

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

“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; 12:1-2

David as Example

In Part I, we found Jesus all through the story of David and Goliath. And yet is that all? Is the only application of this story a call to come to Christ for justification? Does David set no example for us to follow at all? Well, I believe he does. Why else would the author of Hebrews remind us of the great company of Old Testament saints and exhort us to emulate their faith (cf. Hebrews 11:32 – 12:2 above)?

But as Hebrews 11 makes plain, what we are to emulate is not so much David’s courage or skill or office, but his faith. And faith looks different in different situations. None of us will literally be called to single combat as a champion of God’s people. But there are aspects of how David displays his faith that we can imitate. In other words, David is not just a type of Christ, but is also one of us – a saved sinner struggling to live by faith, not sight. And so we must be like him where he succeeds and avoid his example where he fails.

At the same time, where we see David succeed, he is imitating Jesus – not so much as a unique type, but rather as a redeemed sinner, just like us. Thus, as we imitate David’s faith, we imitate Christ. It is exactly as Paul says in I Corinthians 11:1: *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”*

So how do we see David display his faith in this story? I believe in at least five ways, which also serve as examples for us. Let us consider each one briefly:

1) David went first as a servant. *And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him (I Samuel 17:20).* We saw this first in chapter 16 when David used his musical talents to comfort Saul, even though David knew that he was in fact the true King of Israel, having been anointed by Samuel earlier. But David was patient, waiting for God to elevate him in His time (cf. Luke 14:7-11). This took faith. So before David was a champion in battle, he was a table server. So it is with Christ and so it is to be with us, as Jesus Himself tells us: *“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever*

would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45). We must imitate David as someone who was first a servant; for such a life is what flows from believing the Gospel.

2) David was motivated by God's glory alone. *"And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"* (I Samuel 17:20; see also David's confession of faith in verses 45-47). David's first motive was not to promote himself or even to defend Israel. There was an army for that which Saul was allegedly leading. What motivated him to take on Goliath was a defense of God's name and glory. And since no one else was stepping up, he had to, knowing that he had been anointed for that very purpose one chapter earlier. (This is important; we must know our own office and to what tasks God calls each one of us.) But in the face of such a formidable enemy, this took faith. So it was with Jesus. When He first overturned the money changers' tables in the Temple, practically sealing his arrest three years later, his disciples recalled that it was written of Him, *"Zeal for your house will consume me."* (John 2:17). So it should be with us, even in the difficult areas of Christian freedom: *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God* (I Corinthians 10:31). To be motivated by God's glory alone takes living by faith, not sight, since living in such a way has no certain earthly reward.

3) David was undeterred by worldly discouragement. *"Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle."* And David said, *"What have I done now? Was it not but a word?"* (I Samuel 17:28-29). This also took faith. Few things are more stressful or discouraging than having your own family members turn against you. Now Christians are those who are open to criticism and correction as a host of Proverbs make plain. But in this case, Eliab was clearly making an *ad hominem* attack against David, which likely arose out of pride and jealousy. And it took faith for David to brush it aside and get on with the work at hand for God's glory, embracing the way of the Cross.

So it is with Christ, and so it must be with us: *"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.'* But he turned and said to Peter, *'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'* Then Jesus told his disciples, *'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'"* (Matthew 16:21-24).

Resisting worldly discouragement is not moralism; it is living by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (cf. Galatians 2:20). It is siding with the Gospel of God's goodness over against Satanic suggestions and accusations.

4) David resisted worldly means. *“Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, ‘I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.’ So David put them off”* (I Samuel 17:38-39). This example is a bit harder to apply to us, but I still think there is something here. It was not wrong for David to try on Saul's armor and sword; after all, he was going into combat. The problem was that he was not trained in them and so he quickly realized that they “just weren't him.” So in order to trust God in this situation, he needed to be the man whom God had made him and not try to be someone else. To compare himself with other warriors and to try to look like something he was not would be a form of worldliness, showing a lack of faith. Rather, David trusted that if God was calling him to this battle, he should fight in the way he already knew – with the sling and staff.

Likewise, Jesus resisted worldly means. He trusted His father to deliver Him after His work of redemption was done, rejecting the temptations of both devil and man to forsake the cross (Matthew 4:1-11; 27:39-44). He resisted the worldly means of power and prestige. And so must we, particularly resisting the suggestions of others that God has not been faithful to us and that we must somehow reinvent our lives or be more than He has made us. For whatever God calls us to, He equips us: *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). We must only do the good works God has prepared for us, and no others. That takes faith in the God who saves us by His grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). We do not need to justify ourselves, for in Christ we already have all the power and prestige we need (Ephesians 2:4-7).

5) David did not presume but used the means God did provide. *“Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached 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. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him”* (I Samuel 17:40, 49-50a). David was certain that God would deliver him from Goliath (I Samuel 17:37). And he must have known the stories of how God used unlikely weapons in the past, such as Shamgar's oxgoad and Samson's jawbone (Judges 3:31; 15:15-17). But those were weapons nonetheless, and so David did not presume upon a supernatural miracle but relied in the training and weapons

God has provided him. (And by the way, a Jewish sling armed with a smooth stone was nothing to scoff at.) At the same time, it was not the glorious Greek weaponry with which Goliath was armed. And so David uses all his skill and strength to fell Goliath. But what killed Goliath was his own sword, as the text goes on to make clear: *“There was no sword in the hand of David. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it”* (I Samuel 17:50b-51). This was so that Goliath should fall by his own glory, his pride; a pattern we see repeated throughout Scripture (cf. Luke 14:11).

So it took faith for David to first resist what would have been worldly means for him (Saul’s armor), and then secondly, to use the means which God had provided him. It would have been folly and perhaps even cowardly to go out empty handed, calling on God to do it all apart from the means of David’s efforts. So Jesus used the means of grace available to Him as a true man, even as divine. He learned the Scriptures, prayed, and created a community called the Church. And so must we, if we are to live by faith, trust the means God provides to us. He gives us His Word, He gives us prayer and He gives us His sacraments as seals of His promises. If faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1), then we must live that way. To grow in faith, we must trust that God knew what He was doing when He gave us these simple means of grace. To live by faith, not sight.

And so following David in this, as well as all the examples he sets for us is neither to embrace moralism nor legalism, but an effort to grow in our faith – to look to God to save and work through us even as David did. Insofar as David demonstrates the spirit of Christ, he sets an example for us to follow; for to follow David in these things is to follow Christ. And to follow Christ means simply this: to rest and receive Him as our Savior, our Captain, our Friend. Then when we do that, He gives us further tests and tasks that will cause us to trust Him all the more.

And so we preach David and Goliath, both to see Jesus in the text and to find application that we might love and serve Him more, as those saved solely by His grace: *“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, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted”* (Hebrews 12:1-3). Amen.