“FOR THE BATTLE IS THE LORD’S”

Today we will cover the VERY familiar story of David and Goliath. Lesson’s like this one (stories we have heard since we were kids) are especially challenging to teach. After all, we already know the story. We know how it goes. We know in the end David wins. We’ve heard all this before! Here is my challenge for you: keep your hearts and minds open to the possibility that God has something new to teach us from this passage. I pray that God’s truth will speak to us the message we need to hear.

Last week we noted the stark contrast between Saul and David. Saul is the current King of Israel (anointed in Ch 10). David is the king in waiting, the future King of Israel. God has rejected Saul from being the king because of Saul’s disobedience to God. God is done with Saul. He leads Samuel to anoint David as king in Ch 16. David is only a 12 or 13 year old boy at the time. But as soon as David is anointed we’re told that “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward.” The Holy Spirit came upon David and remained with David all the days of his life. Immediately afterward we’re told “the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul.” So one huge difference between David and Saul is that David has the Holy Spirit and Saul does not. Here in Chapter 17 today and throughout the rest of First Samuel we see this contrast between David and Saul played out over and over again. By and large David is led and controlled by the Spirit, motivated to do God’s will. He has a close personal relationship with God and views things from God’s perspective. Saul, on the other hand, is controlled by his flesh, by his own human understanding. Saul is motivated by his own desires. Bear this in mind as we go through our story today. The contrast I want us to notice is not between David and Goliath but between David and Saul (which would also include Saul’s army).

David has been given a part-time apprenticeship in the king’s palace located in Gibeah. But David has another job down in Bethlehem, his home town. He is a shepherd of his father Jesse’s sheep. It’s during one of the periods that David is in Bethlehem that the Philistines mobilize their forces against King Saul and the Israelite army. ***[Show photo from Israel trip]*** The two sides meet for a battle in the Elah Valley – Israelite territory belonging to the tribe of Judah. The Philistine army is on one hill and Israelite forces are on another hill with the valley snaking between them.

The “champion” of the Philistines is a giant warrior named Goliath. He stands well over 9 feet tall. His armor weighs 125 pounds. Goliath’s spearhead weighs 16 pounds and he has his own private shield bearer who walks in front of him. Goliath taunts the Israelites, “Why have you even come out to 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. If he kills me then we will be your servants. But if I kill him, then you shall be our servants…I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man that we may fight together.” This goes on morning and evening for almost 7 weeks. And the scripture says that Saul and his whole army “were dismayed and greatly afraid.”

OK Timeout! Remember when the elders of Israel came to Samuel back in Chapter 8 and demanded a king? What did they tell Samuel whenever he tried to talk them out of their demand for a king? They said,, “No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam 8:19-20). So who is the man that should be going up against the champion of the Philistines? Who is Israel’s champion? Who is it that should be fighting their battles? Their king…Saul. But he’s afraid of Goliath. Why? Because based on all human reasoning and common sense Saul knows that, even though he is a seasoned warrior himself, he’s no match for Goliath. So what is it that Saul and his army do about this Philistine who keeps challenging and taunting them? Nothing. They don’t do anything. In fact we’re told that they run from him. They are terrified!

Meanwhile, back in Bethlehem, David is oblivious to all this because he is busy tending his father’s flocks. That’s interesting. You know, one might think that at this point David would have gotten the big head – “Hey, I’ve been anointed as king and I have this great position in the palace. I don’t need to be messing around anymore with those dirty sheep! Get someone else to do that.” But David remains faithful to the task at hand. He remains loyal to his father and to the family business. He regularly travels back and forth between Bethlehem and Gibeah (8-9 miles). Each time he makes this journey he passes by the walls of Jerusalem which are still inhabited by the Jebusites, who are pagan Canaanites and enemies of Israel. File this away because I will come back to it later.

So while David is in Bethlehem watching the sheep, his father Jesse comes to him and tells him that he has an errand for him to run. “Go down to the Elah Valley where the army of Israel is camped out. Take your three oldest brothers some food. While you are down there check on them – see how they are doing and let me know.”

READ 1 Samuel 17:19-23 [note “they” in v 19 refers to David’s 3 brothers]

For the very first time David hears this Philistine’s taunting of the army of Israel. This has been going on morning and evening for nearly 7 weeks – same old stuff as far as the Israelite army is concerned – Goliath comes out, makes his challenge, and defies the army of Israel. But David is seeing and hearing all of this for the first time.

READ 1 Samuel 17:24-27

Saul is unwilling to fight the Philistine’s champion himself. So apparently he has decided to offer incentives to get one of his men to go up against Goliath – riches, honor (become part of the royal family), a tax exemption for the man’s family. And David can’t believe it. “What? Pay somebody to kill this Philistine? Did you hear what he said?” David is angry! He has a holy indignation burning within him. He considers this Philistine’s words a reproach to Israel.

“Who is this uncircumcised Philistine…?” He is not part of God’s covenant people. He doesn’t know or follow our God. Nobody talks about God or God’s people like that! David sees the big picture. What had God promised His covenant people? Read Leviticus 26:6-8. Read Deut 28:7. If you are trusting God and following Him, then He is going to defeat your enemies for you.

“…that he should defy the armies of the living God?” Read Deut 28:10. “What’s wrong with this picture? You shouldn’t be motivated to kill the Philistine with stuff. He is a reproach to the living God. Go take him out!” David is angry at the Philistine but he is also irked at the fact that the army of Israel is letting him get away with it.

At this point David’s oldest brother speaks up. READ 1 Samuel 17:28

Eliab (like Saul operating in the flesh) is angry at David for speaking the truth. When someone who is operating in the flesh comes in contact with someone operating in the spirit one of two things happens – they are convicted or they get mad. Eliab got mad and tried to undermine David, make him look bad (similar to how Pharisees reacted to Jesus).

David’s response to Eliab is so understated. READ 1 Samuel 17:29. Basically David is saying, “What are you getting so bent out of shape at me for? I’m just asking the obvious question. You should be mad at that Philistine, not me!”

READ 1 Samuel 17:30-31.

David turns from talking to Eliab and starts talking to the rest of the troops the same way and riling them up as well. Word starts to spread thru the ranks about what David is saying and finally Saul hears about it and sends for David.

READ 1 Samuel 17:32.

David tells Saul, “I will go fight the Philistine!” Of course Saul, operating in the flesh responds the way you would expect…

READ 1 Samuel 17:33.

Human reasoning: “You’re too young and inexperienced. That Philistine is a mighty warrior.” That’s just like Saul isn’t it? He is focusing on the physical circumstances. Notice David’s response.

READ 1 Samuel 17:34-37. David’s focus is on his BIG GOD who has delivered his enemies before and David fully trusts that God will come through again. David trusts God because of His own personal experience which has increased his faith. David may only be 15 years old but he has a track record with God, he has a personal relationship and the Holy Spirit is upon him.

READ 1 Samuel 17:38-44

The big trash talking Philistine! David’s reply is priceless…

READ 1 Samuel 17:45-47

He uses Goliath’s own words against him, tells him what he is going to happen. The result is that all the earth (not you Goliath, you’re going to be dead) may know that there is a God in Israel.

“For the battle is the Lord’s (not David’s or Israel’s) and He (God) will give you into our hands (David’s and God’s). Who was the underdog in this fight – David or Goliath? It was Goliath, because David had God on his side!

READ 1 Samuel 17:48-50.

Notice how quickly the fight lasts. One rock, pow! It’s over. Verse 50 indicates that when the rock struck the Philistine, it killed him.

What did David do next? He did exactly what he said he was going to do. He grabbed Goliath’s sword from its sheath and he cut off Goliath’s head. Comment on how the Philistine army ran away instead of submitting to become Israel’s servants like their champion had promised. God’s enemies always lie. Don’t make deals with God’s enemies. You can’t trust them! We have this little exchange that goes on between David and Saul. Saul should have been repenting but instead he is asking David silly questions. And notice even he doesn’t follow through and do what he promised would be done for the man who kills the Philistine. Saul is operating in the flesh so he also can’t be trusted to keep his word.

What did David do with the head of Goliath? He takes it back up the mountain to Jerusalem. One source I read offered a theory as to why David did this, but to me it makes sense… “Heads were often displayed as warnings to potential enemies. Perhaps, then, David had it in his mind to conquer the Jebusite stronghold already as a youth, and he took Goliath’s head to serve notice to Jerusalem that they were next” [*taken from Todd Bolen’s post in Bibleplaces.com*]. I believe it is very possible that David is sending a message from God to the Jebusites living in Jerusalem: “What I did to Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, I will do to you.” And so it is that some 20 years later when David becomes the king over a unified Israel, his very first order of business is to head up to Jerusalem (2 Sam 5). There he and his men enter Jerusalem thru the water tunnel and take the city. Jerusalem becomes his capital, known as “The City of David.”

The battle isn’t yours or mine. It is the Lord’s. Trust him. I have a dollar bill. On the back it says “The United States of America” and right below that it says, “In God we trust.” I heard a lot of political rhetoric this week about making America great again. The only way our country will ever be as great as it can be is when we the people really do put our trust in God (not in a political party, the economy, our military, our leaders) but in God. And if we do not, then we have every reason to be afraid.