

Sermon 24/06/18 – David and Goliath

Prayer

Well, what a privilege to be able to speak this morning on two of my favourite stories in the Bible – David and Goliath, and Jesus calming the storm! Two stories which on first reflection might not seem to have much to do with each other, but which I hope by the time I have finished you will understand why the compilers of the lectionary put them together!

Now I hope you have all got the piece of paper you were given as you came in, and I hope you have had time to write on it the biggest challenge or problem you face in life right now. What I'd like you to do now is to write down the one word that for you sums up David's actions in this story – perhaps you think he was brave or courageous, or maybe it's foolish or even reckless? Just one word.

Now, let's unpack the story a bit and see what the writer is getting at!

The Philistines have come up from Gath to a point about 14 miles west of Bethlehem. They have set up camp and their champion, Goliath has come out to challenge Israel. I say challenge, but the Hebrew word "h_{ar}ap" it is to insult, to mock, to deride, or to defy. It occurs six times in the narrative and it is not just Israel, but their God, Yahweh, who is being scorned. One of the names we find in the scriptures for God is Yahweh Nissi – the Lord our banner! The Lord, in whose name Israel was known and was fighting, the banner, was being defiled and insulted. This is an important thread in the background on which everything hangs.

Next we get introduced to Goliath – and let's be clear he is impressive! He stands 9' 6" tall; his armour weighs about 9 stone (60Kg); the head of his spear weighs as much as this sledge hammer! I'll be honest, you'd have to be mad to go out and confront him! There is however a little backward glance here in the text. In the previous chapter about the calling of David, the Lord says to Samuel: "Do not consider his outward appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Who was this referring to? Eliab, David's oldest brother who we will shortly meet again!

Up to this point the writer has been slowly building our tension and our fear with his image of Goliath. But suddenly the tone changes "Now David.." – it's low key and natural - he arrives bearing a food parcel for his brothers. Then he hears Goliath boasting, and, for the first time in all the narrative about David, he speaks, a casual remark to those standing nearby: "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?" Note immediately how the focus shifts – it's not about how big etc Goliath is, but rather that he is insulting Israel, and thereby insulting Yahweh. David is looking at the situation through God's eyes.

Next comes the series of conversations in the Israelite camp. David asks again for the current situation, and is met with scorn and derision from his eldest brother – the attack turns personal not from the Philistines, but from those who should care most for him! Then David gets to speak with King Saul – remember Saul already knew him as the lyre player who came to soothe him! Naturally Saul tells him not to be silly – this is a big giant schooled in warfare, and you are a young lad!

And now we come to the very heart of the story – David's faith! Look he says – I have been keeping sheep, and if a lion or bear came and stole one I would go after it, and when it turned on me I would seize it by the hair and kill it! "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." Notice it's not "I'm good at killing Lions and bears, and so am well trained" – David recognises that his previous success is down to the Lord, to Yahweh, and it is his faith in God which will enable him to overcome Goliath.

He looks back to the times the Lord has acted powerfully in his life before, and that gives him the confidence and faith to realise that the Lord will do it again!

Poor Saul – he just doesn't quite get it!! He promptly insists David put on his armour and take his sword and helmet! How often, seeing someone stepping out in faith have I done that – promptly offered my worldly advice and tools as to how to succeed!! Fortunately David recognises that all this "stuff" is just getting in the way, and promptly hands it back to Saul!

He picks up five stones and his trusty sling, and standing purely on his faith in Yahweh, he steps out.

The tirade of derision to which David has been subject continues: Eliab has already effectively told his little brother "You're an annoying pain", Saul has derided him as inexperienced and untrained, and now Goliath roars that he is "puny" and curses him by his gods!

And so to the climax – a mighty shout of faith from David: "You come to me with sword and spear and 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 very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

No whimpering to the Lord that he looks like a very fierce giant; no long meetings to discuss strategy and who might be best able to deal with him; not even a prayer meeting to commission David in his mission – just a young man with his heart burning at the injustice that Goliath’s words did to the Lord Almighty, who steps out in absolute faith under the banner of Yahweh Nissi, the Lord our banner, and with one slingshot lays low the boasts of the Philistines and their “gods”.

What a lesson for us! David didn’t spend lots of time telling God how big his problem was – he ran at the problem shouting how big his God was! That is the lesson from this story!

Take a moment now to look again at the piece of paper from earlier and the word I asked you to write down – I think I mentioned things like bravery, or courage. Well I want you to scrub that out, and write in the largest boldest letters you can, the one word “Faith”!

David looks back over his life, he recalls the times he has been saved him from wild beasts and sees God’s hand at work. I dare say he looked back to the strange time when he was anointed by Samuel and knows in his heart that this was a point when God said I will be with you, and then he does the most important thing of all – he acts on his faith!

Let me just for a moment shift our focus to the other wonderful story we have had this morning – Jesus calming the storm. Mark’s narrative has all the hallmarks of an eye-witness account – the details of where the event took place, the description of Jesus asleep with his head on the helmsman’s cushion, even the presence of other boats who can verify the tale. There is much we can unpack from this story, but as our time this morning is limited I want to take us straight to the conversation at the end.

The boat Jesus is in is being crewed by disciples, several of whom were fishermen – they knew the lake and its fitful weather patterns, and they knew how to handle a boat. The ferocity of the storm, and the size of the waves, terrify them, and they fear for their lives! These men were not wimps and city dwellers, they were experienced sailors, and they were terrified – this was truly a life-threatening situation!

The exchange with the disciples is fascinating! “They shake Jesus awake and shout “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?!” Clearly they recognised that Jesus was someone to whom they could turn, and so they ask (or even plead?!) for his help.

Jesus response is wonderful in two ways. First of course is his command to the waves, to the problem they are confronting: “Quiet! Be still!” – and the universe, the waves on the turbulent sea, instantly respond to the voice of their creator!

But then comes his question to the disciples: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” There’s that little five letter word again – “faith”! The disciples have been in Jesus company for some time, and they are steadily learning about him – they are intimately aware of his teaching, his miracles, his presence, his times of prayer – they know all about him, yet his question to them is “Do you still have no faith?”.

Unlike David who had run at his problem, Goliath, shouting how big his God was, the disciples had turned in fear to Jesus to tell him how big the storm was, and his challenge back to them was “where’s your faith?”

I think that tells us something really important about faith. The disciples had all the knowledge and belief about Jesus, who he was, what he could do etc - in our church terms they were well on with ‘Knowing’ Jesus, and had done plenty of ‘Growing’ in knowledge and understanding - but they still acted on the basis that they needed him to DO something. He wanted them to realise that all they needed was to trust in his presence to survive.

So faith is being absolutely assured of God’s presence and care for us, no matter what the external circumstances, whether we are confronting a giant or being wrecked by the storms around us, and being willing to act with absolute conviction that we are safe in His hands! It is being so convicted of God’s care and provision that we can run at the giant’s shouting how big our God is; it’s being confident to stand up in the boat and shout with Jesus “Quiet, Be still!”.

On your piece of paper you may recall that I asked you to write the biggest challenge or problem you are facing – the Goliath or the Storm in your life. Just for a moment I want you to picture in your mind Jesus standing right beside you; he grips your hand. Now, together, run at that giant shouting how big your God is; stand and command the storm to be still! Do it in your heart; shout it out loud if you want! Into that situation let the power of God, his infinite care and love for you, pour into your heart – and truly know that God has your back!

Faith is stepping out and acting accordingly!

If you do, the world around you will see that there is a God who commands the seas, who defeats even the biggest giants, and whose name is never ever to be defiled, or slurred, or defamed! A God whose nature is justice and love for all those he has called! A God to be held high as Jehovah Nissi – the Lord our Banner.

Stand under that banner in faith as you confront your Goliath, your storm, this week!

[The music played at the end can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRamo4z1R-k>]