

2. We are not David but we have David's God

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[0 : 00] Now we come to our Bible reading, which you'll find on page 239. A week or two ago I began a series on David, which I'm calling David God's flawed but faithful servant.

And we come today to this great story, which even in those days of biblical ignorance is probably still reasonably well known, in 2 Samuel 17. It's a very long chapter, but I'm going to read it all, but we'll have a break in the middle for a hymn.

So 2 Samuel 17, and we'll read from verse 1. In chapter 16, David had been anointed as future king by the prophet Samuel, but now we find him in a very different situation.

1 Samuel 17, verse 1. Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle, and they were gathered at Soco, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Soco and Azekah in Ephes-Damim.

And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.

[1 : 27] And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was 5,000 shekels of bronze.

And he had bronze armor on his legs, and the javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed 600 shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him. He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, Why have you come to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul?

Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill him, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.

And the Philistines said, I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man that we may fight together. When Saul and all Israel heard the words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

[2 : 41] Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul, the man was already old and advanced in years.

The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to battle were Eliab the firstborn, next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.

David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand morning and evening.

And David said to Jesse, Son, take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand.

See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them. Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the valley of Elah fighting with the Philistines.

[3 : 46] And David rose early in the morning and left his sheep with a keeper, and took the provisions and went as Jesse had commanded him. As he came to the encampment, as the host was going out to the battle line shouting their war cry, And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle army against army.

And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before.

And David heard him. All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. And the men of Israel said, Have you seen this man who has come up?

Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

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?

[5 : 05] And the people answered him in the same way, So shall it be done to the man who kills him. Now Eliab, his eldest brother, heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David.

And he said, Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle. And David said, What have I done now?

Was it not but a word? He turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way. And the people answered him again as before. When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul.

And he sent for him. And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail him. Because of him, your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

And Saul said to David, You are not able to go against this Philistine, to fight with him for your but youth. He has been a man of war from his youth. But David said to Saul, Your servant used to keep sheep for his father.

[6 : 13] And when there came a lion or bear and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. If he rose against me, I caught him by the beard and struck him and killed him.

Your 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.

And 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 Saul said to David, Go, and the Lord be with you. Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail.

And David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.

[7 : 17] So David put them off. Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand.

And he approached the Philistine. And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David with his shield bearer in front of him. And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him. He's but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. And the Philistine said to David, Am I a dog? You come to me with sticks. And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

Philistine said to David, Come to me and I will give you your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field. 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. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand.

[8 : 29] I will strike you down and cut off your head and I will give the dead bodies of the hosts 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 and 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.

When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead.

The stone sank into his forehead and he fell on his face to the ground. So David prevailed over the Philistine with his sling and with a stone and struck the Philistine and killed him.

There was no sword in the hand of David. Then David ran and stole over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of his sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. The men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron so that the wounded Philistines fell all the way from Shatari as far as Gath and Ekron.

[9 : 52] And the people of Israel came back from chasing the Philistines and they plundered their camp. And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem but he put his armor in his tent.

As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As your soul lives, O king, I do not know. And the king said, Inquire whose son the boy is. As soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

And Saul said to him, Whose son are you, young man? And David answered, I am the son of your servant, Jesse, the Bethlehemite. Amen. May God bless those, that powerful and glorious reading from his word.

Now, if you could keep our Bibles open, please, at 1 Samuel 17 and let's have a moment of prayer. God, our Father, you have given us the great privilege of an open book, the written word, which points us fully and faithfully to the living word.

[11 : 05] And it is in the name of the living word, Christ Jesus, we pray and ask that you will most graciously open your word to our hearts and minds and open our hearts and minds to your word.

Amen. Of course, we all know what 1 Samuel 17 is about.

We all have giants to fight in our lives. There's that big bully down the road. There's that cantankerous boss. Maybe even some church body.

We have giants to fight and we are going to fight them and we are going to defeat them.

Unfortunately, that's not what the story is about at all, is it?

If it were, you could all just sink into a comfortable somnolence for the next 25 minutes or so and waken up for the last hymn. But you see, what's wrong with that?

[12 : 12] We don't always defeat the giants at all. We run away from them. We are defeated by them and that interpretation assumes, doesn't it, that we are David.

When we read that story, whose shoes do we put ourselves in? We are David. What if we are the cowardly Israelites cringing on the hill before the giant?

What if we are Eliab, David's elder brother? What if we are Saul? What perish the thought if we are even the Philistines? Guys, this story is not about David.

We are not David, but we have David's God and that's the title of my sermon today. This is about, this is God's story. It's a story about God.

It's a story about seeing the world as God sees it. It's a story about the honor of God's name. Over and over again, there is a word repeated, translated slightly differently, defy, mock, deride, verses 10, 25, 26, 36, and 45.

[13 : 24] Over and over again, this word, Goliath, the Philistine, mocks, derides, attacks the living God. It's a story about the honor of God's name.

It's a story about trusting in that God. It's a story ultimate about how that God deals with the giants. And it's a brilliant story, isn't it?

The suspense. Imagine if you'd never read the story before. The suspense, the characterization, the unexpected climax, and of course, the hints in the story, which I've tried to bring out already in the hymns we've sung, and about how this links with the big story of God's purposes.

So we're going to look at the story now with that in mind. I'm not going to go through it in a linear manner. What I'm going to do is to look at the groups of characters in the story and their attitude to the Lord.

It's God's story. It's how these various characters in the story react to God, how he uses them, or how they define him. We are not David, but we have David's God.

[14 : 38] So first of all, let's look at God's faithless people. That's the first thing I want to talk about. In the beginning of the chapter, there is an old problem.

The Philistines gathered their armies for battle. But it's a perennial problem. We have an unseen God, and we have a very visible, a very seen enemy.

Anyways, that kind of story runs right through the Bible. The living God who is unseen and the enemy who is all too, who is all too much seen.

These Philistines, if you'd read the early chapters of Samuel, we met them several times. Vigorous people, probably originally from the Mediterranean Islands.

The Egyptians called them the Sea Peoples, settling in a number of cities on the coastal plain, places like Gath and Gaza. How do I know God's people are being faithless here?

[15:37] Now look, the, verse 11, when Saul and all Israel heard the words of the Philistines, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. And then, verse 24, all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid.

Moses had told them back in Deuteronomy, the Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. Clearly forgotten that.

Even more striking, Deuteronomy 32, verse 30, one of you will chase a thousand. It's the opposite. The armies of Israel are cowering before one man.

All the men of Israel, when they saw him, fled away from him. See, the cause of the faithlessness. The cause of the faithfulness is either forgetting or else not taking seriously God's word.

That's always the cause, ultimately, of faithlessness in God's people. And the word of God is not taken seriously. And also, in this faithlessness, there's darker aspects.

[16:46] Unpleasant arrogance. I want you to look, I want you to look at verses 28 and 29. Now, Eliab, David's eldest brother, hurt when David spoke to the men.

And Eliab's anger was kindled against David. Notice what he says, verse 28, you have come to see the battle. What battle? No battle until David arrived.

It was just two groups of people on either side of a valley and this giant strutting around. There was no battle. You see how, you can see now, how if you remember the previous chapter, Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons as kings.

And when Eliab appeared, Samuel said, surely, the Lord's anointed is before me. And remember what the Lord says, just back and glance over the page, chapter 16, verse 7, the Lord said to Samuel, do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature because I have rejected him. You see, you can understand why Eliab had been rejected. His patronizing arrogance to his younger brother and his cringing fear before Goliath.

[18:06] Eliab was a man who was dominated totally by what he could see, what he could hear, what he could touch. What did he see? He saw an impressive-looking giant.

What he saw was a terrifying-looking figure. And what else did he see? He saw his little brother who should have been at home feeding the sheep. His worldview dominated by what he sees.

And he comes across as an unpleasant, whinging, arrogant figure. And there's also failure of leadership. Why had Saul been appointed?

Remember the clamor back in the early chapters of Samuel. Let us have a king, they say in 1 Samuel 8, to go out before us and fight our battles.

Why had Saul been appointed? He'd been appointed in the first place so he could go and fight battles like this. But you see where Saul is if you look at verses 38 to 40.

[19:08] Verse 38, then Saul clothed David with his armor, put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. In other words, Saul is thinking, if you're going to fight Goliath, you've got to fight Goliath with Goliath's methods.

You've got to be like Goliath in order to overcome him. Now we know from the story that is simply not true. Think of these two men I've just mentioned, Eliab, Saul, David's older brother, and Saul himself.

How are both of them described? They're both described as tall, impressive, warrior-like. And yet, when they meet this warrior, they are totally incapable of standing up to him.

If this man's going to be defeated, he is going to be defeated by other methods. And so often, don't we fall back on worldly methods? Because we don't ultimately trust in the word of the Lord.

That's what this story is saying to us. What does faithfulness mean? Faithfulness means, first of all, taking God at his word and then acting upon it.

[20:16] Isn't that our great battle day after day? We're going to come to fighting the giants. Don't worry. But we can't start there. We've got to start with God.

And as God looks down on his people, what does he see? He sees faithlessness. He sees unbelief. He sees a total abandoning of what God had said to them through Moses.

That's the first thing in this story. And it's quite, quite pathetic when you think of it. All this impressive array. And, I mean, the author is making this, is making this very clear.

Day after day, they go out as if they were going to battle. It's in verse 19, Saul and they and all the men of Israel in the valley of Elah fighting with the Philistines.

Well, that, of course, is a joke. It's meant to be a joke. They were not fighting with the Philistines. They were cringing before the Philistines. And verse 21, Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army.

[21 : 21] This is shadow boxing. These two forces are simply standing there looking at each other. So, we have God's faithless people. Secondly, we have God's formidable enemy.

Now, the point of this story is not about David and Goliath. It's often called that it's about God and Goliath. Look at verse 45, which in many ways is the key to the story.

Then David said, we'll come back to this verse. 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.

That is the point. Goliath is frightening. Goliath is formidable. Goliath is terrifying. And of course, it's easy to be formidable and terrifying when you're dealing with a bunch of cowards and wimps like this cringing on the top of a hill.

David sees to the very heart of the story whom you have defied. Very easy to look at the church, isn't it, and think it is rather pathetic.

[22 : 38] And of course, often we are, aren't we? We're not really all that good. We're all that we sometimes pretend. pretend. But, when we realise what is behind the people of God, what is the source of the power of the people of God, and that changes, that raises the stakes, that changes the balance.

So let's look then at Goliath. He's given a tremendous build-up in verses 4 and following. There came out a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

That's possibly about nine feet. Some manuscripts read six foot six, which in all consciences pretty, is tall enough. But, why do we have this long description of Goliath here?

He had a helmet of bronze arms, a coat of mail, bronze arm on his legs, a shaft of his spear like a weaver's beam, and so on. It's developed leisurely to show just how formidable it is.

If you look at this guy and you forget the living God, you are going to be terrified, aren't you? You are going to cringe. You are going to run away because this is truly a terrifying figure.

[23 : 52] And then, his terrifying bluster, he stood and shouted, verse 8, to the ranks of Israel, choose a man for yourselves. Goliath wants to narrow this down to a contest between himself and a champion from Israel.

Israel. And the result is panic day after day for 40 days. A great hulking creature like the side of a house comes prancing out into the valley, shouting and blustering his terrifying challenge.

But the people are looking at externals. Remember once again, chapter 16, verse 7. Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature because I have rejected him.

That gives us the key to understanding what's happening here because what is happening here, the real battle that's happening here is a much bigger thing than appears.

If we read this story simply as David, little David fighting big Goliath, then that of course appeals to something in us. We do like of course when a champion is overthrown, when some massive football team is overthrown by some little provincial team.

[25 : 15] That's great fun, isn't it? But we know of course it's a flash in the pan, we know it's not going to happen again. But that's not what this narrative is about. If you look at verse 43, it's one of the many hints what's really being said here.

The Philistine cursed David by his gods. Now, if you read 1 Samuel, you'll find a bit about Goliath's gods.

In chapters 4 and 5 of this book, the sacred ark, the ark of the covenant, is captured by the Philistines. And the ark of the covenant is put in their temple in front of their god, Dagon.

Their main god was almost certainly the god whom Goliath is cursing David by. And the next morning, Dagon is found turned into Humpty Dumpty before the sacred ark.

Before the power of the lord, Dagon is smashed to pieces. In other words, the lord, the god of Israel, had already defeated the gods by whom Goliath is cursing David.

[26 : 27] What do we have here? This is an outcropping, an example of the great battle announced in Genesis 3, verse 15.

The descendant of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. Right through the Old Testament, we are waiting for the serpent crusher. Over and over again, we might feel he had come. Is it going to be Noah? Well, Noah made shipwreck later on, after having been so magnificent. Abraham?

No, he got it wrong as well. Moses? And we know later on that David is not the serpent crusher either, but nevertheless, this is, if you like, an active parable of the day when David's greater son would destroy the serpent.

Goliath stands for the serpent and David is the Lord's anointed defeating him. And we must remember before we get to us fighting giants.

[27 : 31] We'll come back to this in a minute. This is about the Lord's anointed, the son of man destroying the devil here in one of his representatives. And this is a replay in many ways what happened earlier when Moses is standing before Pharaoh and the contest is no longer a contest between Pharaoh and Moses to contrast when Yahweh the Lord God of Israel and the gods of the Egyptians.

So it is here. The way of the serpent has been taken by Goliath. Goliath is one of these formidable warlords. It takes us back further to Genesis 6.

These formidable warlords like Nimrod and others who were opposed and hostile to God and created military dictatorships and oppressed people dreadfully.

God's formidable enemy. He is formidable and indeed without the Lord being part of the scene he's not just formidable he's unconquerable just as our giants if you like and we're going to come to them don't worry are unconquerable without the Lord.

That brings us to the third thing God's faithful champion his faithless people who are cowed by his formidable enemy but now his faithful champion.

[29 : 02] Now remember we are not David but we have David's God. I want you to look at verses 12 to 23 now.

Now this seems an irrelevant digression. Why are we told about Jesse and his three sons? Why are we told about David keeping the sheep? Well it's a deliberate reminder of chapter 16 where this boy from Jesse's household had been anointed as the Lord's anointed and as the future king.

Reminded of David's background reminded of his lowly status. He does not have a military background as Saul points out later on. You are just a youth and he is a man of war from his youth. It all seems trivial and every day interrupting this big story tell the lad to take bread and cheese to the army. These wonderful little details that show the Bible is so realistic.

This is real life. These little details that show us the picture. God is at work even in the smallest detail as his anointed champion comes onto the field.

[30 : 16] Read again with wonder and amazement Luke chapter 2. at the birth of David's greater son. See how low key it is. See how lacking it is in any kind of razzmatazz.

But of course it's making way for the time when heaven bursts open with the angels singing glory to God in the highest. If we imagine it we can hear behind this simple straightforward apparently trivial story the angels singing glory to God in the highest.

Now I want to look at two things. First of all David's words. David doesn't actually speak until late on in the chapter.

Verse 20 26 David said to the men who stood by him what should 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 Israel? Well that's not what he says. That he should defy the armies of the living God.

[31 : 30] And that's what instantly transforms the situation. One thing to have a panicky bunch sitting up on the hill cringing before this titanic figure. It's another thing when we realize who Goliath really is attacking.

He is defying the armies of the living God. And of course there's a hint here about the dead Philistine gods. You see David begins with God.

He doesn't begin with Goliath and he's absolutely terrifying. We can't handle him. He's much too formidable for all of us to deal with or less any one of us to deal with.

David begins with God and therefore Goliath is in his proper place. you see we're coming to fighting giants in our lives.

We'll come to that at the end of the story don't we? Not at the beginning. If we begin with the giants the giants will fill the picture. The more we see them the more they'll terrify us.

[32 : 29] The more frightening they'll become. But if the living God fills the picture then the whole situation changes.

David's words to Saul in verse 30. David said let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight the Philistine.

Now you can imagine Saul I don't know whether he laughed or panicked but anyway you're not able to go into this Philistine to fight with him. You are but a youth.

He's going to have war from his youth. But David said to Saul verse 34 your servant used to keep sheep for his father and there came a lion or a bear.

And so on. And verse 36 this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like the lion and the bear who used to fight the armies of the living God. And then look at verse 37.

[33 : 28] David said I'm a strong terrifying fellow myself. After all I defeated the lion and the bear didn't I?

There's any such thing. He says the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and of the bear. In other words David is trusting in the living God.

He's not trusting in his own strength. Now please don't let's get into the idea of a wimpish David. Far too often you get these pictures of a tiny little David trying to put on the gigantic armor of Saul.

David was a tough guy. David was the kind of young man who nowadays would have run marathons and played rugby. He was a tall strapping fellow himself. The point is not that it's a little wimp to feeding a great giant.

The point is he is not trusting in his strength. The old hymn says the arm of flesh will fail you. You dare not trust your own.

[34 : 33] David is not trusting in his strength because he knows that strength can be deceptive. David says the Lord did it and he'll do it again. It was the Lord who defeated the lion and the bear.

And then as he says in verses 45 and 46 that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

Do we sing a few moments ago all of the world might taste and see the riches of his grace.

What's this victory about? This victory is not about telling us we can fight giants. This victory is telling us the giant has been defeated already. The world may taste and see the riches of his grace. So David's words. Then David's actions. Now you'll notice the actual account of the contest is after all those words and after all this restriction is very brief.

In 48 to and 49 the focus is not on David's courage and skill which are considerable but on the Lord.

[35 : 39] And the emphasis look at verse 50 the apparently irrelevant detail there was no sword in the hand of David. Surely that point is that David did not defeat Goliath using Goliath's methods.

He used the five stones. Now please don't get into this nonsense about we have to fight the giant with five stones. Stones of prayer and Bible study and all the rest of it whatever they are.

You see the problem with that now I hope. And the other problem of course is we only need one of the stones and we only use them once. So in either case it's a very good application.

The point surely is that God used David's apparently puny weapon not because God uses the weak things to confound the mighty.

And now at the end we can come to the point of the beginning. We do have giants to fight. But this is the right point to come to it.

[36 : 44] The right point to come to is after seeing this is God's story. This is a story about the Lord's anointed. Because I want you to look at verse 52 and following. The men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron.

What's happening now? Because the Lord's anointed has defeated the giant has won the battle then God's people can fight. And surely that is the point. Thanks be to God says Paul who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see it's not that we have giants to fight. And if we are brave enough and clever enough and ingenious enough we can defeat them. That's not gospel. That's moralizing.

It will either drive us to despair because we continually get defeated or it will make us conceited because we win the occasional victory. The gospel is that the Lord that God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So how are we going to fight these giants? Not going to fight them in our own strength. We are going to fight them because we take God at his word. God fills the picture.

[38 : 00] God is faithful and his word is faithful. The arm of flesh will fail us. We will not win because of that. We will win because of the living God whose servants we are.

God is the hero of this story and God will be the praise. So the next time you read this chapter remember we are not David but we have David's God.

Praise be to his name. Let's pray. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Father how many times we have been defeated how many times we have been overcome how many times we simply run away. Help us to look at you and your faithfulness and place the problems in that context and give to us the grace and the wisdom to trust wholly in your word and to go forward in its strength.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.