

Sermon 11th May. 2014

1 Samuel 17

We love David and Goliath stories don't we? Maybe you have your own favourite? The story of Erin Brockovitch is one of my favourites I think. A small and insignificant woman, with limited resources who takes on a corporate giant and wins against the odds and sees that justice is done.

Or think of when we see a football game, perhaps an FA cup final, with one very big side playing a side from way down the divisions. Assuming you don't have any previous strong allegiance to either side beforehand, who do we hope will win? We want the underdog to win! It's so much more exciting when the weak people win! Everyone expects the big side to win, but when the underdog wins, well that's a story worth telling!

So turn with me if you would to 1 Samuel and chapter 17.

Today we're going to continue our series looking at David in the Old Testament and focus for this morning on the story of David and Goliath. Owein started looking at that last week and we reached a bit of a cliff-hanger in the story. How will David take on this arrogant giant from the town of Gath. Will this normal bloke from Bethlehem really take him on and win?

As you remember, the armies of Israel and the armies of the Philistines were lined up against each other in the valley of Elah and Goliath walked forward to challenge the army of Israel. Who will fight? Who will step forward?

Well, for forty days, no one at all stepped up for this particular job.

Each day, twice a day, they were stuck, with the same message of humiliation: "You're rubbish", "You silly little army from insignificant Israel", "You are no match for me!".

So as David came to the camp on his day off from looking after the sheep, to bring some cheeses and bread for the men in the camp. Everyone knew that something must be done. Who would break this deadlock? And it was David who saw the issues as they really were. Who is this man, this pagan that he should defy the armies of the living God? This is the issue. It is God's name and honour at stake here. Who does he think he is? Who is the really strong man in this situation? Well it's not Goliath! You've missed it, says David. It's not Goliath who is the real giant here. No, we have the living God on our side.

So, says David, don't lose heart! Things may look hopeless, but it's not as it appears. Victory is within our grasp.

And so we now come to the passage for this morning and X is going to read it to us starting with the end of verse 37 and continuing to the end of the chapter.

Reading

"Go, and the Lord be with you", says Saul. Sounds very pious and holy doesn't it? But Saul is hiding. Saul is running from his own responsibilities as King. As we have already seen, he was the one who was meant to be down there fighting the battle. But this blessing on David is also full of significance. As we heard from Simon, two weeks ago, David had already been anointed by Samuel and at that time we read that the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in

power. Go and the LORD be with you, says Saul, and little did he realise but that David was now the one who had the LORD with him in a special way. The SPIRIT of the LORD was with David but very sadly, the Spirit of the LORD had been removed from Saul.

Saul then offers David his armour to protect him, But David says: "I am not used to these", and he takes then off. Instead he loads up his shepherds satchel with five smooth cricket ball-sized stones and with his sling in his hand he approaches the Philistine.

So preparations are made for battle but then comes the weigh-in. This is when the two fighters face each other and say big-man-stuff to each other. You may have seen that before a boxing match. The two fighters stare each other down, try and scare each other, intimidate each other and gain the psychological advantage. But as he sees David coming, Goliath is already very angry. "Don't waste my time little boy", he says in effect. " Have you come out here to throw sticks for me? Are you going to play a game with me and get me to fetch sticks for you. You silly boy! I will feed you to the birds and animals who will scavenge for your remains!

And to be honest. If you had been standing on a nearby hill watching this scene unfold, it would have looked ridiculous wouldn't it. Here is Goliath absolutely armed to the teeth with all the latest military hardware, the spear with "go-faster" bits attached to the end, the armour which looked impenetrable, facing David who has come out largely unarmed apart from his shepherds sling! This is a crazy mismatch. It reminded me of the first and only game of rugby I played when I was about 16 years old. I was playing for the Crowborough Rugby Club third team with a bunch of very large and strong men. I did at least have youth and fitness on my side (at that time) but as I ran up the wing and into a very large opponent, he simply bounced me into touch and out of play! And that's what we expect to happen here. We expect Goliath to just bounce David into touch!

But David's reply is even more strong. You may think you are strong with your sword and your spear, but I come to you with the LORD on my side. This is not our battle today, we don't win it with swords and spears, it is His battle, it is the LORDS battle and He will win it for us. Watch out Goliath because I am going to give not just you, but the whole army of the Philistines to feed the birds and wild animals because you have defied the armies of the living GOD. Be careful Goliath who you pick your fight with!

I read a great bit in one of the commentaries that I thought i would share with you at this point...

In an otherwise very serious and dare I say it, quite dry commentary, you suddenly get this very amusing comment on the description of the armour: "he could have done with a visor"

So, he really could have done with a visor as we now see. David starts to run towards Goliath and begins to swing the stone round and round his head and finally he flings it forwards and it smashes into the only unprotected part of Goliath which was his skull and he falls forward on his face and immediately dies. And verse 50 repeats it again, almost like a refrain, and he fell, David struck him and killed him! So here was victory in the first round. David totally defeated him. Before the battle had really got going Goliath was fatally wounded, and died.

So with the victory in the valley quickly and convincingly won, the Israelites can hardly believe what they've just seen. That is not what they were expecting. What a shocking triumph! They run in and chase the Philistines out of the region, cutting them down as they go. It is a gruesome but decisive victory. The Philistine champion is decapitated and the rest of the army fall like flies.

Now Saul is clearly watching on and sees this incredible victory unfold and goes to the commander of his army and says "Whose son is that young man?"

And Abner says, "really King, I don't know".

And you can almost detect a sense of impatience in Saul's voice, "Don't know, you should know, you're the commander of my army aren't you, go and find out, go on, I need to know where he comes from!"

Now this is slightly confusing, because, if you look back a chapter 16, you will note that David has been known to Saul before. David was found by the royal court as a gifted harpist, whose playing would soothe Saul when the evil spirit came on him and troubled him. So Saul must have met David, seen him, perhaps spoken to him before, but here he says, whose son is he? Perhaps it was simply that he couldn't quite believe it either. Was this the same David, the shepherd boy musician who had just defeated this incredible giant?

And there is much much more of the story of David and Saul which opens up over the next chapters and we hope to be looking at some of the key events over the next few weeks. But as we reflect on this story let me ask a question?

Who do you think was the hero of the story you just heard?

Well, you might say, that's a bit of a silly question? Of course the hero is David?

But think again. Who does the story point to? Look at verses 45-47 again. In whose name does David come? In the name of the LORD Almighty.

Who will hand you (Goliath) over to me? The LORD will!

Who is it that saves? The LORD saves!

Whose battle is it, it's the LORDS battle!

You might think that the hero of the story is David, but the storyteller is wanting to make it very clear to us, that it is God THE LORD who is the hero. He is the one we are to be focussing on here. Not on David. It is the LORD who Goliath was defying when he defied the armies of Israel and it is in the LORDS name, for the LORDS honour that David goes up against him.

As the people of Israel told this story to each other, as they read about these events and talked about them with their children, what question did it throw up for them? Perhaps it was this: "Who will you have as Your King?"

We read in chapter 8 that the people rejected God as King and chose Saul. But it quickly became apparent that Saul was not the one. He was not going to be the King under God's rule. He would make up his own rules. So God rejected Saul. But then came David- surely

he would be the king that we need. He was chosen specifically by God, not because of his strength or stature, but simply because he was God's choice and his passion was serving God. Was David the King we need? Well as the story goes on we realise that no, not even David is the King we need. And the book of Samuel (In 2 Samuel 7) points us forward to another King, a greater King who would come, who would set up a forever kingdom and bring honour to God's name. A **son** of David would be King.

And so even here, it seems the storyteller is wanting to remind the people of Israel that it is not David who is the hero, it is not David who is the ultimate King. God is the ultimate hero, it is His King Jesus who they need.

Perhaps in the past, you've read this story and have tried to see yourself as David the hero, defeating the giants in your life. And on a good day, maybe it feels like you have put up a pretty good fight. But then you hit a bad patch again and things don't seem so clear. You fall back into a habit you thought you had dealt with for good, and you begin to feel very discouraged. You see, if we are honest at this point, we know that we are not like David who ran unarmed against the giant. If I had to write myself into the story probably I would be on the hillside, watching on, running back for cover, fearful and feeling beaten.

What are the big enemies for us? Well, I thought of two: one is sin and the other is death! They don't come much bigger than that!

Have you won your battle with sin? Or do you look at your thought life sometimes as I do, and think, what a mess! How screwed up I am? How weak and fickle I am! How lacking in true passion for God I am! How selfish I am! What a shocking mixture of motives I have!

And as you look ahead to the end of your life... which, you can know for certain will end one day, do you have an answer for death. Do we have a philosophy of life that can cope with death?

I am sure you've read or heard about the tragic death of Peaches Geldoff a month or so ago. What a terribly sad story. And perhaps you read what Bob Geldoff said about his dear daughter's death?

"We are beyond pain. How is this possible that we will not see her again? How is that bearable?"

And he's right. How is that bearable? Torn apart by the grief and the loss but even more sad, is the fact that it seems there is no hope. No hope beyond this life. We will not see her again, he says. How is that bearable?

So who is the hero? Who is the King that fights these battles for us and wins?

Turn with me if you would to Colossians 2 which is on page XXX and look at verses 13-15.

Read them

Christ is the King we really need. Only Christ has made us alive, so that we are now able to say no to sin! Only he has dealt with sin, finally nailing the long list of charges against us to the cross with him as he died there. Only Christ has disarmed the power of sin and death and triumphed over them by his death on the cross. He has made a public spectacle of

them. On the cross there was an embarrassing defeat for sin and death. Christ has triumphed over them, and shows the whole world that they are totally beaten. He has won the victory.

He is the only King who has conquered death. Only in Christ can we face death without fear. Only he has the answer for the unbearable loss of a loved one.

And it really matters! It is reality. It's not a nice story, a fairy tale. It's the best of all stories and its true! Christ is the hero of the story. He has won the battles for us! He must be our King. He is the King that we really need! Is he your King this morning?

So Jesus is the King we really need.

But secondly, What a difference the King makes!

Did you spot the difference in the army before and after Davids victory? Before David killed Goliath, they were just standing about, hoping it would all go away, pretending that they had it all under control when clearly they had no answers at all. But after the King won his victory, well, the scene was entirely different. Suddenly they were on the offensive, they were running towards the enemy. Before, they were humiliated, after, they were full of confidence, chasing the Philistines down, surging forward, with a shout!

See what a difference King Jesus makes!

You can see it in the disciples on that first Easter, hiding away in the upper room, frightened for their lives. But a few short weeks later, when it the truth of the resurrection of Jesus really hits them, they are right out there, brimming with confidence, surging forward, and the world has never been the same since.

A few of our homegroup went to see the film "Mandela" a few weeks ago- what a great film. Mandela defeated that giant of Apartheid by which principles- Truth and Reconciliation- and I wonder where he got those principles from? See what a difference King Jesus makes.

For those of us growing up in the 1980's the Berlin wall was one of those certainties of life. There would always be a Berlin wall. There would always be a divide between East and West Germany. As far as we could see, it would never change. But then in 1982, in four churches in Leipzig, small groups of Christians began to meet and to pray for peace. Slowly, over the years, the numbers attending began to grow and march for peace in the streets of Leipzig until (as Philip Yancey recalls in his book "Finding God in Unexpected places")

"In early November, the largest march of all took place, almost one million people marching peacefully through East Berlin. Erich Honecker resigned, humiliated. Police refused to fire on the demonstrators. At midnight on 9 November, something no one had even dared pray for happened: a gap opened up in the hated Berlin Wall. East Germans streamed through the checkpoints, past guards who had always obeyed orders to "shoot to kill". Not a single life was lost as throngs of people marching with candles brought down a government."

See what a difference the King makes!

Some of you have gone through the most awful times in the last years and for some those situations are ongoing. Yet I see a faith that holds on through those times, I see patience in

suffering, I see hope and not despair, I see Jesus holding you and keeping you strong- I see the difference that Jesus makes.

Some of you have seen the difference Jesus makes to those who struggle with addictions. Only Jesus can bring full healing and restoration- and he does, and he has, and he will.

When you are tempted to be unforgiving in a relationship, it is through Jesus that we are not consumed by bitterness but taken over by grace!

When ordinary Christians with ordinary work in ordinary places demonstrate radically different priorities, in which integrity is more important than success or financial gain; then the world will see the difference that Jesus makes.

Do you know this King? This Jesus?

So if you are here this morning and think you want to no more about Jesus being the King and what that means exactly, then do speak to someone after the service. Get them to talk about it. Explain it. May be arrange a time to sit down and read the bible with them. Study it. Work out what it might mean for you.

Jesus is the king that you really need.

See what a difference the King makes.

Everyone expects the biggest side to win. But when the weak people win, well that's a story worth telling.

Questions for HG.

1. What's your favourite David and Goliath story? And why?

2. Where would you place yourself in the bible story?

Would you be...

a. David the hero

b. One of the army watching on in fear, or

c. It's not about me?

3. I mentioned two big enemies in the sermon- sin and death. Are there other giants that we face? How has Christ defeated them?

4. Which side of Christ's victory do we live? Before or after?

If he has defeated these big enemies, why does it still seem to be such a struggle and a fight?

5. What difference has the King made in your life- your work, your community, your relationships?

6. In the light of the fact that Christ is King of your life (he wins the victory, he makes the rules), is there something this week that you will need to do differently?