

Message: From Weakness to Strength

By Pastor Daniel Dennison

1 Samuel 17: 41-49

But.. Sermon Series

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Ok, quick review time: The Bible in 5 words. Can you remember them, and can you share these with a stranger in less than a minute? **(SLIDE)** We have creation. God created everything in our world, and it was and is good. BUT we have the Fall where sin entered into our world and distorted everything. Then God raises up a special group of people that we call Israel to try and communicate his word and direction into the world. And that takes us all the way through the OT and into the NT where we get the supreme revelation of God which is Jesus Christ. And from Jesus we see God's gift to us of the church and we read about its beginnings in Acts and through the rest of the NT. I hope you will memorize these 5 words, because we need to be able to communicate the essence of the Bible to the world around us.

If you were with us last week, we were in 1 Samuel 16. And it's a wonderful story of God picking the most unlikely of heroes, David. But the reason we even get to this point of needing a hero goes back to something Pastor Tom talked about 2 weeks ago. Tom told us about this cycle that we see in the book of Judges but in reality, we see it all over the Bible and it's this:

(SLIDE) The Israelites commit Apostasy, which means they turned away from their belief and devotion to God, this led to the Israelites being battered which led to them crying out to God which led to God providing them a deliverer. I'm reminding you of this cycle because we will see it played out over and over in scripture and we see it played out in our text this morning. So last week's text sets up the 4th step in the cycle which is deliverer. God is in the process of raising David up to be the deliverer for the Israelites. Now let's read this morning's text in 17 to see how that plays out:

(SLIDE) And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴² And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ 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." ⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ 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."⁴⁸ When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹ 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.

There may not be a more famous text in the entire Bible and the reason I say that is because the story of David and Goliath as well as its theme of the underdog defeating the overwhelming favorite is a theme, we see all through our culture. We see the theme of David and Goliath in many famous movies like Indiana Jones, Star Wars, Miracle, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Seabiscuit, Hoosiers and so many more. The TV show Survivor had an entire season a few years ago titled "David and Goliath." Malcolm Gladwell who has written 5 NY Times Bestsellers has one of his most famous ones titled, "David & Goliath."

Needless to say, you all have probably heard this story before! I'm going to assume most of you have heard a sermon preached on David & Goliath before. And my guess is it went something like this: The preacher read the scripture, maybe he gave just a little bit of background information or history and then he got really quiet and he said: What's the goliath in your life? Because the metaphor every preacher uses when they preach this text is that you are David and Goliath is your problem.

And so, the preacher may have said: is lust your problem? Then get out there and kill that problem! Is anger and rage your problem? Go slay your

Goliath! Do you have a big Goliath of a gossip problem? Then you get out there and you sling that stone and you kill that problem! And if you heard this sermon preached at church camp, then it was probably on the last night when everyone was really tired and emotional, and the preacher gave an altar call and said tonight is the night you're going to beat that Goliath in your life. And everyone came forward all teary eyed and snotty and promised that they were going to kill that Goliath in their life. Everyone decided they were going to become celibate and give up every sin in their life and become a pastor or a nun. This is how the sermon typically works! You go be David and you muster up all that strength and you beat that Goliath!

But here's the problem with that sermon: it works great at camp, it works great on Sunday morning while we're in here together in this sanctuary, but then, we get back out there in the world, and we fall flat on our faces. We begin to get battered. We decide this is it, this is the day I'm finally going to give up my struggle with addiction, only the next night when you're home alone and that urge to do that thing you really don't want to do takes over. Or maybe you decide this is the day you're going to give up your feelings of insecurity and comparison only later tonight you're going to get on social media and start comparing yourself to others and those feelings of insecurity are going to creep back in.

The truth is for most of us, we're really not like David, we're like Israel. **(SLIDE) Listen to v.24, "All the men of Israel, when they saw Goliath, fled from him and were much afraid."** Twice in this passage, verse 11 and 24, the Israelites mustered up their courage and their strength, they thought, this is finally it, this is when we will slay that big scary Goliath and yet when Goliath walks up and begins to flex his muscles and taunt them, the scriptures say that the Israelites became afraid and dismayed and they ran away. They were battered and they cried out for a deliverer.

It kind of reminds me of my glory days in intramural flag football. Our campus ministry at OU always participated in intramurals, but we were never any good and always got destroyed by the fraternities. But there was one year that we actually made the playoffs, never mind that 2 of our 3 wins came by the other team forfeiting. We were so pumped and before

that playoff game we were all fired up and we just knew we had it in the bag and we did the “1, 2, 3, go Wesley” chant and then we saw the other team show up. And I remember at one point late in the game right before the run rule was about to kick in, one of my Wesley friends between plays said: dude, I just want this to be over. We looked and sounded mean and tough before the game, but when that other team showed up and the game started, we were terrified, and we just wanted to run away like the Israelites.

So, I could give you guys a pump-up speech today about killing your goliaths, but I don’t think that’s what we need.

What do you do in the face of that thing that you just can’t seem to beat? A pump-up speech isn’t going to help you with that thing in your life that you’ve been trying to overcome for years and still haven’t been able to. So, if it’s alright with you all, I’m going to change up the metaphor just a little bit, because none of us are going to go from this place today as David slaying our goliath because the truth is, every one of us in here this morning, we need a David. We aren’t David, We NEED A DAVID. Why? Remember the cycle: We abandon our beliefs and our practices, we then get battered and beat down, then we cry out to God. Why? Because we need a deliverer! And what we’re going to see in our text this morning is that one more time God provides a deliverer for the Israelites and he provides one for you and me as well.

(SLIDE) We see right off the bat that the Philistines have gathered for battle and **verse 1 tells us they have gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah.** What that tells us is that this is the Israelites land, but the Philistines have invaded. The Philistines were a group of people known for their violence, they were known for their sexual deviance, they were known for their idol worship and they were known for their sheer brutality in conquering other communities. So, the Israelites are getting battered. This is a violent, abusive and deviant people that are quickly advancing on God’s people about to take them over.

And you know as I read this text I’m reminded of our own story as human beings. Each and every one of us was made perfect in God’s image and yet

each of us has been invaded by sin in our lives. That's how this whole sermon series started with Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden. And it's interesting the first two forms of sin we see after the garden of Eden story, after what we call the Fall, is violence and sexual deviance. Cain murders his brother Abel, then men begin to take multiple wives, daughters sleep with their father, and I think you know what happened in Sodom & Gomorrah. Sadly, these kinds of things happen all the time in our world today. We see violence all around us with people being murdered every day, women being battered, and children being abused. We see sexual deviance rampant with rape and human trafficking at all-time highs.

We can look around and see something so beautiful in each and every human being and yet there's also something very dark in each one of us. We live in a messed-up world and the Philistines have invaded each and every one of our lives in some form or fashion. The thing about our sin though is that it doesn't just invade us and consume us, but it actually mocks us. It beats us down and makes us beat ourselves up and hate who we are as children of God. It batters us.

The Philistines didn't just invade the Israelites, they mocked them and shamed them. They sent this huge beast, Goliath, to mock and make fun of the Israelites. **(SLIDE)** In v.10 it says **Goliath tells all of the Israelites "I defy the ranks of Israel this day!" That word for defies actually means to heap on shame.** Our sin mocks us and heaps on shame. It makes us ashamed of ourselves, it makes us feel less than human, it tears down our self-esteem and our confidence. And we become just like the Israelites who the text describes as dismayed and greatly afraid.

So now that we have this bleak picture, let's look at what the answer is. Saul, the Israelites leader, has no answer, the text tells us he's scared to death. And so, God steps in and provides the solution. God sends a hero, a deliverer. He sends David an obscure little boy from Bethlehem. **(SLIDE)** **Vs. 12 tells us he was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem, which means even though he is an obscure figure he comes from a great family lineage.** And though he comes from a great line, our rescuer in this story does not look like what you would expect. He doesn't come wearing any armor, he's not been trained for battle, why is he there? **Well v.18 tells us. (SLIDE)**

Jesse says to his son David: take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well and bring some token from them."

He's on a cheese run! His father sends him with bread and according to vs. 18, 10 kinds of cheeses to take to his brothers and the men who are fighting. Hey Bob, I got some Monterey jack for you, Joe can I tempt you with a little smoked gouda?

He's an obscure little shepherd boy sent to deliver cheese and yet this is our hero, this is our redeemer. As he prepares for battle his brothers mock him. When he tells Saul that he can save the Israelites, Saul laughs at him. **And in v.34 David says, don't worry I have been keeping my father's sheep.** Which I'm sure instilled great confidence in the Israelites: Yea I can go kill this guy! Why, what makes you think you can do that? Because I've been a shepherd. Tending sheep. It would be like me going up to Coach Riley or Coach Gundy if that's more your style and saying hey coach, me put me in. And he'd say, "uh, why would I put you in?" And I'd say "because I've been working on a sermon and I think it's going to be really good, put me in at quarterback!

David is weak and small and insignificant, just like I would look to any football coach. But David kills the thing that has been oppressing and mocking and battering the Israelites. And how does he do it? He does it using his weakness. It's because David was small and insignificant that he was able to conquer Goliath. Because you see if he had been bigger and had armor and weapons Goliath probably would have taken him a lot more serious. But all Goliath can see is this scrawny little shepherd who was sent on a cheese run. And so, he never sees the pathetic little weapon that David ultimately uses to kill him. He kills the giant THROUGH his weakness.

David is their substitute. What David and Goliath were doing is called Champion Warfare. This is a form of combat in the ancient near east where each side or nation would select one individual to represent them. These two representatives would then fight to the death and if your representative won than your entire nation won and would rule over the losing nation. David steps out toward Goliath and all of Israel steps back. If

David wins, Israel wins and if he loses, they lose. David wins and because he wins, the Israelites are now free to live victoriously and conquer all of the Philistines.

So, you say, what does this have to do with me? What does this have to do with my desperate insecurity? How does this help you conquer your lack of forgiveness and that thing that you just can't let go of in your life because someone hurt you years ago? How does this help you overcome that anxiety and depression that you just can't seem to shake? How does this help you slay that Goliath in your life?

IN the midst of your sin, in the midst of your addiction, in the midst of your brokenness, God has raised up a hero for us. Like David, He raised up another insignificant little boy from Bethlehem. One who came from obscurity and poverty and yet there was greatness in his lineage. Do you remember how Jesus' brothers treated him? They mocked him just like David's brothers did. Just like everyone thought it would be a great and mighty warrior that would defeat Goliath, the people thought their Messiah would be a great and mighty warrior. And how did Jesus Christ win the battle for us? He did it **THROUGH** his weakness, just like David. And just like David, Jesus is our substitute. Because he won, because he defeated death, so too can we.

Just before David attacks and kills Goliath, he says this in v.45: **(SLIDE) You come to me with sword and spear and 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.** David had the courage to fight Goliath because he knew that his God was alive and that his God fights for him. When you are in the darkness of your own sin, when you are struggling to overcome that thing that you just can't seem to beat, grab hold of the truth that we worship a **LIVING** God and a God who fights for us. The Philistines, through Goliath, put their trust in strength and power. But the Israelites, through David, put their trust in the living God. Friends, there are a lot of things in our world vying for our affections, but there is only one who is mighty enough to save.

I'll close with this: There's a book that came out a few years back called: Deep Survival. The whole book is recounting stories of people in desperate

circumstances and how they were able to survive or how they weren't able to survive. There are all these incredible stories of people surviving the most unbelievable of circumstances. The author interviewed all of these people and what he was trying to do was determine if there was some kind of common denominator that helped people overcome impossible odds.

He found 2 characteristics that were common among the people who were able to survive, and they are the last 2 that you would ever expect. I mean I don't know about you, but I would expect something like: able to catch wild animals and cook them over an open fire that you built by rubbing two sticks together. But the 2 characteristics of all of the survivors were LOVE and HUMILITY.

For all of the survivors, they had someone in their life that they loved, and they desperately wanted to see that person again. Love drove them to succeed while others gave up. The author said it was common for those who had a lot of experience or maybe more survival skills than others to actually be the ones that died because they were too arrogant, and they thought they could save themselves. But the humble people, those who knew they couldn't survive without a miracle, they were the ones that survived. Love and humility were the 2 things that helped people survive impossible circumstances. And they are the same two characteristics that saved David. He had a humble heart knowing that it wasn't him but God who would defeat Goliath. And he had a love for his people and a love for God that led him to a courageous, life giving act.

And when you face up to your own shortcomings and brokenness with love and humility, when you attack that greed problem, or gossip problem, or drinking problem or eating disorder or whatever your struggle is and we ALL have them, when you attack those things with love and humility, knowing that you worship a living God, then and only then can you find victory in your weakness.

And I think that's a good practical word for us in these divided times that we are living in. It is no secret that we are living in the midst of division, racial tensions, hatred, political discord, and anger. At the end of the day a few passionate social media posts aren't going to change anything. There

can be good that comes from peaceful protests, but generally that's not going to bring ultimate change either. Not even changing of laws and reform will bring the ultimate change that our society needs. In the history of our country we have seen that if just the laws change, oppression and injustice continue.

So, we can change some laws and enact some reforms and in many cases that is needed, but what we need are changed hearts. And lest you think I'm talking about a specific group, I'm not, I'm talking about YOU. And I'm talking about ME. Because we have gotten way too good at finding fault in every political or ideological group we disagree with while failing to see the sin and injustice going on in our own lives. If we want to find some healing from the divisions that are tearing us apart, it starts with us and it starts with a changed heart. Hearts that are full of humility instead of self-righteousness. Hearts that are full of love instead of anger and hatred. Hearts that are open to a deliverer whose name is Jesus. Because when hearts and souls change, churches change. And when churches change cities and nations change.

David risked his life to see his nation rise from the ashes, but you and I have a greater David who didn't risk his life, he gave his life on the cross. Jesus entered our pain and he took on its shame on the cross. And when he bore our shame on that cross, he cried out it is done, and it is finished, and he buried our shame in the grave. And when he rose triumphant out of that grave, he brought life and out of our ashes God wants to bring revival. It's time for you and me to stand up, it's time for the church to rise up, it's time for revival to break out, but it starts in our hearts. It starts with love and humility which leads to our willingness to say I need a savior, because I can't do it on my own.

Father, we thank you that you have given us a savior in the person of Jesus. We thank you that his grace is sufficient. For those in here who have never given your life to Jesus I would invite you to just repeat this prayer with me: God, I confess I have gone astray, I confess I have been trying to do it on my own, I confess I have not had love and humility in my heart. Change me from the inside and then on the out. **For all of us I pray Father that you would begin a revolution and that it would start within**

our own hearts. I pray that you would break our hearts for what breaks yours and then raise us up that we might see a culture changed and revival come.