

“Why David – Part 3”

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Success for the believer asks, “How this crisis impacts God’s reputation?”

1 Samuel 17:25-37

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Why Peter

The sermon title is “Why David – Part 3,” but I want to start with a different question: “Why Peter?” Corinth’s choice of a Music Director and Organist in 2001 was huge. It had been a position with high turnover during my first eight years. Long term traditional church music lovers were wondering if Bob could work with musicians.

We conducted a nationwide search for candidates, narrowed it to twelve, and brought in three to interview in person. We hired Peter not just because of his education, his skill on the organ, and his creativity in writing music. God had prepared him to work with me and with Corinth – in part by giving him Lisa as his wife!

Neither Peter nor we knew to what degree his calling would be tested. In his last church in Miami, Peter had loved working with teenagers. That was his expectation here as well. But we had hired Paul Cummings the year before Peter came, and within two years started a contemporary service. Relationally and musically, that moved the vast majority of teens away from a natural connection with Peter. Peter never, ever complained. His greatest strength is that he adapts to what is, not what he wishes could be. He composes, coordinates, and directs with incredible flexibility.

I credit Peter for the fact that we’ve never had the “worship wars” at Corinth that many churches have waged for the last two decades. We could not have known when we hired him how the future of Corinth would play out and how his flexibility would enable the church to grow stronger in both traditional and contemporary music.

Sometimes you don't know why until you look back.

1 and 2 Samuel should more accurately be titled "1 and 2 David." These two books (in the English Bible) are really the story of David, Israel's greatest king. Two names set up David's story – one positively (Samuel) and one negatively (Saul). Two chapters (16 and 17) offer a three-part answer to the question, "Why David?" In each case, David, the future success, contrasts with Saul, the present failure.

Part 1, when Samuel anoints David, is about his heart. Saul's heart has become hard, proud, and insecure. David has a shepherd's heart.

Part 2, when David plays the harp in Saul's court, is about David's service. David is a behind-the-scenes musician. Kind of like Peter. He doesn't want or need the limelight. He's there to serve.

Part 3, when David fights Goliath, is about David's faith. The story of David and Goliath is one of the Bible's most widely known and loved, and one of the Bible's most misunderstood. It's not a story about the triumph of underdogs. It's a story of preparation to serve as Israel's greatest king.

The setup

Saul was the king the people wanted. He was not only a king "like all the other nations," he was better. When we come to 1 Samuel 17, Saul has won every war he has fought. The Philistines, his nemesis to the west will not give up. Their population is expanding, and they need more land. Now they encroach into Israelite territory.

The two armies face off on opposite hills with a valley in between. Because of Saul's track record, he's probably not concerned at first. Typically, there would be days or weeks of grandstanding and war cries and sizing up the enemy. My suspicion is that at first Saul and his army are feeling more and more confident every day.

The Philistines emerge with a previously unused strategy: "Battle by Champion." Rather than having two armies clash with hundreds or thousands of casualties, each side presents its finest warrior – winner take all. The Philistines borrowed this strategy from their Greek relatives. This is Hector v. Achilles in Homer's *Iliad* (or Hollywood's "Troy" if you prefer. I suspect when they first offered this option, Saul thought, "My son Jonathan and his armor bearer took on 20 Philistines and beat them." Deal.

Then the Philistine champion emerged from their camp. He was like no warrior Israel had ever seen. Almost ten feet tall, his body armor weighed as much as a small soldier (125 pounds). His iron spear shaft weighed 15 pounds. The shield bearer provided double protection.

Then he spoke, no, he thundered toward the Israelite ranks. "Choose your champion to fight me. I defy the armies of Israel." Now Saul and all his soldiers were

greatly dismayed and terrified. This went on for almost six weeks. Twice a day Saul's army would muster up their courage and shout their war cries in defiance, doing the same thing hoping for a different result. Every time, Goliath emerged and they ran back to their hill.

Why didn't the Philistine army pursue them? They had an inferior army. Why didn't Goliath pursue them? He was an awkward giant weighed down with defensive armor. He couldn't chase anyone, but he could intimidate everyone. This is the standoff. Israelites: "Our army can whip your army." Philistines: "Our champion can whip your champion."

Enter David

David is introduced into the story line as if we had never met him. We're told his father, Jesse, is "very old." Literally he "has become a senior." He's probably about my age 😊. His three oldest sons are somewhere in those terrified ranks of Saul's army. Jesse has been sending David regularly with supplies for his brothers. When David's not doing that, he's tending his father's sheep.

On this fateful day, David gets up early in the morning with nonperishable snacks, bread, and cheese for his brothers. Since he had about 15 miles to walk, it seems likely he headed out before dawn. The timing was phenomenal. When he came to the Valley of Elah, he was running to find his brothers. "How's it going, guys?" But just as he showed up, out steps Goliath on the opposite side, thundering his challenge.

David inquires, "What's going on here? Who is this filthy Philistine who is defying the armies of the living God? What has Saul offered as a reward for killing him?"

The guys say, "The king offers wealth, the hand of his daughter, and exemption from the king's service and his taxes." David's big brother Eliab overhears this conversation and ridicules David even for asking. Not that he had accepted the challenge. As the oldest and most experienced of Jesse's sons, shouldn't he have had the most courage and confidence? Or maybe it should have been Jonathan. Saul himself would have eagerly taken the challenge twenty years earlier. No one has.

David tells Eliab, "Who asked you?" and keeps asking questions among the troops until finally word comes to Saul. Saul sends for David, and David says, "No one should lose heart on account of this Philistine. I'll fight him." Saul answers, "He is a well-trained, well-equipped warrior. You're too inexperienced and too young."

David gives the first of two longer speeches in this chapter. This one is directed at Saul. David tells the king, "I've killed lions and bears with my bare hands as a shepherd. This filthy Philistine has defied the armies of the living God. Yahweh will rescue me from him."

Saul has never worshiped idols except the idol of his own ego and success. He responds to David, “Yahweh will go with you.” Then, in a comic interlude, Saul dresses David in the best armor available – his own. It’s probably as fine a set of armor as Israel has. But it looks ridiculous on David – and feels even more awkward. If there is a strategic advantage David will have, it is his quickness. He picks up five stones from the brook and approaches the Philistine.

Battle of the gods

Goliath’s movement toward David is awkward and slow, like the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk. He looks the young shepherd over. The one description of David common to Parts 1, 2, and 3 is that he’s “handsome.” Goliath sees this. The way Goliath sees David is more like “cute.” This is a champion? He curses David with his booming voice. “Dagon damn you, boy. Get over here and I’ll dismember you and let the wild animals have a feast.”

David’s second long speech is directed to Goliath. He screeches in a small voice, “You fight with weapons of iron, but I fight in the name of the LORD of hosts. He will deliver you and I’ll decapitate you so that everyone who sees will know there is a God in Israel. This battle is the LORD’s!” This is more than trash talking. It’s a battle of the gods. Both combatants believe in their god and believe their god will vindicate their faith. This is ultimately not a war of sword v. sling. It’s a war of faith. David knows this.

Goliath plods toward David, while David runs toward the giant. As he runs he places a stone in his sling and before he gets within arm’s length of Goliath he twirls that sling and plunges a rock into the only vulnerable place in a ten-foot target – right between the eyes. He uses Goliath’s battle axe to sever his head from his body.

Their one shot at victory having evaporated with a shepherd’s sling into the head of their champion, the Philistine army disperses and retreats. The Israelites pursue them and plunder their camp. Saul wins against the Philistines, but loses against David.

Trust, properly placed

We trivialize this story if we make it about “facing the giants” in your life. This is not a self-help lesson about underdog courage. This is a story about trust, properly placed. If you trust in the world’s weapons the best you can hope for is the world’s results. That goes for posturing, power, and politics. There are so many specific lessons in the story of David and Goliath.

First, faith is the evidence of things not seen. David’s trust is “the LORD of hosts.” We first encountered this name for God in chapter 1 of 1 Samuel. That was also the week I stepped into Peter’s organ chamber for our livestream-only worship. There is a host of invisible organ pipes that make music happen, all powered by forced air. The Spirit of God is wind and breath – never seen but always active. From the moment of

his anointing David is empowered and guided by the unseen force of God's Spirit. That's true in this chapter as well.

I don't think David hit Goliath's bull's eye because he had honed his sling-skills out in the shepherd field. He never mentions a sling when chronicling his shepherd battles before Saul. The story is designed to point to providence if not miracle.

There's the timing. We have seen and will see so many "coincidences" in David's life. David just happens to show up at the very moment Goliath issues the challenge. As Richard Foster says, coincidences happen more often when we pray. David was a man of prayer, in touch with the invisible Spirit of God.

Then there's the target. David just happens to hit Goliath between the eyes on the first try. It's been often asked, "Why did David pick up five stones if he only needed one?" David didn't know he'd need only one. He thought he might need four or five shots to hit Goliath. That's the human side. But the "LORD of hosts" was with him, and my theory is that an invisible army was all around that battlefield, and one of them guided that rock toward its target.

Second, the moment of crisis is too late to prepare. Not only in Part 3 but in Parts 1 and 2, we learn that David was ready for this battle. He had been getting ready all his life, even before he knew there would be a battle. David was chosen as king because he was a man after God's own heart, and you don't develop that when the giant issues his challenge. In Part 2 he became Saul's armor bearer because he had spent his time in the field not murmuring over his lot as the youngest son but honing his musical skills. In Part 3 he was ready to face Goliath because he had developed courage in lesser battles. Shepherding didn't seem like a big responsibility; it was even downplayed significantly by David's father and his big brothers. But it was how God prepared David for Goliath.

If you're not currently in a crisis of faith, what are you doing to prepare for the time when your faith will be tested beyond human limits? What challenges are you accepting voluntarily because you know you need the experience for facing greater tests? What skills are you developing – not knowing when and how they might be useful? What relationships are you building because you're going to need a support team when the crisis hits? What time are you spending in the Word of God and in prayer so your faith muscles are getting a good workout?

If you do fail, there's still good news. If you are unprepared for a crisis and you completely fall apart that too is one of the ways God will prepare you for the danger yet ahead. God is always pulling together the successes and failures of your life to get you ready for the next challenge. It's sure to come. Waiting until it happens to develop your faith is a grave spiritual danger.

Finally, success is honoring the name of the Lord. For David, success wasn't killing the giant. Success was not allowing the name of the Lord to be trashed. Imagine

if David had walked away from this scene, or if Saul or Jonathan or Eliab had fought the battle without putting full trust in the God of heaven.

When you face a challenge – and maybe it's financial need or time pressure or health uncertainty or betrayal by a friend or lover or just the daily grind of life – success isn't defined for the believer by whether you win or gain in the world's eyes. Many a biblical hero died without "success" from this world's perspective. Read Hebrews 11 – that's what it's all about.

Success for the believer answers the question, "Do those who hear what I say and watch what I do know and trust God more because of what they witnessed?" David never gave a thought to the possibility that he might lose this battle. But even if he did, he would trust.

I love the MercyMe song, "Even If". It was never more deeply illustrated than in the cancer battle and passing of Doug Leatherman a few years ago. The song is based on the story of Daniel's friends who were thrown into the fiery furnace. They were just as confident as David that God would save them. But they added, "Even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or bow down before your idol" (Daniel 3:18). The chorus of this song rings out with confidence,

*I know You're able and I know You can
Save through the fire with Your mighty hand
But even if You don't
My hope is You alone*

That's success. Amen.