

# "CONFRONTING THE GIANTS"

A Sermon On 1 Samuel 17:32-49

June 28, 2009

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*Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.....So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand.*

1 Samuel 17:38ff

## **THE DUEL - I took my power in my hand.**

**BY**

**Emily Dickinson**

**I took my power in my hand.  
And went against the world;  
'T was not so much as David had,  
But I was twice as bold.**

**I aimed my pebble, but myself  
Was all the one that fell.  
Was it Goliath was too large,  
Or only I too small?**

Here is the scene. Saul and the Hebrew people are confronted by a gigantic threat. The weight of their anxiety can be read in the description of Goliath provided by the text. The weight of his armor tops five thousand shekels. The shaft of his spear resembles the beam of a weaver's loom. The business end of the spear exceeds six hundred shekels of iron. The massive threat of Goliath advances upon the Hebrew army behind a phalanx of shield bearers spewing taunts and insults shouting, "Who are you to oppose me?" Verse 11 tells of the effect Goliath had on the Hebrew psyche. "When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid."

When David arrives on the scene he is there to deliver a care package from home. Goliath has been taunting the Israelites for forty days. No warrior can be found to stand against Goliath. When David offers to be the champion the response of the soldiers is predictable. Verse 25 has been omitted by the compilers of the lectionary. The editing robs the passage of its power. In response to David's offer, the soldiers respond, "Have you seen this guy? He's huge. No one can stand against him." Saul chimes in. "Thanks for the offer, but you are just a boy." When David insists, Saul proceeds to dress David in all manner of inappropriate armor reflective of Saul's own anxiety.

Lest we dismiss this story as a quaint and ancient text fit only as the libretto for various children's musicals, I submit that 1 Samuel 17 provides a script defining life as it continues to exist in the church today. All of the elements of exaggerated threat, anxious response, and faithful courage represented by Goliath, Saul and David continue to define our lives.

Consider Goliath. This formidable yet puffed up tormenter damages the spirit of those who face him far more than he actually threatens their lives. Without engaging the reality, the Hebrew people cower before his bluster. Goliath represents every challenge we face that grows bigger in the night causing us to lose sleep; every problem that gets more complicated and intractable the more we think about it; every difficulty that waits with the expectation that sooner or later we will give up and quit. The voice of Goliath can be heard in monthly financial reports and membership statistics. The taut of Goliath can be heard in predictions that no matter what we do our efforts are hopeless.

Consider Saul and the response of the Hebrews. Challenged by Goliath, Saul and the Hebrews fall into despair. When David comes along with a “can do” attitude, they brush him off as naïve and foolish. Goliath has convinced them of his invincibility. In response they wring their hands and bemoan the futility of their situation. The despair of Saul lives in the Christian heart today every time mission is abandoned for maintenance, every time the status quo overwhelms courage and creativity, every time we give Biblical minutia prominence over the sweep of Biblical wisdom. In Goliath we see the tendency of evil to puff it’s self up. In Saul we see our tendency to fall for the ruse.

Consider David. Coming on this now fully developed scene of threat and despair, David brings an attitude of hope and high expectation. He offers himself as the champion to accept Goliath’s challenge. He refuses to adopt the hopelessness of those around him and he resists their efforts to belittle his intentions. When Saul insists that David accept his inappropriate and ill fitting armor, David refuses. The metaphor is clear. Why should David adopt the failed methods of those who have demonstrated their own ineffectiveness? Instead David does what he knows best how to do. He relies upon his own strength and his faith that God has purpose in his efforts. You know the results. The wisdom of David is alive in the church every time we lead from our strengths and trust in God, every time we resist the seductive despair of the moment, every time we recall what God has done in the past and we trust God to come through once again.

Too often we relegate the story of David and Goliath to the children’s message. We are used to it as a basis of children’s musicals and VBS programs. But the story of David and Goliath needs to be seen as important to adult hearts as well. It tells us that evil may not be as big and as powerful as it may appear. It tells us that our hearts too easily buy this deception and fall into

despair. It reminds us that we are better off discarding inappropriate methods and preparations and adopting an attitude of hope and trust in God. It tells us that what is needed may not be as complicated as we might think.

David is not just the courageous underdog. He is the one who knows that there are resources beyond the technology of kingdoms. His is an alternative to the way of swords and empires. To be sure, his way in this story is not a pacifist option. The enemy is struck down, and David must stand bravely in opposition to oppressive power. But his way, if not pacifist in the face of oppressive power, is subversive of that power. Ultimately his trust is not in the technology of force but in the subversive power of truth. And the truth in this story is that God is ultimately in opposition to arrogant and self-serving power and its violence. Trust in God nurtures hope that there is a way into the future where there seems no way, that there may be a chink in the impregnable armor, that a well-placed stone of opposition can bring down seemingly impregnable systems of oppression that loom as armored giants. We must relearn this lesson of God-trusting opposition to oppression in every generation.

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THANKS BE TO GOD.

## David and Goliath

### 1 Samuel 17

<sup>1</sup>Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. <sup>2</sup>Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six £ cubits and a span. <sup>5</sup>He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. <sup>6</sup>He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. <sup>7</sup>The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. <sup>8</sup>He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out 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. <sup>9</sup>If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." <sup>10</sup>And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." <sup>11</sup>When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

<sup>12</sup>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. £ <sup>13</sup>The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle; the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. <sup>14</sup>David was the youngest; the three eldest followed Saul, <sup>15</sup>but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. <sup>16</sup>For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

<sup>17</sup>Jesse said to his son David, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers; <sup>18</sup>also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them."

<sup>19</sup>Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. <sup>20</sup>David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry. <sup>21</sup>Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. <sup>22</sup>David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. <sup>23</sup>As he talked with them, 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.

<sup>24</sup>All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid. <sup>25</sup>The Israelites said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel.

The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel.”<sup>26</sup> 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?”<sup>27</sup> The people answered him in the same way, “So shall it be done for the man who kills him.”

<sup>28</sup>His eldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the men; and Eliab’s anger was kindled against David. He said, “Why have you come down? 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 just to see the battle.”<sup>29</sup> David said, “What have I done now? It was only a question.”<sup>30</sup> He turned away from him toward another and spoke in the same way; and the people answered him again as before.

<sup>31</sup>When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him.<sup>32</sup> David said to Saul, “Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.”<sup>33</sup> Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”<sup>34</sup> But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock,<sup>35</sup> I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it.”<sup>36</sup> Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.”<sup>37</sup> David said, “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.” So Saul said to David, “Go, and may the LORD be with you!”

<sup>38</sup>Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail.<sup>39</sup> David strapped Saul’s sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.” So David removed them.<sup>40</sup> Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd’s bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

<sup>41</sup>The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him.<sup>42</sup> When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance.<sup>43</sup> The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.<sup>44</sup> The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.”<sup>45</sup> But David said to the Philistine, “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.<sup>46</sup> 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,<sup>47</sup> 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.”

<sup>48</sup>When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. <sup>49</sup>David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.