

David and Goliath. It's probably one of the best known and most popular stories in the Old Testament. The little guy beats the big guy. The underdog wins. The dark horse takes first place. That's what David and Goliath seems to be all about. And because we love stories of upsets, of beating the odds, we miss the entire point of this story.

When you actually look at the story of David and Goliath, there something far more important going on. The little guy beating the big guy is a part of the story. But it's not the point of the story. The story wants to tell us far more than, "Sometimes the little guy wins."

So what is the point? To answer that question, I want to spend some time with our OT lesson from 1Samuel ch17. In this part of scripture, the Israelites are fighting their perennial enemies, the Philistines. The Philistines were a bunch of Phoenician invaders who had conquered the coastal region of Palestine.

The Philistines were very high tech. The rest of the inhabitants of Palestine were still in the bronze age. The Philistines had moved into the iron age. Thus the Philistines had iron weapons. This gave them a decent advantage on the battlefield. On top of this, they possessed the other great high-tech weapon of the day, the chariot. This allowed them to dominate the coastal plains.

From the side, Israel is shaped basically like this <<flat hand fingers to fingers with curved hand>>. There's a flat coastal plain. And then there's a chain of mountains. And at that juncture is where the Philistines and Israelites were encamped--where the plains turned into the foothills. And it was something of a standoff.

On the plains, the Philistines were almost invincible--their chariots allowed them to dominate any battle. But they lost that advantage if they tried to head up into the hills and mountains of the Israelites. Chariots and heavy iron are not an advantage in hilly terrain, in fact they become a liability. So the Israelite army doesn't want to head down onto the plains. And the Philistine army doesn't want to chase them up into the hills. Standoff.

To break the deadlock, a Philistine champion named Goliath comes out to taunt the Israelites, to try to stir something up. He offers a series of challenges to single combat. This is something that happened in those days, usually as a prelude to battle.

The description of Goliath is rather incredible. The text says that his height was six and a half cubits. That would make Goliath 9'9". That's huge, and almost unbelievable.

However, there's a little footnote in most Bibles. Only one Hebrew copy of the Old Testament says six and a half cubits. Two other important copies, one Greek, one Hebrew, both say four and a half cubits. Aha. That would make Goliath 6'9". He'd still be a big guy. But he wouldn't be some sort of fairy tale giant.

I'm 6'3". When I did some mission work in Panama, I stood head and shoulders above almost every Panamanian. In fact one of them nicknamed me *Señor Oso*, Mr. Bear. If I were six inches taller, I could have seemed really gigantic.

So, Goliath is undoubtedly a big guy. And he's described as being decked out in armor that weighs 125 pounds. And he's got a sword and a throwing spear and a stabbing spear. The stabbing spear is so big that it's got an iron spear point on it that weighs 15 pounds. And his shield is so big that he's got an assistant to carry it before him. This is not a guy you'd want to meet in a dark alley or in hand to hand combat.

Thus none of the Israelites wanted to face Goliath. No one takes up his challenge.

Meanwhile, young David is visiting the Israelite camp, taking care-packages to his older brothers who were in the army. He hears Goliath taunting the Hebrews. And, David is told about the reward that King Saul is offering anyone who will face Goliath. The king will give that man riches, his daughter, and will make his family "free in Israel." That means "tax-free."

Money, a princess, and his family doesn't have to pay taxes for the rest of their lives. Pretty sweet reward. But David is worried about something else. He's upset that Goliath is "defying the armies of the living God."

He goes to King Saul and voices the same concern. David tells Saul that he used to protect his sheep from fierce predators. He says, "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." And then he adds, "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."

David may have money and a princess in the back of his mind. Who knows? But up front, he's concerned with God. David worries that Goliath defies God. And David trusts that God will protect him from Goliath.

Step back and think about that for a second. Think about how you approach crucial decisions in your life. Does God figure in? In your life, do you make plans which are centered on God? In facing things that are frightening are you trusting in God? David's example of faithfulness and trust is wonderful for all of us to consider. At this point in his life, he puts God first.

The next scene always puts a smile on my face. We're told, "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."

Think about this. Saul's reaction. It's often our reaction. How do you fight a Goliath? Conventional wisdom says you fight Goliath on his terms. Goliath has a helmet. 'Let's give David a helmet.' Goliath has chain mail. 'David, you take my chain mail.' Goliath has a sword. 'Here's mine, strap it on.'

Note the irony. This helmet, this armor, this sword had not done anyone any good. It didn't make anyone confident enough to go out and face Goliath before. From the Israelite king down to his lowliest foot soldier, armor, helmets and swords haven't inspired anyone to face Goliath. And yet, they think that's what David needs. They think David needs to fight Goliath on Goliath's terms.

But David will have none of it. The armor weighs him down, and he is unable to even walk. So David takes all of this armor off. He goes out without human protection. He is not equipped as a warrior. He has only the equipment of a shepherd: a staff, a sling, and 5 stones. So David sets off. And Goliath heads out to meet him.

Goliath sees the staff in David's hand and gets off a pretty funny line. He says, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" He's saying, 'Is that the best you guys can do? Some kid with a stick? You must be underestimating me.' And he taunts David.

But then David utters the key line in this story:

"You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts."

David is basically saying that the sides are stacked up unevenly, but not in the way we expect. David is on the stronger side. Goliath may have a high-tech iron sword and spear and javelin. But David has God, the Lord of Hosts, YHWH Sabaoth Elohim. Yes, things are stacked up unevenly, but despite appearances to the contrary, Goliath is on the weaker side.

And in the face of Goliath's taunting, David has something to say to him, "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." Okay that's a little gory. But why is this going to happen? It's going to be a sign. David says that this will happen "so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that (the Israelite army) may know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear."

This is the climax of the story. If you're going to face a Goliath you don't need to be armed like a Goliath. If you're going to face a Goliath, you simply need to trust in the living God.

Then, almost as an anticlimax, we have the battle. David uses his sling and hits Goliath in the forehead, a spot where his fabulous armor and weapons do no good. The stone is enough to stun Goliath, and knock him to the ground. And then, in the final irony, a couple verses later, David takes Goliath's own sword and uses it to deliver the coup de grace and behead him. The armor that Goliath so trusted in pinned him down to the ground. The sword he trusted in ended up killing him.

The Lord does not save by the sword and spear. That's the bottom line message. It's not about a little kid besting a big powerful warrior. It's all about trusting in Lord, rather than in the sword.

We live in an age of fear. We long for safety and security. And so we build high tech weapons, we equip our houses with locks and burglar alarms, we take out insurance policies to protect us in case of a loss. We do everything WE can. And to a large degree, it's prudent to do so.

But if we place our ultimate trust in these things, if we look to them to ultimately keep us safe, then we've missed the point. The Lord does not save by the sword.

Trying to use the world's methods to overcome fear is no way to find security in this world. Ultimate security can never come from earthly things. Instead, David tells us, this victory over Goliath is a sign that there is a God. It is also a sign that God operates differently.

The Lord does not save by the sword. Remember how God saves us. Remember how our Savior operates.

Our Savior is equipped as a shepherd. Jesus our Good Shepherd offers true protection. And he does so, not with a sword, but with a cross. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, he promises to be with us. After all, Jesus has experienced death himself, and he knows there is nothing ultimately to fear.

The Lord does not save by the sword. The Lord is our shepherd, who saves by his death.

Don't trust worldly things. Trust him. He promises to be with us. He promises to take care of everything we need.