

What is the point of the story of David and Goliath?

You often hear sermons focus on “what is the Goliath in your life?!”

Is cancer your Goliath?

Unemployment?

Lust?

God was with David.

God will be with you!

So go out there and slay Goliath?!

Another favorite is, David defeated Goliath when he was young—  
so the church should value young people!

A third “application” is that David followed his heart,  
therefore if you are a man after God’s own heart, then you should follow your heart too.

There is something tragically absent from all of these approaches to our text.

Christ.

After all, the story of David and Goliath tells us that Goliath is too big for us.

We aren’t David in this story.

We are David’s brothers—

cowering in the hills as our enemies defy the living God.

We need a Spirit-anointed champion to go before us and defeat our enemies!

The first time that I preached on this passage happened to be on a Super Bowl Sunday.

And I couldn’t help but notice that the passage was divided into four quarters –  
with a wardrobe malfunction at halftime...

I’ll use the same outline tonight – because it really does show us the picture  
of what God is doing with David.

### **1. Saul Is Benched (17:1-11)**

*Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. <sup>2</sup> And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. <sup>3</sup> And 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, and the weight of the coat was*

*five thousand shekels of bronze. <sup>6</sup> And he had bronze armor 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, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. 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.*

Because the whole point of 1 Samuel 17 is to show how David is different from everyone else.

In all of Israel, there is no one like David.

You and I are not like David.

The first thing we need to see is that Saul has failed as a king.

The king is supposed to go before Israel and lead his people into battle.

But Saul is sitting in the Valley of Elah, "dismayed and greatly afraid."

Israel had demonstrated their failure to be the son of God,  
and so God rebuked them and gave them a king.

Saul has now demonstrated that *he* is not going to be a faithful son of God,  
and so both Israel and their king are quaking in their boots  
as "Goliath of Gath" stands there breathing threats and violence against Israel.

We can appreciate Saul's wimping out.

Goliath was an impressive opponent.

Saul had been a consensus pick as king

because he was head and shoulders taller than all the Israelites.

Now he is faced with a man who is six cubits and a span (around 10 feet).

Some ancient translations say four cubits and a span (nearly 7 feet),  
and since adult males rarely reached more than 5'6,  
either of those would still be pretty tall.

Especially since the Holy Spirit has departed from Saul,

Saul has no illusions about his chances of success against Goliath!

But Goliath challenges Israel to *choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.*

*If he is able to fight against 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. (9)*

Our text goes into great detail about Goliath.

Besides his height,

we hear about his coat of mail—weighing 5,000 shekels of bronze (around 125 pounds)  
and his spear head weighing 600 shekels (about 15 pounds).

In other words, he's big, he's strong,

and nobody in Israel has a chance to defeat him in hand-to-hand combat.

But we've just heard in chapter 16 that man looks on the outward appearance –  
but the LORD looks on the heart.

So Goliath's weighty appearance should not be the final consideration.

## **2. Enter the Second String (17:12-30)**

<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 oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And 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> And Jesse said to David his son, "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 if your brothers are well, 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> And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. <sup>21</sup> And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. <sup>22</sup> And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. <sup>23</sup> As he talked with them, behold, 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 men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. <sup>25</sup> And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel." <sup>26</sup> And 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> And the people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done to the man who kills him."

<sup>28</sup> Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And 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 to see the battle." <sup>29</sup> And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" <sup>30</sup> And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before.

Verse 12 then takes us away from the battlefield to the little town of Bethlehem.

*Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah,  
named Jesse, who had eight sons.*

An Ephrathite.  
of Bethlehem.

Ephrathah was the old name of Bethlehem.

It's use cannot be accidental.

Bethlehem has played a prominent role in Israel's history—  
especially during the history of the Judges.

The last two stories in the book of Judges are all about people from Bethlehem.  
For that matter, the story of Ruth takes place largely in Bethlehem.

Perhaps a better way of putting it is that the authors of Judges and Ruth  
paid special attention to Bethlehem because of David—

but nonetheless, Bethlehem has had a number of interesting roles in redemptive history.

But it is only here in 1 Samuel 17 that Jesse is called an Ephrathite.

Though Ruth also mentions that Elimelech and his sons were Ephrathites.

Why?

Who was buried in Ephrathah?

Rachel—

Jacob's beloved wife

—the mother *not* of Judah, but of Joseph and Benjamin.

In our story Rachel's blood flows not in the veins of David, but of Saul.

Yet Saul is from Gibeah (the town worse than Sodom)

while David is from Bethlehem Ephrathah—

the town where Saul's foremother was buried.

And this Jesse had eight sons.

Given the prominence of the number 8 in the Bible,

I cannot see this as accidental either.

If it had been Jesse's seventh son,

then we would have spoken of the completeness of the number.

But it is Jesse's eighth son—

showing that completeness is not enough.

Just as the eighth day worship of Israel

showed that redemption requires a day beyond the creation

(Pentecost, Tabernacles as well as circumcision

and the consecration of the priests were all about the eighth day),

so also the eighth son of Jesse shows that redemption requires more than seven sons.

And if you recall – in Ruth 4:15, Naomi is told that your daughter-in-law, Ruth,

“who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons”

has given birth to a son – Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David.

David – the eighth son.

We heard in chapter 16 that David had been anointed by Samuel as the next king of Israel.

We also heard that David had great skill with the lyre,  
and that when he who had been anointed with the Holy Spirit played the lyre,  
King Saul, who now had an evil spirit from God, would be refreshed.

(so when we talk about David as being the second *string*...)

*But David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.*

And while David is going back and forth,  
Goliath spends 40 days taunting the Israelites.  
Morning and evening he took his stand,  
and morning and evening Israel sat there, "dismayed and greatly afraid."

It is important for us to remember that David is "going back and forth."  
He was Saul's armor-bearer, and a court musician, but he still had domestic responsibilities at home.  
In verses 17-18 we hear that Jesse sent David to the camp  
in order to see how his brothers were doing.

*And he came to the encampment  
as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry.*

Every morning, for forty days, the two armies faced each other.  
And every morning, for forty days, Goliath came and tempted Israel to say in their hearts,  
"The nations are too strong for us!"  
This was one of the temptations of Deuteronomy 7.  
The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

*And David heard him*

Many have noted that whereas the men of Israel say "have you seen him?"  
David says, "have you heard him?"

David hears Goliath's challenge and remembers what Moses had said.  
Do not say in your heart "my enemies are too strong."

And David also hears what the people say,  
*Surely he has come up to defy Israel.*

And he answers,  
*who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?*

These are the first words of David recorded in holy scripture.  
Do you see why he is called a man after God's own heart?

In effect, David says, have you forgotten who you are?  
You are the army of the living God?

And David hears what shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine  
and takes away the reproach from Israel:

(Again, an interesting way of putting it—

David understands that Israel's cowardice is a reproach.

Goliath's taunts are a rebuke to a people who have failed to trust in their God).

But David is told that the one who kills Goliath

*the king will enrich him . . . and will give him his daughter*

*and make his father's house free in Israel.*

In other words,

you'll get wealth, the king's daughter in marriage,  
and your whole family will live tax-free.

But Eliab, the eldest brother, grew angry with David,  
the little pipsqueak, and said,

*Why have you come down?*

*And 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 to see the battle.*

Was Eliab jealous?

He, after all, had been passed over when David was anointed by Samuel.

Here's his little brother (probably still a teenager) talking tough.

But we often dismiss Eliab because we know the end of the story!

But from the perspective of the middle of the story,

Eliab is right.

David is rebuking the troops for not going out and fighting Goliath,

but what would have happened to Eliab, if Eliab had volunteered?

Eliab would have been crushed like a bug.

The point of our text is that there is no Israelite

who is big enough and strong enough to beat Goliath!

*You cannot defeat Goliath.*

And since Israel has failed to be the son of God,

we should not expect an ordinary Israelite to have success against Goliath.

And since King Saul has been rejected by God,

we should not expect the house of Saul to have success against Goliath.

We need a Spirit-anointed warrior to defeat the big, ugly goon  
who is breathing threats and murder against the people of God.

### 3. A Wardrobe Malfunction (17:31-40)

<sup>31</sup> When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him.

<sup>32</sup> And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." <sup>33</sup> And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." <sup>34</sup> But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, <sup>35</sup> I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. <sup>36</sup> Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." <sup>37</sup> And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

<sup>38</sup> Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, <sup>39</sup> and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off. <sup>40</sup> Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

So they bring David to Saul,  
and David offers to fight Goliath.

And Saul says, "no way."  
After all, if David loses,  
Israel will have to submit to the Philistines.

But David says, look, this uncircumcised Philistine  
is no different than the lions and bears that I fought while protecting my sheep.  
And the key to David's confidence is found in verse 37  
*the LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear  
will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.*

Notice that David does not attribute his success to his own skill!  
No – it was *the LORD* who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the bear.  
And the LORD will deliver me from the paw of this Philistine!

Faith remembers God's faithfulness in the past –  
and sees that God will be faithful in the future.

This speech convinces Saul.  
Let's give Saul due credit.  
He had failed to be the LORD's anointed–

but he has his moments:  
*Go, and the LORD be with you!*

So Saul gives David his armor—  
but David has never tested the armor,  
he's not used to it,  
so he takes it off.

Instead, he selects five smooth stones from the brook and heads off with his sling and his staff  
to face the Philistine.

#### **4. David Gets A Head (17:41-54)**

<sup>41</sup> *And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him.*

<sup>42</sup> *And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. <sup>43</sup> And 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 beasts of the field." <sup>45</sup> Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a 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 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 host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, 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 saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."*

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

<sup>50</sup> *So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David. <sup>51</sup> Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. <sup>52</sup> And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. <sup>53</sup> And the people of Israel came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. <sup>54</sup> And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.*

Now Goliath has challenged an Israelite to single combat.

According to the expectations of such combat,

David was supposed to come down and fight in hand-to-hand combat.

And that would have ended quickly!

David's choice of the sling as his weapon neutralizes all of Goliath's advantages.

David can stay at a distance and keep slinging stones



while Goliath has to chase him.

On the other hand,

Goliath certainly accepted David's own challenge!

If Goliath had turned away in a huff and said that he would wait for hand-to-hand combat,  
then it would certainly have been inappropriate for David  
to start slinging stones at his back.

But Goliath's response is ridicule and scorn:

seeing this little boy coming toward him, he says

*Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?*

*And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.*

*The Philistine said to David,*

*Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air  
and to the beasts of the field.*

But David responded (v45-47) – with the central theological point,

*You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a 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 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 host of the Philistines this day*

*to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth,*

*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, and he will give you into our hand.*

David makes it clear that this is not just about David vs. Goliath.

This is about the LORD vs. the gods of the nations.

Except – the gods of the nations aren't worthy of being compared to the true God –  
so they don't even merit being mentioned here!

We heard about Dagon, one of the gods of the Philistines, back in chapter 4 –

falling on his face before Yahweh!

Because the LORD himself goes before his people to defeat all his and their enemies!

When God brought his people out of Egypt and established them as his son,

the Exodus demonstrated of the power of Yahweh against the gods of Egypt.

Even so, when God established David as his son,

his victory over Goliath demonstrated the power of Yahweh against the gods of the Philistines.

And when God established Jesus as his son,

declaring at his baptism, "this is my beloved son!"

He then sent him into the wilderness

where David's greater Son was tested by Goliath's master.

Do you see why you cannot simply put yourself in David's shoes?

You are not the Messiah.

You are not God's anointed king who has been chosen by God to deliver your people!

You are the host of Israel,

whom Goliath has threatened and insulted.

You are the army of the God of Israel.

And when Jesus cut down Goliath on the cross,

and overthrew the powers of sin, death, and the devil,

then we, with all the heavenly hosts,

come charging into battle in order to rout an already defeated foe.

We chase the armies of the devil and plunder their camp.

If a preacher tells you "you can fight Goliath,"

ask him, "How? He's lying there dead with his cut off!"

Jesus has defeated Goliath.

The imagery of David and Goliath fits beautifully with Paul's discussion of spiritual warfare.

Our spiritual warfare is conducted against foes who are already defeated,

but not yet utterly destroyed.

The Philistines were defeated the moment Goliath fell.

But it takes a little while to finish the job.

Jesus has defeated and bound the strong man.

We live in that "little while" in which the hosts of heaven are mopping up

and plundering the strong man's house.

### **5. David Takes the Lead (17:55-18:5)**

<sup>55</sup> As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know."

<sup>56</sup> And the king said, "Inquire whose son the boy is." <sup>57</sup> And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. <sup>58</sup> And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David

answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. <sup>2</sup> And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. <sup>3</sup> Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

<sup>4</sup> And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. <sup>5</sup> And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

So David has gotten a head (notice that he brought it to Jerusalem—

suggesting that David may have already decided where he wanted his future capital to be).

And Saul takes note of David (apparently for the first time).

David was already his court musician and armor-bearer,  
but court musicians and armor-bearers are just servants.  
Saul does not seem to have paid much attention to David before,  
and so now he asks Abner, the commander of his army,  
“Whose son is this youth?”

(after all, Saul had said that his father’s house would be free from taxation!)

Abner did not know,  
so he brought David, still carrying the head of Goliath,  
before Saul and Saul asks,  
*Whose son are you, young man?*

*And David answered, “I am the son of your servant Jesse, the Bethlehemite.*

I think that we have established that you and I are not like David.

We are not the Spirit-anointed king who defeats the enemies of the people of God.  
But at our best, we are like Jonathan—  
who responded to David with self-denying love.

*As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul,*

*the soul of Jonathan loved him as his own soul.*

*And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father’s house.*

*Then Jonathan made a covenant with David,  
because he loved him as his own soul.*

*And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David,  
and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.*

In short, Jonathan yielded all to David.

Whether he understood that David was God’s anointed yet is not clear.  
What is clear is that he didn’t care.

If someone had said to Jonathan at that moment,  
“But David will usurp your place!”

Jonathan would have responded, “thanks be to God!

For this is one who will faithfully shepherd God’s people!”

Jonathan denied himself and followed David.

The language *here* is that *Jonathan* made a covenant with David.

Jonathan is the prince.

David is the subject.

And so Jonathan makes a covenant with David.

(Later we’ll see a mutual covenant between Jonathan and David –  
but here it is plainly *Jonathan* who makes the covenant.)

You and I are not called to be the Spirit-anointed king.

We are called to follow the Spirit-anointed king!  
We are called to yield all that we have and all that we are to him.

*And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him,  
so that Saul set him over the men of war.  
And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.*

At least at first,  
(we seem to say that a lot about Saul!)  
at first, Saul starts off well!

But as we will see, Saul does not yield all to David.

Saul tries to use David for his own advantage.  
He looks pious and good,  
but in reality, Saul is about Saul.

We try to do that too.  
We try to use Jesus for our advantage.  
We try to use God's Spirit-anointed conqueror as our personal agent.

Too often we are not seeking the kingdom of God,  
we are seeking our own kingdoms.  
But as Saul will learn the hard way,  
if you will not bow to God's Spirit-anointed warrior,  
soon you won't have any kingdom at all!