent, is hell. But in your daily life, God is all around you.

You see his expression in the trees, in the birds, in sun and moon and stars and in the black holes in the universe. And you see him best in other humans.

That is why all things we do, whether we bake bread, or we run the marathon, or we clean the house, or we repair the car, all things are related to our Lord God. He is involved in all, related to all, praised in all we do.

When you study, when you learn, when you work, when you sit and relax and do absolutely nothing, you live in the world of God.

And if you want to achieve great things, you are expressing God's nature in you. He is the creator of all things, and if you do creative things, you follow in God's footsteps.

So when you study like crazy and then have good results, you praise God for having helped you. You did it. And He did it.

And when you have a tough job to do and it works out well, it is thanks to God. He made you succeed.

Even if things do not go well as you hoped they would go, God is not on a trip, He is not far, He is still intimately close to you and to what you did. And we thank Him for that.

David won the victory over Goliath - for 100% because he was a trained fighter. But he also won that battle because God was 100% with him.

Conclusion

So in our life, let us work hard, and train, and do better, and do all we can to excel, as God children.

And as God's children, let us pray and expect our Father to make all things work out well.

For in Him we live and move and have our being.

Amen.