

## **How to Preach David and Goliath with balance: a case study of finding Christ in the Old Testament (Part I)**

*“And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets — who through faith... became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.... Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. ” ~ Hebrews 11:32-34; 12:1-2a*

In the past couple of decades, there has been a helpful return to an emphasis of finding Christ in all of the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament. The idea is to make sure we are preaching the Gospel from each text, and not reducing our messages to mere moralism. Much has been written advocating this approach, and more has been written pointing out some of this approach’s potential overreach and imbalances. For example, David Murray, in his recent book, *Jesus on Every Page*, presents an excellent balanced approach in his chapter on discovering Jesus in Old Testament characters.

I do not have the expertise or the zeal to address the question as a whole. However, I believe that a simple case study can do some good in showing this balanced approach to preaching from the Old Testament. Let us consider the famous story of David and Goliath and different ways we might approach this text (I Samuel 17).

It has been said that the “old” approach to this story was to preach David as an example of courage; that each of us must find the “giants” in our lives, equip ourselves with “five smooth stones” of some sort and then go into battle in the name of the Lord to conquer our giant. I suppose such sermons have been preached; a sort of “dare to be a David” approach.

The answer, it is said, is to find Jesus in the story. And clearly then, David is a type of Christ in that he is the King of Israel who conquers Israel’s enemy in single combat just as Jesus conquered the devil. Surely, this is correct. But does that mean there is no application in the story, no sense in which David serves as an example for us? Why can it not be both? And moreover, why must we see Jesus only in David? Is He not present elsewhere?

And so I want to take up this text as a case study to demonstrate two things: 1) where we might find Jesus in this story, so as to approach it in a gospel-centered way; and 2) in what ways David serves as proper example for us to emulate in a manner that is not moralistic.

### **Finding Jesus in the Story**

So, first, where do we see Jesus in this story? I want to suggest we see Him in at least three ways, not just the one mentioned above.

**1) A Community of Types.** We do not just see the spirit of Christ in David, but in others in the story as well, notably in Samuel, the prophet of God; and in Jonathan, who, in the wake of David's triumph, cheerfully surrendered his claim to the throne in favor of David: *"Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt"* (I Samuel 18:3-4).

Now, I suppose one could argue that Jonathan here represents the Church and her love for Christ, but that comes close to allegorizing the story in my view. But what we clearly see in Jonathan is the attitude of Jesus as Paul describes in Philippians 2: *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* And in fact, Jonathan not only surrenders the throne, but later risks his life for the sake of his friend and for righteousness, exactly after the spirit of Christ. Then he dies in battle, never seeing the full fruit of his love. And so we must see Jesus in Samuel and Jonathan as well as David.

Why is this important? Because no one man can fulfill all of Christ's offices or reflect all of His character except Jesus Himself. In Genesis 22, we see Jesus in Abraham, in Isaac and in the ram caught in the tree. In the Exodus, we see Jesus in Moses, Aaron and Joshua. This is perhaps why almost all of Paul's letters are from a small team of men and not just Paul himself. That is why we see a community of apostles, some of whom got things wrong at times (e.g. doubting Thomas in John 20; and exclusivist Peter in Galatians 2). So, with David. In I Samuel 25, it is Abigail, more than David, who at first displays the wisdom of Christ.

And so if we insist on seeing Jesus only in David, then we promote an unhealthy "hero" approach to the Christian life, rather than embrace the doctrine that the Body of Christ on earth is always a community, each part with various strengths and weaknesses as I Corinthians 12 describes so well.

**2) Jesus as Victor.** This is the most obvious example, the one we mentioned at the beginning. It therefore does not need much elaboration. But clearly, as Israel's first real king, David serves as a clear type of Christ as Scripture makes plain in abundance. And as David acts as the singular champion to defeat the Philistine champion (which was itself an Ionian tradition the Philistines had

imported with them from Greece), so Jesus acts as the singular Champion who Alone defeats our enemies.

Therefore, the main point of the text is not so much for us to be as brave as David, but to flee to Jesus who will fight and win for us, as Paul states: *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil”* (Ephesians 6:10-11, understanding that the armor of Ephesians 6 is that of the Messiah, cf. Isaiah 11, etc.). We perhaps find ourselves not so much in David then perhaps, but in his doubting and scoffing brothers; precisely those who need a Savior.

**3) Jesus as Sacrifice.** And yet, how does Jesus conquer the devil? Is it by might alone? We know that it was precisely the opposite – that is was by the Cross, by dying in humiliation as a common criminal. So then, is it proper to see Jesus only as Victor in this text? After all, who dies? We perhaps have a small hint of this in I Samuel 17:54 (as suggested by Gordon Hugenberger): *“And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.”* For reasons too involved to explain here, I take this tent to mean the tabernacle as a way for David to honor God. But why did David take Goliath’s head to Jerusalem which had not fully been conquered by the Israelites yet? It therefore must have been placed “outside the gates,” likely on a stake on a hill; perhaps a hill that became known as the Place of the Skull, Golgotha.

After all, where is Christ later in David’s life, during Absalom’s rebellion, as David’s son is surrounded and killed by Joab’s men? Is Christ with David, who cried out, *“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”* (II Samuel 18:33)? Absolutely. But who actually did die, surrounded and humiliated, caught in a tree by his hair? Cursed indeed is everyone who dies upon a tree. Christ is also found in Absalom, as He dies in our place as if He were the rebel deserving death.

And so with David and Goliath, it is not David who dies as a substitute, but Goliath. Dare we find Jesus in Goliath as well as in David? If not, I suggest that we may not understand the depth of the substitutionary atonement, of how *“for our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”* (II Corinthians 5:21). Perhaps then, in the story of David and Goliath, Jesus is not only found in David, the victorious King, but in Goliath, the blasphemer deserving of death. What grace this is that Jesus should die in our place!

And so we clearly see Jesus foreshadowed in this dramatic story in a multitude of ways. That alone will preach. But there is yet more. In Part II, we shall see what it means that David serves not only as a type of Christ, but also as an example of faith for us to imitate.