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Facing Our Goliaths: The Most Famous Old Testament Story We've Never Heard

Scott Powell

Well, hey there, everybody. It's Scott Powell here. And I'm really excited to talk to you today about a story that you've probably heard about before, but maybe haven't heard the whole story. I think it's one of the most famous stories in the bible, that most of us have never actually heard, or never heard the fullness of. It's the story of David and Goliath, David and Goliath! This great story, this great underdog story that I will propose to you today is actually something far different from that. So, before we jump in, let's open in a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus, we come to You today with prayers and thanksgiving. We thank You for the gift of this conference, the gift of this retreat, and all of the people who are listening and watching online. Please be in my words. Let me not say anything that's outside of Your will. Be with all of the other presenters and all of the people who are organizing this thing. Please bless our Lent, and help us grow closer to You. We pray this all through Christ, our Lord. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alright, David and Goliath. I don't know that there is a more famous, you know, kids story in the bible, so to speak, than the story of David and Goliath. Which is a huge bummer to me, because once a story gets relegated to sort of a children's tale, it sort of gets forgotten about, and washed over, or mythologized or, you know, whatever we do with things like this. It's actually why I have a huge beef with children's bibles with pictures of Noah's ark on the cover. which sounds like a strange thing to say, but I feel like I don't know if I've ever seen a children's bible that doesn't have a cute little picture of Noah's ark on the front of it. which is totally fine, and children's bibles are awesome, and I have a ton of them because I have children, and I love that. But, all of a sudden, once you relegate something to a children's story, those of us who are adults and trying to actually grow in the faith kind of forget that those stories have anything to say to us, because they're sort of put in a little box. David and Goliath is kind of one of those. We sort of feel like we've got a handle on David and Goliath. It's the great underdog story! Little David, he's fighting the big Goliath and all of this stuff. That's really not what the story is about.

So, I want to take a step back and I want to talk about this story. It shows up in the book of First Samuel, First Samuel. And it's in the book, it's in chapter 17. And

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the first thing we need to know about the story of David and Goliath is what happens just before this. Because this is not really a story of just some kid named David who comes and fights a giant, it's a story about what happens when a person is receptive and open to God's will and God's spirit.

In the previous chapter, chapter 16, King Saul, who is the reigning king in Israel. And if you know anything about the story of salvation history, King Saul, Israel's first king, was a lousy king. He was terrible. He made bad decisions, he was selfish, kind of went crazy by the end of his life. He... it was not a pretty picture. And there's a moment in which, because of his sin, and his obstinance, and his rejection of God's will in his life, the Spirit of God actually leaves King Saul and goes and rests on a young man named David, who is going to be the king. And this story is about what it looks like when God's Spirit rests upon a person who is open to God's Spirit working in their lives, and that's what this story is all about.

So, here's the story: David's a little kid, there's a big war going on, Israel at the time is fighting the Philistines. And the Philistines, they're a people who show up all throughout the Old Testament. They're a constant sort of thorn in Israel's side. They're often at battle with each other. And the way that warfare worked in the Old Testament world was that they would show up on the battle field, there would often be battles, but there would often come a point in the warfare in which they would decide each side would choose one of their... they would choose their strongest warrior, the strongest person to go and fight against the other side's strongest person. And it would be a one-on-one match, and whoever won that one-on-one match would be the victor. And whoever lost, the entire army would then be enslaved by the other side.

And so that's the point we've come to in this battle with Israel and the Philistines. And the Philistines have said "Well, we've got the... we've got the trump card. We've got the money-maker. We've got Goliath!" Who is described in the text in these huge ways. There's different versions of the Old Testament. In one translation he's described as nine feet tall, in others he's described differently. But he's massive. He even made it into an adjective in our vocabulary. "He's a Goliath of a man," right. He's huge, he's foreboding, he's formidable, all the other "for"s you can think of. He's a huge threat. And Israel, as a result, is terrified. They're cowering, and they're looking around, and they're saying "We don't have anybody who can compare to this guy." So for 6 weeks, 6 weeks, this Goliath comes out and taunts the armies of God every single day. And for 6 weeks, the armies of job cower in their tents, terrified. And every day he comes out, and he says "Who is going to come and fight me? Who's got the guts to stand up to Goliath?" And everybody says "chh", and they're all terrified.

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Into the picture comes little young David. David is too young actually to go into battle. He's not at battle. He's back home, he's tending the sheep, he's keeping the family's flocks. And his father, Jesse, sends him out to the battlefield, both to bring some lunches to his brothers, who are off fighting in the battle, and some gifts to the leaders and the king and everything like that. So here comes David, and he's like "I'm bringing some lunches for people," and he shows up on the battlefield and he finds that everybody is cowering in their tents. And he's like "What's going on?" And he hears Goliath, and he sees and he hears the things that he's saying, and David is shocked by what he finds. And I want to read to you what he actually says. I'm going to read from 1st Samuel, chapter 17, starting in verse 24.

It says this. It says *All of the men of Israel, when they saw the man that is Goliath ("The man") they fled from him, and they were much afraid. And the men of Israel said "Have you seen this man who has come up? This is them speaking to David, because he's like "What are you doing?" And they're all like "Have you seen that guy?" Have you seen this man that has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the man who kills him, the king will enrich with great riches, and will give him his daughters and make his father's house free in Israel.*

So, it's become so dire that king Saul is actually offering bribes to anybody who will go and fight this guy. "I'll give you riches, I'll free you from taxes, I'll give you my daughters to marry, anything. Just please go fight this guy." And everyone was like "It ain't gonna be me." And David comes up and he's like "Wait a second," this is in verse 26: *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?"* Little David, little kid, tending the sheep, brings the lunches. All the warriors, the mighty, trained armies of God are hiding in their tents, but little David says "Uh-uh, who is this man?" Not "Who is this guy who's insulting us?" Not "Who is this guy who is a threat to us?" He says "Who is this man who has the gall to defy the armies of the living God he blasphemes?"

Because his taunts, no doubt, are blaspheming God. Because in the ancient world there's no separation between church and state. So you were the strongest nation if you have the strongest Gods. And so what the Philistines are saying is "Your God is pretty weak. Your God is nothing, because none of you guys have the guts to do anything about it. And if God really loved you and really cared for you, maybe he would have somebody stand up." And David says "Wait a second, we are insulting God. We are allowing our God to be insulted. I'm going to fight him. I will do it. Nobody else is going to do it?" He looks around and he says "Fine, I'll go."

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And everyone looks at him like “What are you thinking? You’re a little kid. This is impossible.” And there’s this great line, there’s this great line that I want to read to you. It’s actually very beautiful, it’s in verse 31: When the words which David spoke were heard, he said “We’ve got to do something. I’m going to do it.” They repeated them before Saul, the King. Like “Hey, we found this kid. He’s willing to do it.” So they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him, and David said to Saul “Let no man’s heart fail because of that guy. Let no man’s heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight this Philistine.” And Saul said to David “Wait a second, you’re not able to go fight against this Philistine, to fight with him, for you’re but a youth, and he’s been a man of war from his youth.” But David said to Saul “Your servant,” I love this, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion or a bear, and took the lamb from the flock, I went after him, and I smote him, and I delivered it out of his mouth. And if he rose against me, I caught him by the beard and I smote and I killed him. Your servant has killed both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.”

That’s huge. And you’re like “Yeah David!” It’s such a great scene. And so, Saul’s like “Okay. I’m going to let you go into battle. Fine.” And so, he gives him his armor. And there’s a great scene which we don’t have the time to go into, where Saul gives his armor to young David, and David finds out that it doesn’t fit. “It’s too big, it doesn’t feel right. I need my slingshot hand. I need to be able to kind of be free to fight.” And there’s a great spiritual metaphor in there, that we should never wear somebody else’s armor to go fight our battles. God has called each and every one of us to the battles that He’s put before us, and He’s going to give us the grace and the armor to fight those battles. And we shouldn’t do it on somebody else’s behalf. Don’t wear somebody else’s armor into battle.

And David says “No, I don’t want to do this.” The irony, of course, is that if you’re the king of Israel, if you’re the king of any nation, but Israel in particular, because they are the manifestation of God on earth, they’re supposed to be an image of God. And if nobody else is going to fight, well, who should go? The king should go. He’s the one, the buck should stop there. But he says “No, I’ll give my armor to this kid.” So it’s a good insight into Saul and his response out of fear. But David’s response out of faith. It’s the difference between fear and faith.

So he says fine. David Goes. And I don’t know if you remember he story, he goes to face Goliath, and he goes out, and there they are, face-to-face, and Goliath is like “Who is this kid?” And there’s an amazing scene, if you remember it even from your childhood perhaps, remember David goes down to the riverbed and he finds 5 smooth stones. 5 stones, little stones, pebbles, right. And he takes one of those stones and he heaves, he launches it out at Goliath. This is where I want us to

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take a step back, and I want you to, for a moment, forget everything you know about this story. Forget your childhood tellings of this story, forget every football announcer analogy who's like "Oh, it's a David and Goliath." And this mashup, you know, whatever analogies we have in our society for this story. Forget all of them for a second, and I want you to actually hear what happens.

David, the kid, takes a stone, a pebble from a riverbed, heaves it at this potentially nine-foot-tall, whatever he is, giant warrior. The pebble, mind you, smacks him in the forehead, and he falls down dead. The pebble hits him in the forehead and he falls down dead. And David goes, it gets a little bit gory, he cuts his head off and he's like... And we don't have to go into that. But just think about that for a second. The David and Goliath story that we all know, of the underdog who has the guts to fight and overcomes, that's not what just happened. He took a stone, he hit him in the forehead with it, and the giant falls down dead.

The Hebrew people did not read this story and said "Wow, what a great underdog story. We should use some football analogies from that." No, they said "Oh my goodness, this is what happens when someone has the guts to stand up on God's behalf. To follow the will of God. To deny themselves, to put themselves in the backseat and say "I mean to stand for God." Because there is no logical reason that a tiny pebble hit in the forehead should have knocked a giant warrior over dead. So what the Hebrew people said is "God has intervened. God has performed a miracle this day." Why? Because this guy had the guts to show up on the battlefield. He doesn't do almost anything except heave a little stone, and the miracle takes place.

The sword that David uses to cut off the head of Goliath is actually taken and put into the tabernacle, in the holy of holies, in the temple which will eventually be in Jerusalem. And it is venerated, not because David is so great, but because God has performed an utter miracle on his behalf. That's the story. It's not "If you're scrappy enough, you can beat the bad guy." The story is "If you have the guts to stand up for God, trusting that He will have our back, then God will have the victory every time." Because with God, we always have the majority. Anyone with God, we're going to win. We have the majority. We can overcome, not because we're so strong, not because we're so scrappy, but because God will fight on our behalf.

The constant refrain of the Old Testament is that when Israel wins its battles, it's because God fought on their behalf, not because they fought and were so great. That's why I love this story so much, because it gives me a profound amount of hope. Because I'm not a great warrior, and I don't have all the gifts that David had. I can't... I don't think I could chase down a lion, grab it by the beard and kill it. I'm not sure I'd have the guts to do that. But there are a lot of bears and lions and

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goliaths in my life. There are a lot of things that face me that I don't know how to deal with, or what to do with. And what this story tells me is that if you put your trust not in yourself, not in your scrappiness, not in your abilities, but you put your trust in God, and you show up to the battlefield, God will fight the battle, and He will give you victory, not because of you, but because of Him. But we have to do our half. It's not a half, we have to do our fraction. We have to show up, and we have to say "Here I am Lord. I come to do Your will." And if we do that, then He will give victory. It won't make us look great all the time. He will be glorified through us, through our smallness. That is a glorious story. Let's close with prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be. World without end. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thank you all, enjoy the rest of the conference.