

Whose View?

1 Samuel 17:1-58

What's the victorious Christian life look like? The Bible tells us we're more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. It says that at the end of Romans 8. Is that how you feel? I suspect that at least one of us this morning is facing some fairly significant struggle. Perhaps that struggle threatens to overwhelm you. You're feeling down, discouraged, disheartened. You don't feel very much like a conqueror. You feel that the reality is we face just the same struggles as everyone else – maybe even more.

- We struggle with rising interest rates.
- We struggle with rebellious children.
- We struggle with pressures on our time.
- We struggle with health issues.

Where's this victorious Christian life? What's the secret to getting on top of these struggles?

A big part of the problem is that we allow the world to define our struggles for us. We allow the world to define life and what life's all about for us. We want solutions on those terms. Sometimes we need someone to lift our eyes to other possibilities:

- to see the struggles from a different perspective;
- to see the issues with a new focus;
- to consider that more important things may be at stake.

This well-known story of David and Goliath challenges us to do just that. Let's look at it together.

The Combatants

The Israelites and Philistines gather for war again. You pick that up in verses 1 to 3. We're not told why.

- Perhaps they're just taking up where they left off last season.
- Perhaps some new offence came up.

It doesn't matter a great deal – it's just that they're at it again. Same two combatants – just a different location.

But something else is different as well: this time they've got a different technique. Instead of the two armies going at each other's throats and wiping each other out, they move to the champion system. We each send out one person to fight for us – winner take all.

- Our champion wins – you serve us.
- Your champion wins – we serve you.

It saves a lot of people getting killed for nothing – and leaves plenty left over to be slaves.

So, first the narrator introduces us to the Philistine champion. Verse 4:

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armour of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

Impressive, isn't he? Big. Powerful. Well-trained. State of the art armour. Has the latest military hardware. The narrator makes sure we get all this firmly in our minds. This guy looks invincible, indestructible, unassailable, unbeatable. That's exactly what the Philistines wanted Israel to think.

And, it's what they did think. Verse 11:

On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

What's more, as the story goes on, we find they're dismayed and terrified for 40 days. This was drummed into them day after day. They had a long time to think about their utter helplessness.

Even Saul:

- the impressive Israelite who's head and shoulders above everyone else;
- the king they asked for who'd lead them into battle against their enemies;
- the one they chose as their champion

is quaking in his boots along with everyone else. God's Spirit left him back in chapter 16. He's no longer equipped to handle this crisis.

When we've got Goliath firmly in our minds, then the narrator introduces Israel's champion – except he doesn't tell us he's Israel's champion straight away. What he does tell us is:

- David's father isn't all that important.
- David's the youngest of eight sons.
- David's not even in Saul's army.
- David's just a messenger boy – going back and forth between his father and brothers; taking provisions one way and messages the other way.

In other words, David's a nobody. He's not qualified to take on Goliath. He's not expected to take on Goliath. And, if for some obscure reason the two did meet in battle, there's no doubt who'd win.

That's the Philistine worldview. It's the basis for how they lived. It's the basis for how they approached this

battle. And the Israelites adopted their worldview. They said: Yep, that's the way things are. You use your eyes to weigh up any situation. You look at the pros and cons.

- Goliath's big – that's against us.
- Goliath's got the latest technology – that's against us.
- We don't have anyone that even comes close to Goliath – that's against us.

The Philistines are right. We're thoroughly beaten.

But, for people who've been reading through 1 Samuel, there's another possible worldview. There's Hannah's song in chapter 2.

The LORD sends poverty and wealth;

He humbles and He exalts.

It is not by strength that one prevails;

those who oppose the LORD will be shattered.

There are God's words to Samuel in chapter 16:

Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

Israel should have known that. Saul should have known that. But they're too busy adopting the Philistine view of things instead of God's view.

The Conflict

And that leads us to the heart of what's going on here – the real conflict. There's a Hebrew word that's used six times in this chapter. It's not always easy to see it in our English translations, because they don't use the same word to translate it each time. It appears first in verse 10 on the lips of Goliath:

This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man

and let us fight each other.

The Israelites pick up this language in verse 25:

*Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to **defy** Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him.*

Again, they're both on the same page.

When David first speaks, he also picks up this language – but he's on a different page altogether. Verse 26:

*What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this **disgrace** [you can see why they use a different word – defiance doesn't flow as well in English at that point] from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should **defy** the armies of the living God?*

Goliath defies Israel. Back in verse 8, he even sees Israel as servants of Saul. Israel's army thinks Goliath's defying them. They're simply looking with their external eyes. David sees it differently. David cuts through to the heart of the issue – to the most important factor – this guy Goliath is defying the armies of the living God. And just in case we didn't pick it up the first time, he repeats it when he's talking with Saul (in verse 36) and again when he's talking with Goliath (in verse 45).

David keeps running into wrong thinking. You see it with Saul. Saul hears about the sorts of questions David's asking and sends for him. David tells Saul he's quite happy to go and fight this Philistine champion. Saul's not convinced – because Saul's adopted the Philistine world-view.

- You're too small.
- You're only a lad.
- You're inexperienced.

Can't you see you've got no hope against this trained fighting machine? As you read David's answer in verse 34, it begins to look like David's come over to Saul's way of thinking. He begins to recite his experiences – as if he's giving his qualifications for the job.

- I've killed the lion.
- I've killed the bear.
- This uncircumcised Philistine can't be any worse.

But David's focus remains on God. He's not telling Saul these things to boost his own image – the sort of thing Saul would do. He tells Saul this to highlight God's role. Verse 37:

The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.

You see this wrong thinking with Goliath as well – the only difference is that we expect him to think like a Philistine. When David goes out to battle, what's Goliath's reaction? He despised him.

- He sneers at his lack of armour.
- He ridicules his weapons deficiency.
- He mocks his puny size.

He cursed David by his Philistine gods. He looks at the situation with his own eyes. He does his pros and cons analysis. He's confident he's been dealt an unbeatable set of cards.

So David goes about educating him as well. Verse 45:

You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off

your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give all of you into our hands.

Goliath left out the most important factor in his pros and cons analysis: namely, the one, true, living God. God's the only one who has a truly unbeatable hand.

David puts the conflict on the theological level – which is the most important level. And what's the conflict look like from that viewpoint.

- Goliath has defied the one, true God.
- Goliath has defied God's chosen people.
- Goliath's strength and military power and defiant words just don't measure up against God.

Back in Genesis 12:3, God promised Abraham:

*I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;*

Goliath picked his fight with the wrong people. God will defeat him. God will win this battle. God will demonstrate His reality to the Philistines and Israel and the whole world.

The Champion

There's another aspect to this story we should consider. It's not in this chapter – it's in the chapters leading up to it. Who is David? Sure, he's the unlikely hero. He's the nobody with no chance going up against the big guy. He's the one Australians love to identify with because we like to see the tall poppies brought down to size. But he's more than that. He's God's anointed. Most of the people

in this chapter don't know that – but we, the readers, do. David's isn't just Israel's champion, he's God's champion.

In one sense, David isn't Israel's champion at all. That's Saul. He's the one they got when they demanded a king like the nations. He's the physically impressive one who's head and shoulders above the rest. He's the one they chose to lead them into battle and defeat their enemies. But he rejected God's instructions. He failed to be king under God's rule. He's quavering in his boots like the rest of Israel. Yet, he was the one Israel chose – not David. Israel didn't look at David and say: It's just so obvious, let's choose him to be our champion to fight Goliath. If they'd looked at David at all, they'd have dismissed him – because they saw things from the Philistine perspective.

Still, it's David who finds himself fighting Goliath. And he does so because God's been at work.

- God's chosen him.
- God's anointed him as king.
- God's Spirit has come on him in power.
- God's got him to the battle-field by quietly working in the background.

In this story we see what it means for God's Spirit to come on David in power – God enables him to see the situation from God's perspective and to maintain his confidence in God and to act accordingly. In this story we see what it means to be a man after God's own heart – David's concerned for God's name and that God's name be honoured and the whole world recognise the reality of the one, true, living God.

And so the focus is on God. Many want to shift that. They want to read this story and focus on David.

- We should have courage like David.
- We should be available like David.
- We should have faith like David.

Yet, David says he does this so that the whole world will know there's a God in Israel.

Conflict Today

That's the story. What are we to take away from it? Let me highlight three things. The first is the importance of understanding God's perspective on things. How do we approach our struggles in life? It's so easy to feel overwhelmed by the struggle itself. We look at the various circumstances – and they take on giant-like proportions. And we begin to think of them in exactly the same way everyone else does. We easily slip into defining our struggles the way everyone else defines them.

- For example, how do you react when you get sick? The general consensus says: This is no good. This is an imposition on my plans. This is something that needs to be fixed up. I want instant relief. And maybe we add a little Christian bit to fool ourselves that we don't think exactly like everyone else: it'd be nice if God gave me that instant relief.
- Or how do you react when you face some financial difficulty? The general consensus says: Not having enough money's a bad thing. It's an imposition on your lifestyle. It's wrong for people to cut back their standard of living. It'll lead to feelings of failure. Society shouldn't let that happen. Governments shouldn't let it happen. Let's find a way to keep living how we're used to living.

We've bought into our society's definition of life. We see life the same way they see it. We value the same things they value. And when those values encounter difficulties

– when something comes up that takes some of those things away – we think we're no longer conquerors. We think we've lost the battle. We feel discouraged and dejected and defeated.

That's not where the real conflict is – the important conflict. Don't get me wrong here. I'm not saying those difficulties aren't difficulties. I'm not saying they're not struggles – or that they're not painful. But there's something more important – more fundamental. As the Israelites needed to have their focus shifted from the external impressiveness of Goliath and see that the real issue had to do with defiance of God, so we need to see our real enemy: namely, sin and death and the devil.

Think it through. You can sail through life without any difficulties – enjoy good health, have a comfortable lifestyle, experience the joys of marriage and family, have strong friends to stand by your side. You may even make a significant contribution to society. Everyone thinks you live a successful life – and you do by the values of our society. But its perspective focuses only on the externals. Its view of the world ignores God and what God says life's about. It doesn't deal with the heart. It doesn't ask whether the heart defies God.

And it doesn't deal with death. Your good health and comfortable lifestyle won't stop death. They won't have any relevance when faced with the real enemy. God says two very important things about death:

- death is the result of sin; and
- following death comes God's judgment.

Death only brings life on this earth to a close – it doesn't bring us to an end. We continue. We will stand before

God and we'll be required to give an account of our lives. And the issue God'll ask about isn't health or wealth or the other things we struggle with. What He'll ask about is how we treated Him. Did we truly treat Him as God? Did we live to honour Him? Did we submit to His will? Were we concerned to see His name honoured?

The reality is we all fail at that point. None of us has lived perfectly according to God's will for our whole lives. We've all ignored God. We've all done the wrong thing. We've all rebelled against God. We've all done our own thing instead. We've all been more concerned about our health and our wealth. That's where the real problem is. That's what we need to have our eyes opened to see. We must shift perspective from mere externals. And that enemy should cause us to tremble with dismay.

That leads to the second thing. Who do you identify with in this story? I suspect most of us identify with David. We think of him as the hero who won the day. He's the little guy who overcame great odds. We like to think that may happen to us one day. But we should identify with the typical Israelite soldier. We face this huge enemy – namely, sin and death and the devil and God's judgment. The longer we look at this enemy, the more hopeless we realise our position to be. There's just no way we can take on this enemy and win. It's got us beaten. We have no effective resources – no strength, no weapons, no protection. We need a champion to fight for us.

And that's where Jesus comes in. In this story, David's not a picture of us; he's a picture of Jesus – God's true, anointed King. Jesus is such an unlikely looking hero.

- Born in questionable circumstances.

- Raised in some backwater village.
- Belonging to an oppressed people.

He had no political position. He gained no military training. He established no financial empire. Rather, all He managed to do was get Himself killed – executed by the ruling class in a most painful way. If you were wandering around Palestine in the first century, would you have picked this guy as your Champion?

Yet, it's in His death that He defeats our enemy. God uses the most amazing means to achieve His victory. God piled the punishment for our sin on Him. He took our place. He died our death. There's no longer any accusation that can be brought against us. He's dealt with it all. Thus, those words of Paul in Romans 8:

We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

The conquering has to do with sin and death and the devil. God has no charges to bring against us because they've been paid for in full. But we didn't pay this ourselves. We didn't achieve our own victory. The conquering's done by our Champion – namely, Jesus. Complete. Finished. Perfect.

And so, what of those other struggles we face in life – the things our society values so much and about which we feel we're not doing so good? Get them in the right perspective.

- The real conflict's already been won for us. Nothing can change that. Nothing can take it away from us – not bad health, not poor finances, not even death. Don't forget that. Live on that basis. We no longer fear death.
- But also, we need to see these other struggles from

God's perspective. Are they really all that important? In the context of forever with God, does it really matter if I'm healthy or wealthy now? Is a smooth, struggle-free ride through life on this earth something I should focus on? Or should I be more worried about things that concern God? Things such as battling against sin and wanting others to honour Jesus. When we get to that point, we'll realise a couple of other things:

- that nothing escapes God's sovereignty; and
- that sometimes God uses struggles in the areas of health and wealth and all those other things to develop godly character in our lives.

That brings me to the third thing. When it's asked how David and Jesus were victorious, it comes down to two basic things:

- They saw things from God's perspective.
- They trusted God's view of things.

Those who would join themselves to Jesus must follow the same approach. We're to see their dependence on the Father. We're to see their struggle against temptation. We're to see how they refused to be sidetracked by externals. And, having already been saved by heaven's Champion, we're to grow in heaven's lifestyle.