

Cashmere Presbyterian Church

Sunday 20th June 2021

Sermon

A Big and Courageous Heart

Text: 1 Samuel 17: 1-49

Last week we looked at the way David was plucked from the obscurity of shepherding on the hill around Bethlehem, to be anointed by Samuel to be a future king of Israel.

And how was that to happen? What possible pathway was there for this boy, not of the bloodline of the King nor any clear stage to stake a claim! All he had was Samuel's assurance that he the right heart for it! Last week we focused on the humble and contrite heart of David.

Today, through the story of Goliath we get a picture of the big and courageous heart that was going to be required for the many challenges ahead of this young man.

1. Giant issues

It is easy to relegate this story to the children's bible. Yet upon closer examination it is very clear that there are deep and symbolic messages for us all. A key to understanding what the story is on about is the height of Goliath. The bible says he was 9 ft 9 inches. That is huge! Was he really that tall. The tallest accurately recorded person in recent time was Robert Wadlow – he lived in the USA last century and he was 8ft 11 inches. And the ancient text of the dead sea scrolls discovered in a cave mid-last century have Goliath at only 7 foot tall suggesting his height got exaggerated as the story got retold and retold! How come?

Two reasons, I think. Firstly, the Hebrews used exaggeration and hyperbole to make a point – it was a literary device. This is even more obvious in the painting on the order of service today where Goliath's giant proportions are ridiculously exaggerated in comparison to the boy David.



Secondly, they did have a point to make here. That is, often our problems get out of perspective. They grow in our own heads. They take on dimensions much bigger than the reality. Have you ever had someone say to you that you have got things out of perspective? And a sure sign that this is happening is when a situation we are struggling with is dominating our thinking, we just can't get it out of our head!

Goliath was a giant problem for the Israelites that grew in size as the days of his taunting piled up on them and no one was brave enough to confront him.

That sets up the issue, one we all face at times. What are the solutions?

David bent down by a brook and chose 5 stones. In my mind today, each of those stones represents a part of plan to deal with problems that have taken on giant proportion.

Know
your own
heart

When David was anointed with oil by Samuel, it was on a small stage, semi-secret. It was deeply symbolic of spiritual anointing – that David's life was to part of God's big plan and that there was a mysterious divine guidance going on here. Here we see David owning this on the public stage. Onto the battlefield, in full view to a vast audience – this man's action is anointed!!

The anointing with oil comes to life, is not a forgotten spiritual memory without being fleshed out – it is real, meaningful and being worked out in practice as God opens doors and provides pathways towards the full expression of this anointing!

David was displaying confidence in who he was chosen to be. It comes our wonderfully when the well meaning Saul tries to outfit David in his armour. David could not even move with all that stuff on. To his credit David had enough self-awareness to say no thankyou to Saul's armour and yes thank you to fighting the battle on his own terms as the chosen on of God.

I had this experience when I first arrived at StAC. It was daunting facing up to 100's of young men in chapel, yet I knew my calling was to be there.



A big bold
brave
heart

It was a battle scene in the hill country of western Judah, borderlands. David arrives to find the 2 sides talking at each other – posturing from a safe place on their hillside, not crossing the battle lines into the valley which was the combat space –

I think of UN officials, from the safe space of New York, posturing about the battle zones in places like Syria, Gaza or Yemen! Lots of talk, not much action. Comparatively, the wonderful New Zealander David Shearer who has spent many years living in Sudan with a UN mission to transform that nation from war-torn to functioning as a safe nation.

In fact in the David story when there is action in the form of Goliath moving into the combat space to taunt them, the Israelites hurriedly retreat further into the safety of their tents!

V4 identifies Goliath as a 'champion', in Hebrew this is literally: 'one who fights between the battle lines'.

Goliath, the uncircumcised Philistine who pours contempt on Yahweh, is a representative of the ungodly powers at work in the world. Symbolically in this story he is the champion of ungodly causes!

It is into this battle ground David is called by God ...

Interesting fact here is that there was a huge crowd of people on Yahweh's army here ... only one made the tough trip into the battle zone! What then are the barriers that stopped them, that stop us in engaging in the battle with evil and ungodly forces in this world. While the Israelite soldiers were longing for safety with their quick retreat at the sight of Goliath, this is evidence that this is a messy place, a risky place that is well outside our comfort zone. David lived in the place all his life from this point, it was not tidy, rather it was challenging and there was potential for huge mistakes. He had the heart for it.



An
unencumbered
heart

David arrived with a lot of baggage. Saul then tries to encumber him further with all that armour to way him down. He quickly leaves his parcels with the baggage handler and

returns the bulky armour to Saul. He frees himself to engage the enemy? What is our baggage – past failure, insecurity, doubt ...?

Just recently I have had to deal with the baggage left behind by my accident in order to get back on my bike!

And over the years I have dealt with people who have a huge fear of death because of a traumatic memory of how a loved one died. By contrast what a wonderful thing to face death with a peaceful heart!. In "Word by Word: A Daily Spiritual Practice" by Marilyn McEntyre we read:

"I do hope to die with a quiet heart," John Ames says in Marilynne Robinson's lovely novel Gilead. "I know," he adds, "that may not be realistic." Though it seems a modest hope, quieting the heart is not a simple action, but rather a result of focused intention, resistance to distraction, openness to God, willingness to release anxieties and insults, and the long, slow obedience to one of the most insistent commands in Scripture: "Do not be afraid." A quiet heart is like a clear pool in which one can see the sandy bottom. Fear muddies that clarity. It takes courage to be still long enough for that silt to settle and clarity to come. And it takes patience, which is a form of courage. The quiet heart Ames hopes to die with is a place so secure and so full of knowing that fear can find no place in it.



A positive,
hopeful
and
optimistic
heart

David's older brother was a very big wet blanket, quite aggressive in his negativity to David even being present! Beware of naysayers. Not to say we do not seek the wise counsel of others, but do not be sunk by the negativity of naysayers! I change the station when the radio presenter starts on a negative rant or aggressive questions! Often, as in Eliab's case driven by dysfunctional personal agendas. We need to distinguish between human neediness and God's call. And change the station to the hopeful messages.



A God
shaped
heart

This is the decisive stone, the ultimate giant killer that flung first and foremost from David's sling.

David ran (v22 dropped his baggage and ran to the battle lines; v48 toward Goliath). What gave him so much courage in such difficult circumstances. It was not because of the reward nor out of youthful arrogance, but out of a deep sense of conviction that God was with him!

We see here in David

- Faith in God
- Loyalty to God

- Dependence on God – the laying down of the armour was symbolically saying I will not trust in the ways of the world, I put my trust in God, and it is buying into a deep Kingdom principle that when I am weak I am strong. As Paul puts it in 2 Cor 2: 9-10

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me. That is why, for the sake of Christ, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Note the contrast with King Saul – through this whole story the bible makes a contrast between Saul working in his own power and David who is strengthened by God.

David's faith honed in the hills above Bethlehem. In the quiet spaces of the shepherding life. I think that often before we come into the public sphere of Christian witness, God want to see us proven in the private sphere.

So it is here in v 34 David refers back to the shaping of his shepherding for this time – he specifically talks about his successful battles against lions and bears, but behind that is also the spirituality honed in the quiet hills through song, prayer and the need to rely on God.

I see this kind of spiritual honing in my farmer friends and I know it myself from my own times alone with the elements on our farm as a youngster or in the mountains as a teenager.

So it is that the spiritual dynamite displayed here by David was honed in the lonely wilderness areas of his shepherding, as he faced his giants – loneliness, his place in the family, attacks by wild animals he was able to look to the hills, so much bigger than these giants and the to the God who created them, so much bigger still – and say in comparison with this problem I have a big God that brings everything into perspective!! Goliath is puny by comparison.

And so the giant is disarmed (he takes the armour into his tent!)

As he bends to pick up the stones Goliath is looming tall, but beyond him David see the towering hills of Judah put the size of the giant in perspective and I imagine David saying to himself:

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?

² My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;

⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The LORD watches over you—
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;

⁶ the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

7 The LORD will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;

⁸ the LORD will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

A Max Lucado quote put this into Godly perspective when he says:

'Focus on giants and you will stumble, focus on God and the giants
stumble'

Conclusion

Finally where do you fit in this story. Most often we tend to identify ourselves with the hero! Can I say that it is tempting to always associate ourselves with David in this story! But could it be that at times we are like Eliab the naysaying brother, or the skittery Israelite soldiers, or may Saul who was seeking to do things in his own strength, or even Goliath, part of an ungodly alliance! This makes for an interesting challenge – do I see myself in any of these? And how do we move from those places to David's place – to find our hearts emboldened by God to face whatever the giant in front of me is. That heart was shaped in David in the quiet places away from public scrutiny – how much am I allowing God to shape me in my quiet times? And when the moment came this kept his eyes on the mighty God (MY GOD IS SO BIG) so that the giant suddenly looked puny in comparison!