

## The Battles We Fight

### 1 Samuel 17

If you've heard me teach here at Faith for very long, you've probably heard me quote Philo of Alexandria who said, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle." I am drawn back to that statement quite often as I talk with people inside and outside of the church. I really don't know many people who aren't fighting "great battles." Sometimes these battles are obvious to everyone, but sometimes they are concealed, known only to the person. Philo's point is that I should be gracious to everyone I meet because his/her life is difficult enough already; they certainly don't need more grief from me.

What are the battles you are fighting these days? Perhaps your battle is with another person – in your workplace or in your family or in the church. Maybe there's been a conflict or an offense. Instead of being "for" you, it feels like they're against you.

Or perhaps your battle involves a set of circumstances that are beyond your control – involving your health or your employment or your family. As you look to the future, you're not at all sure how things are going to turn out.

Or perhaps your battle is more internal. Maybe you're fighting some addiction that threatens everything you love in this life. Day after day it's hand-to-hand combat. Or maybe you're fighting discouragement or even depression because your life hasn't turned out how you'd hoped. You may even wonder if it's worth it to keep fighting.

This morning we are going to discuss a perspective on the battles we are fighting. Specifically we are going to consider what difference it makes when you are in covenant with the one, true living God. When you think about it, it should make *some* difference if you have an alliance with a God who is powerful and sovereign and who sent His one and only Son to die for you. God being on your side should make all the difference in the world.

***David and Goliath: A Case Study in Fighting Battles.*** We're continuing our study in the life of David. Please turn with me to 1 Samuel 17 where we find the account of "David and Goliath." Last week we saw that David was "a man after God's own heart." He would eventually become the second king of Israel, replacing King Saul. In the meantime, David split his time between playing the harp in Saul's palace (at Gibeah) and tending his father's sheep in Bethlehem. Since chapter 17 is quite lengthy, I'll summarize some portions of the narrative; we'll consider other portions in more detail.

The first eleven verses of chapter 17 describe how the army of Israel and the army of the Philistines each stood a mountain, separated by the valley of Elah. As they stood ready for battle, Goliath stepped out of the Philistine ranks. We are told that he was "six cubits and a span" (a cubit being approx. 18 inches and a span being approx. 9 inches; NIV "over nine feet tall"). He wore a bronze helmet on his rather large head; he wore armor that weighed approximately 125 pounds. He wore bronze greaves to protect his legs below the knees, had a javelin slung over his back, and carried a massive spear with a fifteen pound spearhead. It's hard to imagine a more intimidating figure.

Goliath stepped out and issued a challenge to Israel. Basically he said, “Pick someone to fight me. It will be a winner-take-all battle. The losing nation would become the servants of the winning nation.” Verse 11 tells us (understandably):

11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

Every morning and evening Goliath would step out and issue this challenge to the army of Israel. After 40 days of this, David arrives on the scene. His father Jesse had sent him to take bread and cheese to his brothers who were part of Saul’s army. When he arrives David runs to the battle lines to greet his brothers (v. 22). As he was talking with his brothers, Goliath steps forward and issues his challenge to the army of Israel.

23 As he was talking with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine from Gath named Goliath, was coming up from the army of the Philistines, and he spoke these same words; and David heard them. 24 When all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid.

David not only hears Goliath’s challenge; he also witnesses firsthand how the army of Saul was afraid and intimidated. In verse 25 David learns the reward for the man who defeated Goliath:

25 And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who is coming up? Surely he is coming up to defy Israel. And it will be that the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."

Notice how David responds to this information:

26 Then David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?"

David saw what nobody else present saw. Everybody else saw a battle between Goliath and a soldier from Israel, but David saw a battle between a blasphemous Philistine and the one true living God. David saw the unseen battle. On one side was Goliath, whom David calls an “uncircumcised Philistine.” Circumcision was the sign of the covenant; being uncircumcised meant that you didn’t have a relationship with God. On the other side were “the armies of the living God.” Israel’s God wasn’t made out of wood or stones like the dead gods of the Philistines. David was incredulous that an uncircumcised Philistine would taunt the armies of the living God. That just shouldn’t happen because Israel’s living God was more powerful than their dead gods.

Verses 28 through 30 record how David’s brothers were angry when they saw David talking with the soldiers. They accused him of being insolent and “wicked in heart” – as if he were there out of mere curiosity.

David actually goes to Saul and volunteers to fight Goliath. Saul, of course, told David that he was completely outmatched by Goliath who had been a warrior from his youth. But David pointed out that *his* youth had prepared him for a battle such as this.

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 36 "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted 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, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you."

It's rather amazing that Saul would agree to put the fate of Israel in the hands of David. He agrees to let David enter into the winner-take-all battle with Goliath. The next paragraph explains how Saul tried to equip David for battle. He had the best of intentions, but it just didn't work. This is worth reading (verses 38-40):

38 Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor. 39 And David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." And David took them off. 40 And he took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine.

David simply wouldn't fight with weapons he had not tested. So David took his stick, five smooth stones in his pouch, and his sling and walked out toward Goliath. Notice how Goliath mocked David when he realized that Israel had sent such a small, young man to fight him. After forty days of taunting the army of Israel, was this the best they could do?!

41 Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. 42 When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance.

Once again the author mentions that David was handsome. . .

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 also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field."

Goliath was insulted that Israel would send out a (seemingly) unarmed youth to fight him. When Goliath "cursed David by his gods" he confirmed that this confrontation wasn't merely between human armies. This confrontation was ultimately between the gods of the Philistines and the God of Israel. David certainly understood this:

45 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and 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 taunted.

Goliath may have some impressive weapons, but David came with the full resources of "the Lord of hosts." Goliath was the one who was really outmatched. Notice how David matches Goliath's threat about his flesh being food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field. But notice as well the theological point that David wanted made:

46 "This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and 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 does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands."

David's victory would be instructive to two different audiences. First, David wanted "all the earth" to "know that there is a God in Israel." Perhaps other nations questioned whether there was even a God in Israel since she didn't have idols and statues that they could wheel out and put on display. David's victory over Goliath and Israel's victory over the Philistine army would remove all doubt.

Second, David wanted "all this assembly" – both the army of Israel and the army of the Philistines – to know the "the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear." God isn't dependent upon human weapons. "For the battle is the Lord's." He would ultimately be the One who defeated Goliath and the Philistines. God would use David's courage and skill, but the battle was the Lord's to win.

You know the rest of the story. When Goliath started approaching David, we read that "David ran quickly" toward Goliath. David didn't go looking for a fight, but when he found himself in one, he wasn't timid or half-hearted. He ran toward Goliath, reached into his pouch, grabbed a smooth stone, loaded his sling, and struck Goliath in the forehead. The stone sunk into Goliath's forehead and he fell face down on the ground. David ran up to Goliath, took out Goliath's sword, and cut off his head with it.

This sent panic through the Philistine army. Instead of becoming servants of the Israelites, they fled in terror. The army of Israel pursued them back to their cities and won a great victory. David takes Goliath's head to Jerusalem (which wasn't even in Israel's control yet) and stored Goliath's weapons in his tent for future use (we'll see them again in chapter 21).

Let's spend a few minutes thinking about the *Implications for the Battles We Fight*. As we think about these implications, bring to mind the battles you are fighting right now.

***Our battles are also about God's glory/reputation.*** David understood that the reputation of Israel's God was on the line when Goliath taunted the armies of Israel. It wasn't about Israel's

military might, and it wasn't about his own prowess as a shepherd/warrior. The battle with Goliath was about God's glory/reputation. Was God strong and mighty or not?

As hard as it may be to hear, you need to understand that the battles you fight are also about God's reputation. Just like God was identified with the nation of Israel in the Old Covenant, God is identified with the church in the New Covenant. So much so that when Jesus confronted Paul on the road to Damascus, He didn't say, "Why are you persecuting My people?" Jesus asked, "Why are you persecuting *Me*?" The Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is so closely aligned with His people that the battles we fight are about His glory and reputation.

Just like David wanted the whole earth to know that there was a God in Israel, the battles we fight should demonstrate that God exists and that a relationship with Him radically affects our lives. If you really believe this, it changes everything. Your battles are no longer about your reputation, your competence, getting your way. Those things don't really matter so much. What really matters is what people conclude about God.

If our battles are really about God's glory, we will ask a different set of questions. Let's say your battle is with another person who isn't treating you very well. Instead of asking, "What can I say or do to put that person in his/her place?" we'll ask, "What can I demonstrate about God/Jesus?" That question opens up a world of possibilities.

Trust me, if people know you are a follower of Christ, they will look at your life and draw conclusions about your faith and your God. People both inside and outside of the body of Christ will be watching the battles you fight. Even the unseen spiritual world is watching (Ephesians 3:10). Your battles are about God's reputation.

The second implication flows from the first, namely that ***The battle is still "the Lord's."*** God doesn't expect you to fight your battles in your own strength. God cares about your battles more than you do. If you let Him, He will fight your battles. Remember Romans 8:31-32. . .

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

We don't go looking for battles, but when we find ourselves in a battle, like David we can run into our battles with confidence because God is "for us" and because God will give us everything we need to glorify Him in that battle.

Just as God used the skills David learned as a shepherd, God will use the experiences, insights, and skills we've learned over the years. God equips us as we walk with Him. But ***the battle is still the Lord's*** in the sense that He empowers us and brings about the results that will most fully glorify Him. As we walk by faith, keeping in step with the Spirit, saturating our hearts and minds with His Word, God fights our battles. He works in us and through us in power.

For example, if your battle involves another person, God will fight your battle as you live out Romans 12:17-19.

17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.  
18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written,  
"VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

When we take revenge – through words or actions – we’re telling God, “I’m going to fight this battle *my* way in *my* strength.” Our revenge is not one of God’s weapons in our battles. But when we refuse to take revenge, when we love our enemies, turning the other cheek, speaking the truth in love, we are trusting that God will fight our battles. Even if we “lose” from a human point of view, God is glorified because people see His kindness and generosity through us.

Some of you are fighting great battles these days. Life is hard for you right now. But consider how you might demonstrate God’s character in the battles you fight. And consider what it means to let God fight your battles.