



## **Do You Really Know the King?**

### **A Study in Samuel**

*A Giant Perspective*

*1 Samuel 17:1-58*

*Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith*

*on Sunday, July 17, 2022*

### **Cosmic Bob and Sunflower**

I have mentioned this before, but my dad ran a sandwich shop in my hometown for the last fifteen years of his life. I was always intrigued by my dad's ability to navigate the diverse clientele that frequented his shop. He used to say that his store is "where the elite meet to eat."

The elite included the lady that I simply referred to as "Mayo and Onions" because that is what she would order. My dad was a soft touch to the hard luck cases, and she would come in and buy a sandwich for a quarter because she didn't have much. He would make her favorite: an onion and mayonnaise sandwich heated in the microwave.

A unique character named Warren would come in and bring his own cup and my dad would charge him a nickel for three refills on the cup. Warren had a tab that my dad kept for him when he was shy of coins.

But there were two people who always came in five minutes to closing time after we had taken down the back line, wrapped all the vegetables, cleaned the slicer and washed down the front serving line. They were the epitome of hippies – two people from the Woodstock generation that time forgot. And they were in tune with all of the "invisible everything's" around them.

They felt vibes, were attuned to negative waves, and were trippy and dippy hippies. I never knew their names. But dad referred to them as Cosmic Bob and Sunflower. They were my favorite because they loved talking about God. Anything metaphysical just sent them through the roof. O

One day after they left the shop, I was still going on about how ridiculous I found them. My dad, who was religious though he was not pious, stopped me. He said that, yes, Cosmic Bob and Sunflower are out there, but that doesn't change the fact that there is always something happening in that unseen realm. He mentioned Ephesians 6 and cosmic powers.

He was right. There is a spiritual perspective to every aspect of our lives. And God uses the unlikely and the unexpected to confound and defeat the powerful enemy of His purposes. I invite you to read with me perhaps the most famous Old Testament account this morning in 1 Samuel 17.

### **16 Clears the Way for 17**

1 Samuel 16 illustrates the symbiotic way that God's will and desire for our lives are worked out in everyday things. While we might be convinced that our days are full of a lot of "little nothings," that is not the case. God is active, moving, working. We often set about our day to day living without much thought as to what God's desire might be in any given set of circumstances.

As Christians, we are aware of the idea that God is at work in our lives. It is a comforting concept to believe in. God is always directing, guiding, and in some instances cajoling or forcing His will to work in our lives. But we are not always aware of the specifics.

Practically speaking, we are not paying attention or even that concerned with God's invisible hand at work behind the scenes of our lives. This means that we are often confused as to how God is working in our lives. How can God's purpose for my life possibly be related or revealed through all of these messy, chaotic, and scary circumstances around me?

And yet, that is how God works. That context provided throughout 1 Samuel 16 reveals how David's trust in God during this whole "Goliath" issue makes more sense. David was revealed to be a man after God's own heart. Somehow, David is more aware, more sensitive to God's work in the everyday issues that he faced as the youngest of eight sons working as a shepherd. This brings him to a place in which, even as a young man, David senses the power and presence of God around him, and certainly in dealing with Goliath.

### **Saul the King?**

Effectively, Saul is a KINO: King In Name Only. Saul refused to accept God's authority thereby forfeiting his right to remain the king of Israel. Now we find Saul powerless and ineffective in producing Israel's deliverance from the Philistines.

Defeating these nasty Philistines had been the primary reason for and the great promise in requesting a king in the first place.<sup>1</sup>

Early on, Saul had success. Way back in the initial occupation of the Promised Land following the Exodus, Joshua's leadership had led the tribes of Israel to settle in the central highlands while the Philistines lived in five capital cities of the coastal plains in the southwest. During the intervening period covered in the book of the Judges, the Philistines had been Israel's greatest threat.

Saul's first victory drove them out of the central highlands and made this battle in the foothills between the Israelite and Philistine territory inevitable.<sup>2</sup> There is a lot at stake here in this specific conflict in the Valley of Elah. So much so that the peace and prosperity of Israel's future can be said to hang in the balance.<sup>3</sup>

The battleground between Socoh and Azekah places this event in the western foothills of Judah. The Valley of Elah<sup>4</sup> separated the opposing armies. We all have our Valleys of Elah. Those places in our lives where we can clearly see what obstacles lie ahead of us and it feels so massive, so huge. It isn't that there is some giant obstacle, but it is the weight of some defining moment. Some point we come to and in that moment, we line up, stare at the opposition facing us and begin to shrink back. So much seems to be at stake, we become terrified of losing.

That is where Saul was. He could clearly see what he was facing because it was lining up across the valley from him. And in those moments, when we see the scope before us, the massive thing standing between us and what we hope to come, keeping us from realizing some promise, in those moments if we don't have a consistent daily relationship with the spiritual work of God around us, in us, and through us, we can find ourselves acting like Saul.

In the face of Goliath, Saul seems paralyzed. The day-to-day experience of leading the nation has led Saul here. Dumbfounded as to what to do about the Philistines and Goliath.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 9:16

<sup>2</sup> This occurred in 1 Samuel 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> David M. Howard Jr, "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms." *TrinJ* 9 (1988): .19-35

<sup>4</sup> The Valley of the Terebinth

And in contrast we see David. The shepherd boy who bears the marking of Spirit-filled leadership. David is driven by the spiritual. He is motivated from the beginning by the desire to defend the honor of God's name. David's victory mobilizes the Israelite army, resulting in a rout of the Philistines. God has abandoned Saul. God has blessed David.

How often do we approach our valleys like David and how often do we approach it like Saul? Do we have any Davids in our lives, people who have the tendency to see things in more metaphysical, spiritual depth and perception. I highly recommend them.

David's perception of Goliath is different from everyone else. They see "this man" challenging them. David perceives Goliath differently from the beginning. He is able to see Goliath with God's perspective. To David, Goliath is not "this man," he is an uncircumcised Philistine." David mentions covenant language here from Genesis. This Goliath isn't blessed by Yahweh, by God. He doesn't belong to God. Why should he be victorious in any spiritual sense?

So often, we forgot to see things through a spiritual perspective. When we do, of course we realize that the enemies of God or God's people are simply outmatched by the divine nature and eternal power of God Almighty. That is when seeing things with a spiritual perspective grounds us, provides confidence for us.

The army of Israel describes Goliath as a man who "defies Israel." Again, it is all physical realities, nothing spiritual. David views Goliath as the man who defies "the armies of the Living God."

Saul looks at Goliath and sees a giant that has been trained to be a killing machine. Goliath is an expert in battle. Even more, Goliath has the most advanced weaponry. He has bronze and iron instruments. The Israelite army just has sticks and stones, so its no wonder Goliath's name-calling scares them to death.

Saul is so scared that it isn't even an option that he face Goliath. When he is counseling David about it, Saul's armor lies there unused, ready. It is curious, this passage lists two soldiers had their own armor: Goliath and Saul. Goliath took his armor out a couple times a day.

Saul's stayed hidden away in his tent. Saul didn't even want to hint like he may be wandering into the battlefield against the giant.

Saul looks at Goliath and sees an insurmountable obstacle. David looks at Goliath and sees a pagan who worships deities that are not even alive.<sup>5</sup> Saul and his soldiers speak words of resignation. David speaks words of indignation.<sup>6</sup>

### **A Third Perspective**

As we established in the beginning of 1 Samuel 16, God sees in ways unlike any person. David has learned to be able to also see with God's perspective at times. What God (and David) see in the Valley of Elah is quite different from the view of the Israelite army.

There is a third perspective here that we have not discussed to go along with David and Saul's. Saul saw an imposing figure that led him to do nothing, to put the car in neutral or even reverse. David saw the might of God and this insolent pagan challenging God's name, and he was ready to rush hell with a water gun. But what did Goliath see?

I don't want to spend much time here. But consider this: as trained a warrior as he was, as skilled a killer as he most assuredly had become, as imposing a physical presence as he struck in the battle lines, Goliath is not prepared in any way for battle with David.

As far as Goliath can tell, David has no weapons to speak of – no sword, no spear. He has no defense – no shield or armor. Just a shepherd's staff that Goliath dismissed as a stick. And a shepherd's pouch. How is that kid going to conquer him?

If anyone was not seeing things through a spiritual perspective, it is Goliath. He is consumed with the physical. He curses David by his pagan gods, but he is convinced that he can dispatch this boy by himself. Goliath steadily marches forward, convinced of his victory. So often, those people, things, or forces who oppose God are convinced that they don't need any spiritual help beyond what they bring themselves. Goliath's lack of faith in the Living God will cost him his life.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 5 and Judges 16 talk about the Philistine god Dagon and how God proved Dagon to be a false god.

<sup>6</sup> T.A. Boogart, "History and Drama in the Story of David and Goliath," *Reformed Review* 38 (1985): p.208-209

There is a spiritual perspective to every aspect of our lives. God uses the unlikely and the unexpected to confound and defeat the powerful enemy of His purposes.

David uses the same word in Hebrew for hand and paw<sup>7</sup> when he convinces Saul to let him fight Goliath. The hand of Goliath is no different from the paw of the lion or the bear. To David, Goliath is another animal just like the ones he has already defeated. The hand of God that delivered David from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will also deliver David from the hand of Goliath.

Again, do you see the value of taking time daily to engage in spiritual disciplines?<sup>8</sup> When we spend time in God's presence, we realize that the current problem or obstacle is often times no scarier than what we have previously faced. Yes, it can be new and massive. But the same God who delivered David and the flock from the lion and the bear will deliver Israel from Goliath and Philistines. And this same power can deliver you and me from whatever giant predicament we face in the valley.

For David, and for all who can see things with God's perspective, all the enemies of God are reduced to the same level. They're nothing more than dumb beasts. Regardless of size or strength, God will provide victory over all of them. But to understand this, we have to see and hear things differently than others around us.

When others see fear and hesitation, we need to see reasons for taking immediate action. Over the years, I have recognized so many moments when I needed to be more like David, but I was so often, sadly and to my own regret and embarrassment, too much like Saul. I allowed the size of the opposing force to intimidate me into remaining silent in the tent, placing my battle armor quietly in the corner.

Have you ever made Saul choices when you needed to make David decisions?

Have you ever realized those moments when you needed to take immediate action, but instead you were overwhelmed by anxiety or despair?

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<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew word is *yad*.

<sup>8</sup> There is a great book by Richard Foster called *The Celebration of Discipline*. You can find it on Amazon for \$17. It deals with the path to growing in faith by leaning into the spiritual disciplines. I highly recommend it if you are a reader considering how to engage more consistently into the presence of God.

If you and I want to experience vindication against our opposing forces, we need to engage daily in the presence of God.

That way we begin to see things with a more spiritually enhanced perspective. When my dad was a kid, he used to be so excited to go to the movies and see things advertised to be in “Brilliant Technicolor!” Or in Beautiful Vistavision! Or what about in Ultra Panavision 70! Seeing those movies at home, in that little black and white grainy box on Saturday afternoons was different from going to the movie theater and seeing it in living color. It was experiencing the world through a different perspective.

We need to learn what David learned and what Samuel learned. Don't be overwhelmed by the physical because God sees beyond the superficial appearances to the realities of the heart.

David sees beyond the hopelessness of the valley here in 1 Samuel 17. This perspective will help him later write, “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. You are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me.” Because of the daily engagement of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, time in the Scripture, we can see the comfort and protection provided by God and that will give us confidence to act when it is time to storm the giant.

If we are not trusting God every day, it stands to reason that we would certainly be scared of the giants when they shout their challenges to us to come out and fight. But if we are in God's presence daily, we will be able to see this next big giant in this next dark valley with a different perspective. And that giant change in perspective can make all the difference for us.