We're looking at the life of David. And today, we're going to look at the event that propels David onto the national, public stage. And it's the story of David slaying a giant. And as a story it's become *the* metaphor for overcoming insurmountable odds in your life, or of defeating a seemingly all-powerful enemy. And that's the danger of the story - because either you can think it's just a kids' story, or you can think this is all about how you can become a hero and defeat the giants in your life. But it's not a kids' story and it's not about how you can be a hero. It's about fear and faith and about a hero who fights for you.

Let's read it together: **1 Samuel 17:1-53**

The Fear

Look at v1, 'Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah.' So, Israel's enemies, the Philistines, are pushing into Israel, and they've encroached on her territory and they've pitched their tents and parked their tanks on Israel's land, trying to take ground. It's a reminder that evil and sin and discord never give up trying to take territory in your life, or in the life of society. And here are the Philistines coming again, just as sin and evil does with us.

And these two armies are on opposite mountainsides, and in between is the valley. But deeper and darker than the natural valley is the psychological valley of fear and dread that separates Israel from her enemy.

Because everything that Israel fears lives bodily in this man Goliath. And he is massive. And he would have towered over everyone else there. Because they're Israelites, aren't they. They're not even Dutch. And everything about Goliath - his height, his armour, his weaponry, intimidated. He was physically and psychologically overpowering. He's this almost superhuman character. A man born and trained and equipped to strike terror into his enemies. And he did.

Now think about that. You see, what was one of the take home messages of chapter 16 last week, and God's choosing of David? As God says to Samuel, "Do not look on his - [Eliab's/David's oldest brother's] - appearance or on the height of his stature…. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (16:7). But what's Israel looking at? This giant of a man, Goliath, is standing in front of them, and Israel is only looking at one thing - his terrifying outward appearance. And so as chapter 17 follows chapter 16 it's as if the writer is telling us, 'Not looking at the outside doesn't just apply to those God chooses, to those who might rule over us as kings; it also applies to the things we dread, the things that have the power to rule over us and paralyse us with fear.'

Because the men of Israel were paralysed with fear, weren't they? Day after day, Goliath would step forward and heap shame upon Israel: v10, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together." Every day he would throw down this challenge to representative combat, and the side of the man who won would share the spoils of their champion's victory. And no one, on either side, was in any doubt as to who would win.

And this has gone on for 40 days, and Israel is emotionally and psychologically worn down. Now, do you know what that feels like? And how your ability to stay hopeful, or cheerful, or faithful runs dryer and dryer the longer this problem, or struggle, or sin, goes on. And like Goliath it seems to

mock you, and not just you, but your faith in God. And as each day passed these men became a little more fearful, a little bit more faithless.

But if Goliath is the Philistines' champion, who was to be Israel's? Who was to fight for them? If Goliath was the tallest on the Philistine side, who was head and shoulders above the rest on the Israelite side? And the answer is, Saul. The king. Yet Saul doesn't step forward. Instead, v11, 'When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.' And Saul is as full of fear as anyone. And he knows the challenge should be met, but he cannot face it himself, so instead he offers a reward. Verse 25, "The king will enrich the man who kills him [Goliath] with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."

Think of that: defeat Goliath and you'll have riches, and a royal wedding, and freedom from taxes for life! But does anyone step forward? No one. Not even Jonathan, Saul's son, or Abner Saul's general, both of whom were seriously brave men, proven in battle. Because what's the point of being rich and royal and living in your own little tax haven if you're dead!

Because as he came out each day, Goliath became the thing that defined and dominated their world. His size, his cruelty, the way he mocked, the way he spoke about God, he was what reality was. And as he became larger, their world shrank. He became the measure by which they measured everything. So, let me ask you, what is that for you? You see, Goliath is almost emblematic of anything, any sin, or sickness, or person, or past, or present, or future circumstance, that has the power to dominate your life, that defines you, or scares you, or leaves you diminished by anxiety, and as it does, it seems to defy God. What is that for you? What would have the power to shake you to the core?

Well, for Israel Goliath was the embodiment of that fear. And what they needed was a champion to step forward, a champion who could see the world differently, who could see Goliath for what he really was.

The Faith

Among Saul's army were three of David's big brothers. And David's dad has him running errands for them, taking them their cheese - like a good Swiss farming boy would.

But look what he tells us David did before leaving for the camp: v20, 'And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went.' Now, why tell us David left his flock in the care of another, when it seems an unnecessarily, irrelevant detail to the story? Because when we first meet Saul in 1 Samuel, Saul has lost his animals and it doesn't seem he even cares much about them. But David's different. He doesn't take a laissez-faire attitude to his flock, and 'they'll be ok, don't worry about it', he's a good shepherd.

And David goes to the camp, and he runs to the front line. And look what the writer says, v23, 'Behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.'

But what does David hear? And what does he see? Verse 26, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" He hears the Lord being ridiculed and he watches

as his people, God's people, run in fear. But God is being scorned, the living God is being mocked! Does no one care? Will no one do something?

You see, David's world is not dominated by Goliath, is it? It's dominated by God. It's not Goliath and his shadow of death that loomed large over David, it was God in all his blazing light. It's not the anger, or power, or size, or cruelty of giants that was David's controlling reality. His reality was dominated by something far more beautiful, far more lovely, far more terrible and fierce and dangerous and powerful. And Goliath and Israel are behaving as if God is dead, but David knows much better than that. And if God is living, that changes everything.

And David sees this confrontation as it really is, a confrontation between God and the gods of this world. Everyone else sees size and power. But David sees God. Everyone else sees an invincible giant, David sees a mortal man, and the God who alone is immortal and invincible. He sees the reality beyond the reality. He sees with fresh, faith-filled eyes. They saw Goliath and thought he's way to big to fight; David saw Goliath and thought he's way to big to miss, what a target! when God's the one who fights for you!

You see, when God's the one who dominates your reality, when he's the one who defines your life, when he's the beauty and the great power over every power, when he's the one who fills your field of vision, when he's the one you fear, nothing else ever need make you fear. But when he's not. When something else is that for you, then just about anything can make you fearful.

So, when he's brought to Saul, David says to him, v32, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight this Philistine." I will be Israel's representative, I will stand and fight this enemy. And Saul's response: you're just a boy! Verse 33, "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." And Saul's right, isn't he? At least according to the way we all normally see reality. David is just a youth. Too young to serve in the army, too inexperienced to fight in battle, to small to face a giant. And Saul's not mocking him - he's simply seeing the world through the lens of power and might and size and numbers the way we all do. But it's a world in which God plays no part.

But David inhabits a different world, a world in which every problem and every enemy is measured against God. A world in which God uses the weak and the powerless to shame the strong. A world in which God fights for his people and where the outcome is never in doubt.

And David tells Saul that he might be just a boy, but he's a shepherd boy, and shepherd boys, good ones at least, fight for their flock. Because that's what shepherds do. Verse 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." You see, David knows, that when you turn your back on God, and like Goliath embrace power as your god, and you use power to crush those who stand in your way, you lose something of what it means to be human, you become like the animals. And God has delivered David from animals before, and he will do so again.

And so David doesn't leave Saul with his track record, he leaves him with God: v37, "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." So the point isn't that David has grit, though he does, it's that he has a God far greater than his enemy. It's not that David never wobbles, it's that he knows God's his warrior. It's not that David has no fear, it's that he knows that God is faithful. And it's not that David

desperately wants to be a champion, it's that he knows that in God he has the only champion he and Israel need. And it's because he can look back with thankfulness at past deliverances that he can look forward with faith. So he may very well be young and innocent and naive and inexperienced when it comes to battle; but when it comes to God, he is anything but.

But Saul doesn't understand that way of thinking, does he? So he tries to get David some protection. And picture the scene as this teenage boy is dressed in the armour of the man who stood head and shoulders over everyone else. But that's how Saul sees reality, isn't it? In Saul's world, and maybe in yours, that's how you win battles, that's where protection and security come from: from swords and armour and superior firepower; from money and wealth and power and prestige. And he's trying to fight the Lord's battles, or at least get David to fight the Lord's battles, in his own strength. And as David stands there, drowning in the king's chain mail, it's a comic - and tragic - reminder of how we're constantly tempted to put our trust in the wrong stuff, and end up being suffocated by it.

So David takes it all off, and v40, 'He took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherds pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.' And as he sheds all of Saul's stuff, it's a graphic picture that David is not going to be a king after Saul's image. He's going to be a shepherd king, and he will go into battle as a shepherd.

And when Goliath sees him, he heaps insults upon him. So, listen, if you choose to live by seeing the world through a different lens; if you decide that God in all his beauty and all his power is going to be what determines reality for you and defines you; don't expect everyone else to cheer you along. Instead your own family may throw cheap remarks your way and question your motivation like Eliab, David's brother, did. And your bosses may question your thinking and politely suggest you're crazy, as Saul does. And your enemies, whatever form they take, may ridicule you as Goliath did. But none of that changes anything. You see, Eliab and Saul and Goliath and David, were all looking at the same circumstances, the same facts, weren't they? But only one saw God towering over them all.

And David wants Israel, and the Philistines, and the world, including you and me to get it: v45-47: '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… that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's."' So David's motivation isn't his own glory; it's not that he's fed up with being little brother and he's hungry for hero status, it's that he wants the whole world to know that God is the power above every power, the champion before whom nothing and nobody can stand.

The Man in the Middle

Now, whilst everyone else ran from Goliath, did you notice what David does? He runs *towards* him; he runs *towards* the cursing, and the evil, and the sin, to slay it: v48, 'David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 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.'

And so David, the good shepherd, the Lord's anointed, or literally, the Lord's messiah, brings Goliath down with a single stone and kills him.

Let me ask you, what are the giants you wish could be slayed in your life? Think about death for a moment. Think how death has invaded the land of our world. Think how it towers over us and casts its shadow over everyone of us. Think how death has robbed you of those you love; think how one day it will rob those who love you. Think how death takes babies and children and husbands and wives way too soon. Don't you wish someone would slay death?

Or think about sin. Think how sin and self-centredness keep on encroaching on the land of your heart, or your friendships, or your family. Think how it alienates you from God. Always wanting more. Always hassling and harrying and robbing. Think how self-centredness in your own life eats away at your relationships. Think how sin seeks to enslave you, or those you love. Don't you wish someone would slay it?

But you and I have no power to do either, do we? Like the Israelites we stand powerless before sin and death, and we desperately need another to take the field and fight for us.

Or think about the injustice you see out there in the world, and you want to do something about it. But you also know that you could spend a lifetime fighting it and it would still be there when you're gone. Or maybe for you it's the daily struggles of life, and just to get through the day seems like a mountain to climb, or a giant to kill. Well, what can give you the courage not to give up? The assurance that it really is worth it, that victory is assured?

Well, three times the writer calls Goliath a 'champion' (v4, 23, 51) a word that literally means the man in between. And that's what he was to the Philistines - he stood between them and Israel. It's what David was for Israel, the man between them and their enemy. So who's the man who takes the field as our champion? Whose the man in the middle, the one who can slay sin and death and release us from their power? Who can assure us that the struggles we face are worth it, that victory is ours, that we need not run from the field of battle but justice and righteousness and love will prevail?

Well, if David, born in Bethlehem, stood between Israel and Goliath, another Bethlehemite, David's great Son, the Lord Jesus, the *ultimate* good shepherd, and *the* ultimate messiah, stood in the middle for us. And he became our representative. And as David ran towards Goliath, Jesus set his face to Jerusalem; and he didn't go to battle with a wooden staff but on a cross of wood; and he didn't take 5 stones in his hands, he took 5 wounds in his body. And the enemy of our sin and self-centredness that separates us from God, and from one another, he took upon himself. And in his body he absorbed the enemy of death, the punishment we deserve, as he died in our place. And as he did, you might think that the giants had slayed him, that sin and death had taken one more victim. But no one was thinking that when three days later he walked out of the tomb alive - with sin and death crushed beneath his feet. And just as God used the weakness of a teenage boy to bring down Goliath, so he used the seeming weakness and defeat of the cross to bring down death.

But did you notice that when the Philistines saw Goliath's death and fled, the Israelites surged down the mountain in pursuit. Because David's victory was their victory, and they got to share in the prize. That's how it works in representative warfare. And Christ's victory is your victory. And you get to share in his resurrection life. You get to share in his righteousness. You get to receive his Spirit. You get to enjoy all the spoils of his victory. And just like Israel, you don't have to lift so much as a stone to do it!

And it's precisely because Jesus is the hero, and not you, that you can find the courage to charge down the mountain and pursue the enemy and plunder satan's camp. And you can fight for justice and stand for truth, or simply get through your day, because you know victory is assured. Because you know that Christ has risen from the dead and sin and death are defeated. And so, like David, you'll see the world through a very different lens, and fear won't hold you captive.

And sure, maybe others will mock you, just as they mocked David. But you don't need to worry about them when you know the smile of the risen Jesus is on you, and speaks words of love and victory spoken over you.