

God's Story: Champions

1 Samuel 17:1-16, 32-50

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David and Goliath. Goliath, the fearsome giant, David, the young shepherd. A famous battle between a powerful villain and the original underdog, Goliath and David, David and Goliath, that's what today's reading was all about, right? This is the story of David and Goliath.

And we know that Goliath is a giant – this unbelievably tall soldier, the champion of the Philistine army throwing down a challenge against the people of Israel. The bible says that Goliath's height was six cubits and a span – that's almost 10 feet tall, far taller than any person in recorded history. Now, there are a few manuscripts that record Goliath's height as being four cubits and a span, which is around 7 feet tall, like Shaquille O'Neal – but if you're quibbling over his exact measurements, you're missing the point. The average adult male at this time in history stood only about 5 feet tall, and since David was only a youth, he'd likely be even shorter, so it's clear that Goliath would have stood literally head and shoulders above every other man on that battlefield. But the Bible spends less time describing Goliath himself and more talking about the kind of weaponry and armour Goliath had with him – a helmet of bronze, bronze armour on his legs, a coat of bronze mail

weighing in at about 125 pounds, a bronze javelin, and an iron spear with a 15 pound head. Goliath is not just big, he is bristling with the most advanced weapons technology available at that time – this story is happening very early in the Iron Age, when iron-working for tools and weapons was just starting to become available, and the Philistines were the only group around who knew how to make them. Everything about Goliath is outsized and powerful – he is the champion of the Philistines, their most powerful, most prominent warrior, and he comes forward to challenge the Israelites to bring forth their champion, a fight to the death for the fate of both their peoples. And of course, it's obvious who Israel's champion will be. It's going to be Saul.

That's how this story is supposed to go. It's supposed to be the story of Saul and Goliath, because Saul is obviously the Israelite equivalent to Goliath. Goliath is a tall man? Well, so is Saul. When the people of Israel chose Saul as their king, it is partially because he was a full head taller than any other man in all of Israel. Goliath has weapons? Well, so does Saul – he and his son Jonathan are the only two men in all of Israel to own a sword and a spear, and later in this story we see Saul clothe David in his own armour, with his own bronze helmet and coat of mail. Saul and Goliath are clearly the two champions for their peoples, they are both the strongest, tallest, best-equipped soldiers in their respective nations, but of course there's a problem with this. In every way that Saul is best in Israel, Goliath is better. Sure, Saul is tall –

maybe over 6 feet – but Goliath is taller. Sure, Saul has bronze armour and a sword, but Goliath has more bronze, more weapons, and he has iron. All of Israel knows that Saul is the best they have, and yet it's obvious that Goliath outclasses him in every way, so it's no wonder that when Saul and all Israel heard Goliath's challenge, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. Saul was the best they had, and he obviously wasn't good enough. If you really want an underdog story, a story of mismatched odds, you want the story of Saul and Goliath. That's the way the story should have gone.

And it probably would have gone that way – Saul would have eventually had to head out against Goliath and gotten himself run through by that iron spear – except for one little complication. An old man in Bethlehem named Jesse has three sons who've joined up with the Israelite army and gone to war, and Jesse puts together a little care package for them – some bread, cheese, a few supplies from the farm, and he gets his youngest son, David, to come in from his shepherding duties for a few days to deliver this package. And when David arrives at the front lines, he hears the Philistine champion, Goliath, cursing and threatening and defying all Israel, defying their King, Saul, and defying their God, the LORD almighty. David hears this, and so he goes to Saul and he volunteers, he offers himself as Israel's champion, offers to take Saul's place as Israel's representative in this battle with the Philistine Goliath. And since he's too small and puny to handle Saul's armour, he

leaves it behind, and heads out onto the field of battle with nothing but a sling and five smooth stones. And so instead of the battle we're expecting - Saul and Goliath - instead of one tall, well-armed man against a taller, better-armed man, we get a tall well-armed man against a short, puny, unarmed boy, instead of Iron age vs Bronze age we get Iron age vs Stone age, instead of Saul and Goliath we get David and Goliath.

Or do we? That's certainly what Goliath is thinking as David approaches, that this is a battle he can't lose, that the Israelites have nominated as their champion the most unlikely, insignificant person possible, and Goliath is going to destroy him. If this battle was Saul and Goliath, Goliath would have a clear advantage, but at least Saul would put up a fight, he'd make it interesting. But if this battle is David and Goliath, well, then Goliath won't have to break a sweat, it's going to be over before it begins. There is no way that David, this half-grown, stone age peasant can possibly fight Goliath – we're watching David's funeral here. If you really want an underdog story, a story of mismatched odds, you want the story of David and Goliath, because that's the way the story should have gone.

And it probably would have gone that way – David running and dodging until he gets tired and Goliath's javelin finally finds its mark – except for one little complication. Goliath was expecting that Saul would be Israel's champion, and now he thinks David is Israel's

champion, but both times he's wrong, and David lets him know it. "You come to me with a sword and a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of God, the Lord of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, so 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, the battle will be fought by God, and He will give you into our hand." David comes to tell Goliath that Israel has sent out their champion, but it isn't David. Their champion is the Lord God Almighty, commander of the armies of heaven, that's who will be fighting Goliath that day. This story isn't Saul and Goliath OR David and Goliath – it's God and Goliath, and let me tell you, if you *really* want an underdog story, a story of mismatched odds, then you really want the story of God and Goliath, because this one isn't even close. It's not a fair fight anymore. Despite all his cutting edge weaponry, his armour, his massive physique, despite every advantage Goliath seems to have, the truth is he doesn't stand a chance. As soon as God decides to fight on behalf of his people, Goliath doesn't stand a chance. With one smooth stone, with one throw of a sling, Goliath goes down. The battle is over before it starts. All David has to do is go out to meet his enemy confident that his champion goes with him, his God walks alongside him, that the battle belongs to the Lord.

The days of bronze javelins and iron spears are long behind us, and I would guess that no-one here will ever be attacked by a 10 foot Philistine – we're not in the Iron Bronze or Stone ages any more, we're in the Space age, the Nuclear Age, the age of information, and from where we stand today, that battlefield, those armies, that one young boy heading out to take on a giant, it all seems so far away. But I know that every single person here is right now in some way fighting a battle. Maybe it's a battle against disease, against cancer, against the slow aging of the body and mind. Maybe it's a battle against addiction, against mental illness, against depression. Maybe it's a battle for your family, for your marriage, for your livelihood and your employment. Maybe it's a battle against others, against bullies at your school, or against the damage caused by a careless word or a hurt from long ago. Maybe it's a battle against yourself, against the power of sin at work in your heart, against pride or anxiety or doubt. We are all fighting our very own Goliaths, we all battle those insurmountable obstacles in our lives that rear up when you least expect them and derail all our carefully laid plans and make it seem like we can never be rid of them, we can never be free. But whatever battle you are fighting, whatever champion has taken up arms against you, whatever Goliath stands in your way, make no mistake, you are not fighting alone. We have a champion on our side. We have a God who takes our burdens as his own, who makes our battles His battles, and that champion is the same God who brought

the universe into existence with a word, the same God who used a sling and a stone and a shepherd boy to save a nation from slavery, the same God who calmed the wind and the waves with the power of his voice, that is the God who fights on our side against every power that would destroy us, every obstacle that would discourage us, every part of our lives and our world and ourselves that obscures the love and joy that we are meant to enjoy in abundance. We have a promise from God, not that we will never suffer, but that he will be with us in our suffering, not that we will never face storms, but that so long as we are with Him, those storms cannot overwhelm us, cannot destroy us, cannot separate us from everlasting Love. The Lord God Almighty, commander of the armies of Heaven, he became one of us, in Jesus Christ he entered into this world to be with us in the midst of every battle we may face so that in his power we can stand firm against every Goliath this world can throw at us, because our God is standing with us, and the battle belongs to him. And when you have the creator of the universe on your side, the one who took on death and sin and conquered them on the cross, what can possibly stand in your way? It's a mismatch. It's not even close. All we have to do is go out to meet every enemy confident that our champion goes with us, our God walks alongside us, that this battle, that every battle belongs to the Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.