

Sermon Text (1 Samuel 17:32–50 ESV)

³² And David said to Saul, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” ³³ And Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth.” ³⁴ But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶ Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷ And David said, “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you!”

³⁸ Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, ³⁹ and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.” So David put them off. ⁴⁰ Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd’s pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

⁴¹ 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.

⁵⁰ So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David.

The Triune God Fights for You

“It’s a real ‘David and Goliath’ story!” Have you ever heard a conflict or a competition being described in that way? What is that phrase being used to describe? It’s usually referring to

an underdog situation in which a smaller, weaker, or less powerful person or group goes up against a bigger, stronger, or more powerful person or group. Some examples include a rookie boxer going up against a veteran boxer, a sports team that has struggled to win games going up against a team that is an undefeated champion, and a small group of seemingly insignificant and powerless workers taking on their powerful and seemingly unstoppable bosses when they feel that they have been wronged. Often times, the conflict or competition is described as a “David and Goliath” story when the underdog, against all odds, manages to pull off a surprising victory. However, there is a problem with describing these underdog victories in this way. The emphasis is put on the underdog overcoming the overwhelming odds and managing to get a victory, when, in the account of David and Goliath, the emphasis is put on God.

By putting the emphasis on the strength and feats of people instead of on God, we can find ourselves being much like both the Philistines and the Jews, neither of whom were expecting an unexpected victory. The Philistines were confident that they had already won because of the champion that they had fighting for them. “[Goliath’s] height was six cubits and a span [a little over nine feet tall]. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beams, and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron” (1 Samuel 17:4–7). He was big, he was strong, and the Philistines were so confident that they would win that Goliath issued a challenge to Israel, shouting at them, “Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us” (1 Samuel 17:8–9). That is not a challenge that you issue if you think that there is a possibility that you could lose.

The Jews, on the other hand, saw Goliath and heard his challenge, and instead of having confidence in their victory, like the Philistines did, “they were dismayed and greatly afraid” (1 Samuel 7:11). They saw how big and strong Goliath was and, believing that none of them possessed the strength and skill to defeat him, believed that victory was, therefore, impossible. We can also see an example of King Saul putting the emphasis on their own strength instead of God when, after David says that he will go and fight Goliath, he said to him, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth” (verse 33).

How are you like the Philistines and the Jews? You may find yourself so confident in your own strength and skills that you don’t give a second thought to God. You may think that you are strong enough or skilled enough to protect yourself and your loved ones, to earn enough money for yourself to get everything that you want and need, or to get the praise and the glory for putting your strength and skills to the test and coming out victorious in competitions. You can put so much emphasis on yourself and what you can do that you feel safe, secure, and arrogant, thinking that these accomplishments come from you and you alone and that you don’t need to put your trust in anyone else, not even in God. Even if you do not think that you have the strength or skills to do these things, you may find yourself putting your trust in someone who does instead of in God.

On the other hand, you may find yourself in situations in which things seem hopeless. Even with your strength and skills, you may not feel that you or your loved ones are safe from everyone and everything that is out there, you may be finding it harder and harder to provide for yourself and your loved ones with the money that you are making, or you may think that it is pointless to do something because you’re just going to lose or fail. You may also look at those whom you have relied on and think that they aren’t able to help you and that, therefore, everything is hopeless. You

can put so much emphasis on yourself and what you can do or on what others are able to do for you that, when faced with obstacles that seem impossible to be overcome, you think that there truly is no way to overcome them, completely forgetting that you have a God that is able to do all things and can make the impossible possible.

David is someone who also could have easily found himself focusing on his own strength, skills, and accomplishments. After all, he had performed some impressive feats. As he said to King Saul in response to him saying that he was just a youth, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them” (verses 34–36). David could have ended it right there, putting all the emphasis on himself and his accomplishments, but he didn’t. He continued by saying, “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (verse 37). David understood something that we can so easily forget. Our strengths, skills, and accomplishments do not come from ourselves. They come from God, who gave them to us. If God is not with us, then no matter how strong or skilled we think we are, we will fail, just like the Israelites failed to defeat the Amalekites and Canaanites when “neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed out of the camp [with them]” (Numbers 14:44). They thought that they could win, even though Moses told them, “Do not go up, for the LORD is not among you, lest you be struck down before your enemies” (Numbers 14:42). “Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them, even to Hormah.” (Numbers 14:45).

Not only is God the one who gives us our strengths, skills, and accomplishments, but he is also there to help us out of even the most seemingly impossible situations. God says through the psalmist, “[C]all upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Psalm 50:15). No matter how strong your adversary is; no matter how hopeless a situation seems God is there for you. He will always be there to help you, giving you exactly what you need in that situation. Therefore, the glory does not go to us but to God and God alone, for God is mighty enough to deliver us from the greatest of troubles, and nowhere is this more evident than in how he delivered us from our greatest trouble of all, the trouble of sin.

There are many times when we can feel helpless and like we have no chance of victory, and the greatest of these times is when we are faced with the reality of how serious our sins are. We committed so many sins throughout our lives, and those sins are so great that, when we stand before them, they put Goliath to shame. We stood no chance of defeating the giant that is our sins with our own strength and skills, but God did defeat it.

God the Father sent his only begotten Son, Jesus, into the world to save us from our sins. And Jesus did so by living the perfect life that we could not live and by dying an innocent death on the cross for us. By his perfect life and innocent death, Jesus dealt a fatal blow to the giant made of our sins, and it fell to the ground, dead. The proof of this victory is in the resurrection. Although Jesus died, death could not hold him, for death had lost its power. Now, the victory that Jesus, God the Son, won for us is made our own through faith which God the Holy Spirit creates in our hearts. If our Triune God is mighty enough to deliver us from our sins, then he is surely mighty enough to deliver us from all of the evils of this world.

David trusted in God so much that he went into battle against a mighty foe wearing no armor and armed with only a sling and five smooth stones. He did not do this because he trusted

in his own abilities that much but because he trusted in God that much, which he showed by declaring that God had given him the victory before the battle had even begun. We can do the same thing. No matter what the world throws our way, we do not trust in ourselves but in God; we need not fear, for our God has already won us the victory. As Jesus says in the gospel according to St. John, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Thanks be to the Triune God who fights for us and gives us the victory.