

I Samuel 17:(4–11, 32–40,) 45–49 ⁴⁵Then David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Armies, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶Today the LORD will hand you over to me. I will strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth. Then all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷and all those gathered here will know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear, for the battle belongs to the LORD, and he will deliver you into our hand.” ⁴⁸Then, when the Philistine started advancing to attack David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹David put his hand into his bag, took a stone from it, shot it from his sling, and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown to the ground.

This text is one of those Bible stories that a lot of people know, even those who aren't Christian at all. Whenever a whistle blower takes on the federal government or their employer it is called a real David and Goliath story. If you are a child of the 70s you might remember a claymation TV show called Davy and Goliath, although in that case, Goliath was his pet dog. There is even a TV series that tells this story among others in David's life. Don't take that as a recommendation. Most TV shows about Biblical events are often very unfaithful to the Scriptures.

While I'm happy that so many people know about David and Goliath it is also clear that so often they completely misunderstand the point of this text. It is often pictures as the little good guy winning over the big, evil, corrupt guy or government or whatever. People like to think of it that way because they so often feel powerless in this world. Stories like this give them some hope.

But the real hero of this story is not really David. The hero of this story is the LORD God himself. It's not really showing how the little guy can win, but instead how everything in all of history is under the control of God. He works out everything for the good of his people. Today we will see that The Battle Belongs to the LORD despite the enemy so trust in the LORD and anticipate victory.

This battle is one of many recorded in the Scriptures between the Philistines and Israel. Philistia was a loose confederation of a number of city states of which Gath was one. These are the same people that Samson had fought some years earlier. A portion of their territory is modern-day Gaza, so wars there are nothing new at all. They were a repeated thorn in the side of God's people until the Babylonian invasions. After that, they are never heard from again.

The Philistines had a champion by the name of Goliath. This is how he was described, **“He was nine feet, six inches tall. ⁵He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore scaled body armor, which was made of more than one hundred pounds of bronze. ⁶He had bronze greaves on his shins and a bronze spear slung between his shoulders. ⁷The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spearhead was made of fifteen pounds of iron.”**

To many people this sounds like stories of Paul Bunyan, although he is often pictured as being significantly taller than the tallest trees. That height is not out of the question. The tallest man in modern history was 8'11". He died in Manistee in 1940, actually. The tallest man today is either 8'2" or 8'4", depending on whose measurements you believe. Wrestling fans might remember Andre the Giant who wasn't that tall, but was so big he looked like an optical illusion.

For forty days Goliath called out for someone to fight him, man to man. The Israelite army's response to him is understandable. **“¹¹When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they lost their courage and were terrified.”** Today the US Army will use “shock and awe” tactics to bewilder their enemies. That's what Goliath was doing here. He scared even the most hardened soldier.

We don't have someone almost 10 feet tall trying to bash our doors down today, but many things can make us feel helpless. All that needs to happen is that you find out that the company you work for has hired a new CEO. He talks about “Getting the company back to profitability” or “Right-sizing the company.” What that usually means is that he's getting ready to fire a bunch of people so you'd better get your resumé ready.

We look at the wars going on all over the world. The Gaza that I mentioned before seems to be a particularly big mess. Every solution sounds like varying degrees of bad. Vladimir Putin decided that he needed a chunk of Ukraine and has sent tens of thousands of his people to die in an unnecessary war. Now there seems to be trade wars brewing between pretty much every country with the specter of inflation looming in the background.

The biggest enemy I've ever had to face is a real jerk. He has done more to undermine my ministry here than anyone else, and it's not even close. No matter what I try I just can't get rid of him. You want to know his

name? I'll tell you. It's me. It's my own sinful nature. If someone else wants to annoy me—and I've been annoyed by professionals—I can get away from them. But I can't escape my own sin.

Our greatest enemy is one who makes Goliath seem like a mouthy five-year-old. He is the one our Savior Jesus is battling in the Gospel lesson for today. Satan knew that if he could get Jesus to sin or even consider it, then he would no longer be holy and God's plan to save us would crumble into dust. People can only make this life miserable. Satan can destroy us eternally. That's what he wants more than anything else.

The Battle Belongs to the LORD despite the enemy so trust in the LORD.

By this point David's father, Jesse, was an old man. His three oldest sons were at the front lines. So he sent David, his youngest, to see how his brothers were doing and to bring some supplies to the army. In the verses that we didn't cover, we see that David's oldest brother, Eliab, is one of those who were scared to death of Goliath. He accused his kid brother of shooting his mouth off. He should be quiet and go away. I think we begin to see why God had not chosen him to be king.

David could look to the past to see how God had been with him. He used an example from when he was a shepherd, **"Your servant has been taking care of his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after it and struck it and rescued the lamb out of its mouth."** He could also look to what had happened in the previous chapter. God told the Prophet Samuel to anoint him to be the next king of Israel. That's a powerful promise.

We can look to our pasts for confidence for the future too. I can't tell you how many times in the past the congregations I have served have faced money problems. There have been a few times when I told my family that we had to prepare for the possibility that I wouldn't get paid. Guess how many times the Lord has come through for me. If you would say, "Every single, solitary time," you would be exactly correct.

This is not by any means the only example I could give from my own life. I suppose if I talked about all of them, I'd be carrying on for hours on end. I'm sure you could give my plenty of examples from your life too. As we grow older, all of these examples of God being faithful to his promises continue to pile up. So when we face new problems, even if they are nine and a half feet tall, we can be confident that God will remain with us.

I have to imagine that verses 38 and 39 of this text would have been pretty funny to watch. David, still a young man, tried to put on the armor of Saul who was quite tall himself and had been a soldier pretty much his entire adult life. It reminds me of a friend of mine who talked about trying to figure out how to put on all his pads on the first day he ever practiced for a football team. The armor wasn't going to do David any good.

What made David angry was not so much that this Philistine had a big mouth. You would anticipate that. David's anger was because Goliath had defied God himself, **"You come against me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Armies, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶Today the LORD will hand you over to me."**

The main reason we can have confidence today is not because of David's impending victory over Goliath. It is because of Jesus' victory over Satan in our Gospel lesson for today. He faced Satan's temptation head-on, one-on-one. He didn't use his almighty power to tip the scales in his favor. That's exactly what Satan wanted him to do. He sent Satan packing with nothing more than the power of his holy Word.

That victory in the wilderness foreshadowed his ultimate victory over Satan on the cross. It didn't seem very becoming of the Son of God to go without food for 40 days. It didn't seem very becoming that he would be mocked, spit on, nailed to a cross, and rejected by his heavenly Father. But that's exactly what the Son of God came here to do. He obeyed God's Word perfectly in every way. He paid for every time we have failed God. So really it doesn't matter what the future holds. Through Christ, we've already won.

The Battle Belongs to the LORD so trust in the LORD and anticipate victory.

David almost sounds arrogant when he says to Goliath, **"I will strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth."** Pretty bold for a young man who had never fought a single battle in his life. Of course, as they say, it's not arrogance if you can back it up.

But if you look at what David said right before and right after those words you see he wasn't being arrogant at all. He was supremely confident in his Lord. He said, **"⁴⁶Today the LORD will hand you over to me."** He uses God's covenant name. His confidence was based on God's promises to him and to his people. It was impossible for God to go back on his promises so he knew that that giant would be brought low.

David went on to say, **"Then all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷and all those gathered here will know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear, for the battle belongs to the**

LORD, and he will deliver you into our hand.” It wasn’t going to be David’s superior tactics that would win the victory. God would see to it for the sake of his name, that is, his reputation among all people.

David was proven to be right. He used a sling which was basically a couple pieces of rope with a little pouch to put a smooth rock in. You would spin it and then launch it with tremendous speed. He hit Goliath dead on. It be worse than getting hit in the head with a Tarik Skubal fastball. The great Philistine champion fell to the ground and the rest of his army fled in terror.

Please don’t take this text to mean that if you are a Christian you can go up to the biggest bully in school and knock him down a peg. You might be in for a rude awakening. The point that we can take home from this lesson is that just like David put his full trust and confidence in the LORD, so can we. The exact same God who was with David just over 3,000 years ago is with us too.

As a matter of fact, we can have even greater confidence that David did. He would later get God’s promise that the Savior would come from his family line, but he would die without ever seeing that promise fulfilled. That’s the blessing we get to enjoy in the Lenten season. We get to walk through the four Gospels and see how Jesus did everything so that he could be the perfect Savior that the whole world needs.

That knowledge changes everything. Remember my biggest enemy—my own sinful nature? Through Holy Baptism God gave me all the blessings that Jesus won for me on the cross. Now I have a New Person who can not only fight back against my sinful nature, but can win. When I fail, my New Person knows just what to do—take that sin to the cross and trust that it has been washed away in Jesus’ blood forever.

Even Satan himself has been rendered powerless. Oh he’s still dangerous, don’t get me wrong. But when Jesus died on the cross Satan’s head was crushed. In the end he will be locked away in Hell forever, not to rule, but to get exactly what he so richly deserves. So if our single greatest opponent is out of the way, what do we have to be afraid of? If God conquered them for us, can anything really harm us ever? No enemy, no matter how tall, not even death itself can separate us from the love of our God.

The Battle Belongs to the LORD despite the enemy so trust in the LORD and anticipate victory. I don’t know what the future holds. To be honest, I’m glad that I don’t. I’m more than happy to place it in the very capable hands of the God who loves us and gave himself for us.