

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. *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.*

David and Goliath – probably one of the best-known and loved Bible stories of all. Everybody knows what a David versus Goliath situation means, even if they never read the Bible. It’s the ultimate underdog story about the boy who overcame a monster with a slingshot. The real hero of the story is of course the Lord. David takes no credit but instead he says, *“The battle is the Lord’s.”*

What we heard minutes ago was only the last part of the story. There is a long lead up where the tension is built. As Israel is moving into the Promised Land, they find that not all the neighbors are friendly. The Philistines had been a constant source of trouble. This time, they sent out their best fighter, Goliath, to propose a duel of champions. “Send out your best soldier to fight me. If I win, you become our slaves, if yours wins, we become your slaves.” We are given some intimidating details about this Philistine. He was a warrior from youth – knowing nothing but the art of war for his whole life. He was a champion – a man of war with many victories under his belt. He was a giant of a man at 9 and a half feet tall. He was wearing 125 pounds of armor. He relished the idea of a fight to the death. And to make it all worse, he mocked Israel, and by extension, mocked the God of Israel. Goliath was a real-life monster.

We are told that dismay and great fear took hold of King Saul and all Israel. The Philistines were banking on the fact that Israel did not have among them a Hulk-sized killing machine to face Goliath. They were right. Israel was the underdog in this fight. To pull out a victory in this situation seemed impossible. Nobody wanted to accept the challenge. Things looked real bad. If they couldn’t deliver in this hopeless challenge, their choices were death or a lifetime of slavery to people who were hostile to the God of Israel.

Then David comes into the story. He is the runt of the litter, so to speak. He was a shepherd, not a warrior. His father sent him to the army encampment to bring supplies to his older, stronger brothers. Well, while David was out making his delivery, he overheard Goliath taunting the armies of Israel again. That’s when he hatched a strange idea. He would volunteer to face the giant Philistine. He was not afraid. He was not compelled. He offered himself courageously and willingly. As a shepherd, he had taken down monsters before – defending his sheep from lions and bears. He saw no difference between this rude, godless Philistine and his wild animals. David told King Saul, *“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!”*

Now Saul still did not trust the Lord. He was thinking in an earthly way and putting his trust in military technology. So he took one look at David and he said, “You can’t go out to battle dressed like that!” So Saul

dressed up David in his armor. Now, Saul was no Goliath but he was still a big man and David was only a youth. The armor didn't fit right and David said he was not comfortable because he hadn't tested the armor. Having never been trained in warfare, he must have found maneuvering difficult and awkward in the armor. So, David decided he would go to battle without armor. He took a staff, a sling, and five stones.

Imagine Goliath's surprise when he saw that David was the one Israel put forward to fight him – he was young, rosy-cheeked and handsome. Who was this little pretty-boy to fight him? He's not even a soldier! What a joke. He taunted David, "*Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?*" and he cursed David by his gods. Then David responds – and his speech is just so awesome I've got to repeat it here. He said, "*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.*" Wow! This kid was confident – not in himself but in God!

Finally the moment came and the action unfolded very quickly. With one shot, David took down the monster. And time imagery is very graphic and gory so that it's hard for us to forget – the stone sank into his forehead and he fell to the ground, and David, true to his word, took the sword from Goliath's belt and cut off his head. Just like that, Israel feared no more. The Lord won the victory!

That was long ago but God's people do not go unopposed today. There's a monster that taunts us still. Luther wrote of him in his great battle hymn: "*The old evil foe now means deadly woe. Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight. On earth is not his equal.*" There's a devil out there and just like Goliath of Gath, he defies the living God. He does not come at us with sword, spear, or javelin. Instead, he capitalizes on our misfortunes. All kinds of tragedies beset us in this broken world – sickness, addiction, abuse, bullies, gun violence, injustice, job loss, poverty, death. None of us makes it through life unscathed by these. The evil one takes them as opportunities to sow doubt, fear and despair in our hearts. Our chief enemy uses all of these things not only to oppress us but to mock our faith. Think of whatever your monsters may be – the Goliath-sized problems that plague you. The devil throws them in our faces and he says, "You'll never get rid of this. You'll never overcome it. It will always be a thorn in your side. It will always rule over you and you can't defeat it." He wants us to be afraid and to think that our situation is hopeless.

Make no mistake, we are the underdogs in this fight too. *On earth is not the devil's equal.* Just like Israel, we do not have a soldier among us who is big or powerful enough to take on this terrible monster. The devil is just too cunning, too smart, and too powerful for any of us to contend with! *With might of ours can naught be done; soon were our loss effected.* But the song goes on, and I actually like the newer translation here – *But now a champion comes to fight, Whom God himself elected.* God has sent us a David. Out of the shadows of fear and

doubt, One stepped forward and said, *“I will go and fight with this Philistine. Let no one’s heart fail.”* You ask who this may be? *The Lord of Hosts is He, Christ Jesus mighty Lord, God’s only Son adored.*

The battle between Jesus and the devil was a classic David and Goliath matchup. Jesus was the descendant of King David. He also styled himself a shepherd saying, *“I am the Good Shepherd...the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* The stakes were even higher. If the devil wins, the human race must forever be his slaves. If Jesus wins, the devil and his servants are stripped of their authority. Like David, Jesus had not trained in the art of war. His physical strength and stature were not noteworthy. He had no weapons or armor. He could have armed himself. He could have fought power with power. As he said when they arrested him in the garden, *“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”* ...But instead, Jesus chose to fight power with weakness. The devil must have laughed at the idea of Jesus, a mere man, confronting him who was once a chief among angels. He must have mocked God, saying, *“Is that the best you’ve got? Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?”*

So they joined in battle and the evil one entered into Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. Jesus was arrested, condemned, and crucified. If you imagine Christ and the devil arm wrestling, it looked like the devil had Jesus’ arm almost pinned down. *“He’s on the cross. He’s dying! There’s no way he can win!”* Then Jesus pulled out a slingshot. The devil did not suspect that Jesus’ death was the victory plan. The cross became that moment when Jesus wrenched back the devil’s arm. *This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will; he can harm us none, he’s judged, the deed is done. One little word can fell him.* Jesus is the one little Word. The Word of God made flesh. His death won the victory for us. When he died, he broke death. Death couldn’t handle him. When Christ rose from the dead, that’s when he slammed the devil’s limp arm down on the table. The one little word sank deep into his forehead and his kingdom came crashing down. The battle is the Lord’s. Jesus beat our monster once and for all.

Now, there is an aftermath to the battle. As we read through Israel’s history, we see that David’s victory over Goliath was the turning point but they continued to fight the Philistines. They continued to have little skirmishes but things were different. Previously, they had suffered loss after loss and they were afraid that God’s promises had failed. Now they returned to the fight with renewed faith in the Lord and they won victory after victory. The same is true now. Jesus’ victory over the evil one has turned the tide of the battle but the fight goes on. We continue to fight our monsters but now with fearless trust in our champion, Jesus Christ. *He holds the field victorious!* Terrifying things will still happen in our own lives, in our families, and in our world but don’t let the devil use those to get you down. We know that at the last everything is going to be okay. God will bring us to our Promised Land where we will finally be safely out of the reach of all the monsters. *Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child, or spouse, Though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day. The kingdom’s ours forever!* AMEN.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.