

St Paul's Church, Spennymoor

Pontus Bramberg

4th Sunday after Trinity, AD 2024

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank You for Your Word revealed to us in Scripture. We pray that we may be diligent in reading Your Word and calling upon Your Most Holy Name. We ask that You would make known to us your sovereignty and faithfulness as You did to David, Your Servant, and that we, like him, may always trust in Your strength. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

In today's reading from the seventeenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel, we find one of the most well-known passages of the Old Testament, the story of David and Goliath.

At this time, Israel was under the rulership of its first king, Saul. The Israelites were facing constant threats from neighbouring enemies, particularly the Philistines. The Philistines were a formidable force, and their frequent attacks on Israel created a sense of perpetual insecurity.

The story of David and Goliath is not only an encouraging story about a young shepherd defeating a giant warrior. It is a testimony to the power and sovereignty of God, which highlights faith and trust in God as greater than human strength and ability.

In the first three verses of this reading, we see the stage set for a significant confrontation. The Philistines and the Israelites are encamped on opposite hills, with the valley of Elah between them. This valley is located about 20 miles from Jerusalem.

In verses 4 to 7, Goliath is depicted as an imposing, indeed terrifying, figure. His extraordinary size (six cubits and a span is equal to 9'9" or almost 3 metres; some manuscripts give his height as four cubits and a span, or 6'9", but the larger figure is generally accepted) is emphasised along with detailed descriptions of his weaponry and armour. It would have seemed almost impossible that a young man, maybe even a boy, such as David with no experience of battle would defeat him.

Goliath is meant to instill fear and this was evidently successful as we see in verses 8 to 11. The challenge is clear: single combat to decide the fate of both sides. The Israelites are terrified; they see only the physical might of Goliath and feel completely helpless against such a formidable foe.

After these verses we skipped over 21 verses in today's reading. They provide useful

context and more information on the young man, David, who, seemingly unafraid, comes forward to accept Goliath's challenge. We do not know exactly how old David was at this point but in the verses (12 to 31) left out, we find some clues. Firstly, David himself is not yet serving in Saul's army (see verse 15 if you have your Bibles open); if we look in the Book of Numbers, verse 1, chapter 3, we see that men had to be at least twenty years old to serve in the army, so David is definitely at most 19 years old. Secondly, if we look at 1 Samuel 17:13-14, we know that Jesse had eight sons of whom David was the youngest; we also know that the three eldest brothers went to serve in Saul's army. We are not told what happened to the other four sons, but if they are not serving in the army, David could at this time have been in his early teens although perhaps more likely around 16 years old.

Despite this apparent disparity in size, strength, and experience, David is undeterred and unafraid. His confidence however is not in his own ability but in the faithfulness of the Lord. In the first few verses (32 to 37) after the section we skipped, David recounts how God delivered him from the bear and the lion (at this time, around 1020 BC, lions still lived in the Holy Land, in fact, lions likely did not go extinct in the region until around 2300 years later, in the 13th century AD). David, in sharp contrast to the fear of David and the other Israelites, expresses unwavering faith that God will likewise deliver him from Goliath.

In verses 38 to 40, David again shows his trust in God when he rejects the royal armour and weaponry in favour of the, in a human sense, objectively less powerful tools with which he is familiar: the staff, the sling, and five smooth stones. Because of his unwavering trust in God, David does not need to rely on the might of human weapons.

Next follows Goliath's mockery of David and, much more importantly, David's bold declaration of his faith in the Lord:

You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands. [1 Samuel 17:45-47]

I quote this entire declaration because it is such a powerful reminder of David's unshakable faith in God, even in this situation which in human terms is absolutely terrifying. David boldly declares his faith in the Lord, contrasting Goliath's reliance on physical weapons with his own reliance on God's power. His declaration is a powerful testimony to the true source of victory, not only in his battle but in all struggles, both at the time of David and today.

In the final two verses of the reading, we see David acting swiftly and decisively. This decisive action, guided by unwavering faith in the Almighty, leads to a victory that can only be described as miraculous. This victory is not only literal but also symbolic of the supremacy of God's power over human might.

The entirety of this reading powerfully illustrates the sovereignty of God. Despite Go-

liath's intimidating size and formidable weaponry, it is ultimately God alone who determines the outcome of the battle. This should remind us as Christians that God is in control and that His purposes undoubtedly will prevail, regardless of how formidable the strength of evil and how desperate the situation may seem.

David is a great example of faith and obedience. He trusts in God's past deliverance and steps forward in faith, even when all the others doubt and fear. Just as David trusted in God, we should trust in His promises and act in obedience, even, and perhaps particularly, when our circumstances seem daunting.

David's role as the unexpected deliverer foreshadows Christ. David, an unlikely hero, delivers Israel from Goliath; Christ, in His humility, delivers humanity from sin and death. David's victory thus points to the ultimate victory we, as Christians, have in Jesus.

Each of us will face various 'Goliaths', challenges that seem insurmountable, in our own lives. This reading encourages us to place our trust in God, who is greater than any obstacle we can encounter. We are called to step forward in faith, knowing that God is with us and will deliver us.

As a church, we face cultural and spiritual battles that can seem overwhelming. This passage reminds us not to rely on our own strength but on the power of God. Together, in unity and faith, we can face these challenges, confident in God's promised victory.

Let us therefore trust in God like David did and entrust our spiritual battles to His sovereignty.

Amen.