

INTRO: What does it mean to be on the right side of history? This question is both argued and assumed, from classrooms and chatrooms, to congressional debates, judicial proceedings, presidential addresses. It's thrown around like a political football among the talking heads of cable news. It even takes center stage on Broadway. Who will prove to be on the right side of history in the culture wars, the big elections, the social and economic justice crusades? Whether you end up on the right side of history depends entirely—entirely—on whether you recognize that history is theological. Is there one true and living God, personal, holy, sovereign, good, and wise, who has clearly revealed his character and expectations? Or are we conveniently free to worship any pleasure or power our feelings deem divine? Are we left to create meaning and morality from scratch in a universe empty of objective value or significance? Has naturalism rendered theology passé—so sixteenth century? We all resonate with that poignant song from the play Hamilton, *History Has its Eyes on You*. The idea of an ocular history—a history that sees and evaluates—provides meaning through accountability of the impersonal sovereign judge, history. History judges meaning. But, what if history itself is subject to a Lord of History, an author and evaluator—a God, in fact? What if the Creator God infused all reality with a meaning all His own? What if this one true God of the Bible is real? Then what will it mean to be on the right side of history? Goliath thought he knew what it meant to be on the right side of history, but one fateful day, he learned otherwise—the hard way.

READ 1Sam 17:1-3 (setting: conquest battle). There's war between Israel and the Philistines. Both armies gather to fight for strategic Israelite soil.¹ The Philistines camp at Socoh, Judah's backyard. The games begin in v.4.

READ 1Sam 17:4-7 (intimidation and fear). Here we get four verses on Goliath's appearance, after we've just read in 16:7 “*Do not look on his appearance or the height of his stature*” (so also Firth). That doesn't just go for your friends; it goes for your enemies. A cubit is 18”. Six cubits and a span is 9'9”.² Goliath is taller than your ceiling...and ripped (proportionality in Caravaggio's depiction). His bronze body armor was 126 pounds without anybody in it. The shaft of his spear was like a 2x4 stud. Just the tip of his spear was 15 pounds of sharpened iron. He's wearing a bronze helmet with bronze greaves or shin guards. And as if all that were not enough, he had a guy in front of him carrying a rectangular shield. Goliath is a human tank; or, as one theologian put it, “a moving fortress” (P. Borgman, 44), a giant with no weak spot. The whole description makes him look intimidating, invulnerable, unbeatable. It's hard not to stare at Goliath. Even so, “*do not look at his appearance or the height of his stature...*” It is this seemingly invincible giant who screams across the valley at Israel in v.8.

READ 17:8-11 “*Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me... Give me a man that we may fight together.*” Goliath is laying down the gauntlet. He either means, Why did you even bother to bring the army if you're afraid to fight me? Or, why waste all these soldiers when we can just go one on one? Either way, Goliath is challenging Israel to a **representative battle**—a one-on-one death match, winner take all.³ Who's it gonna be? I defy the ranks of Israel...! Who wants to die today?” “*When Saul*

¹ “The goal of this strategically important battle was certainly to secure the Valley of Elah, the natural point of entry from the Philistine homeland into the hill country of the Saulide kingdom. The battle was thus crucial” (Tsumura, NICOT 437).

² R. Bergen, R.P. Gordon, J. Baldwin, and Tsumura all rightly accept a height measurement of over 9 ½' tall, against Firth, who follows McCarter and perhaps LXX in measuring 6'6”; still formidable, but a change best understood as a scribal attempt to make it more realistic. Some ascribe such “gigantism” to malfunction of the pituitary.

³ So also R. Bergen 190, citing R. de Vaux, “Single Combat in the OT”, “who cites numerous examples from the ancient world in which such contests took place” ; R.P. Gordon, 155; J. Baldwin “The natural question therefore is to ask...whether single combat was not a Western custom imported by the Philistines.’ This would seem likely” (TOTC 134, quoting R. de Vaux). I found no comments on the Christo-telic implications of representative battle.

and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were *dismayed* and *greatly afraid*,” Saul included. Saul was tall, but Goliath was tall and brutal.⁴ Now what? Or better, now who?

READ 1Sam 17:12-22 (David’s errand). David enters the scene through a small side door. He’s a backwater Bethlehemite, youngest of the family, too young to enlist (not quite 20), but old enough to feed dad’s sheep. Jesse’s got three older sons in the army, and David splits his time between Saul as musician and home as shepherd. So Jesse sends David with some food for the big boys, but really to bring him back word that his other sons are still alive and well. David is earthy—carrying grain, bread, and cheese for others. The only reason he’s even there is to get word about Jesse’s taller, older, more significant sons.⁵ Meanwhile in v.16, Goliath is defying Israel twice a day for six weeks.⁶ David’s up and at ‘em near dawn, and after he drops off the bread with the baggage guy, he runs to the ranks to talk with his brothers. We met Saul hiding among the baggage (10:22). David runs to the ranks. What happens next is crucial.

READ 1Sam 17:23-31 (an unsightly sight).⁷ As David is talking with his brothers, here comes Goliath fresh from breakfast, burping up another taunt. Then comes one of the most pregnant sentences of all Scripture, “*And David heard him.*” Notice that. It doesn’t say “*And David saw him.*” It says “*David heard him.*” Everyone else in Israel saw how Goliath looked. David heard what Goliath said. That difference drives the contrast between David and everyone else. All the other Israelite soldiers see and flee. But as impressed as they are with Goliath’s vertical advantage, their perspective is still too horizontal. “*Surely he has come up to defy Israel.*” Oh...just Israel; not Israel’s God. Well, yeah, if all this is about is what you can see, then of course, head for the hills. Yet they mention Saul’s offer of a reward for whoever can get rid of Goliath—marriage into the royal family and exemption from taxes.⁸ Well, that piques David’s interest. “*Wait a minute, roll that back. What did Saul offer for the one who “takes away this reproach from Israel”?*” But David knows what’s really going on in v.26. “*For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?*” Who is he? Not what does he look like, or how tall is he, or how much armor does he have on, but who does he think he is, saying this kind of stuff, about the living God? What matters to David is not what Goliath looks like but what Goliath sounds like—what he says, and who he says it about. Goliath is not just defying Saul or Saul’s servants (8) or even “the ranks of Israel (v10). He is defying “the armies of the living God” (26). It’s God’s honor at stake, not just Israel’s. For David, this means war, and it’s a winning proposition for Israel, no matter how big Goliath is.

Of course, when faith speaks, fear resents it, because faith shows up fear for what it usually is—unbelief. So Eliab treats David as insignificant (“those few sheep”), obscure (“in the wilderness”), and irrelevant (“Why have you come down”), even presumptuous and evil. “*You just want to gawk at the fighting.*” Eliab says in v.28 “*I know your presumption and the evil of your heart.*” Oh, Eliab knows David’s heart? Is this Eliab’s attempt at looking on the heart like God does in 16:7? If so, he can’t see straight. Eliab misjudges what’s in David’s heart, maybe because God had already rejected Eliab...or maybe this bad judgment is the reason God rejected Eliab to begin with.⁹ Whatever the case, David’s faith makes Eliab

⁴ Fear of Man is the Christian fallen condition focus. Defiance is the non-Christian FCF. Deliverance from those who defy God is the theological theme.

⁵ See commentators’ comparisons with Joseph’s errand into the wilderness in Gen. 37, and his brothers’ similar antipathy for his aspirations, though some see this as over-wrought.

⁶ Mt 4, Jesus and Satan one-on-one after 40 days?

⁷ Note the sight theme here: Goliath’s appearance detailed, then “*See if your brothers are well*” (18), “*Men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled*” (24). “*Have you seen this man?*” (25) “*You have come down to see the battle*” (28).

⁸ Free means “exempt from taxes and other obligations to the palace” (Tsumura, NICOT).

⁹ And as Firth says, “Eliab’s failure to understand what is happening confirms Yahweh’s rejection of him in 16:7” (Apollos 198); so also Bergen (NAC 193) “The author perhaps included it in the narrative to demonstrate the correctness of the Lord’s”
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look bad, and Eliab criticizes David to get the focus off his own unbelief.¹⁰ But David isn't fazed. V.29 "What have I done now?" David's faith is totally un-self-conscious. He just thinks he's being normal, saying and thinking what any faithful Israelite should say or think. So David confirms Saul's offer by asking someone else to repeat it to him in v.30, which gets back to Saul in v.31. And Tall Saul is interested that David is interested. So Saul summons David to the throne.

READ 1Sam 17:32-37 (David's faith contrasted with Saul's unbelief).

V.32 "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." This would be comical if David's poise were rooted in self-confidence.¹¹ That's why Saul says "you're not able to go against this guy."¹² Saul's perspective is still totally horizontal, based on sight and appearances. That is the voice of unbelief talking. But David's confidence is rooted not in himself but in God's track record of faithfulness to David in past battles. What's more, this Philistine has really stepped in it, "for he has defied the armies of the living God." Saul's perspective is dominated by sight. David's perspective is dominated by divinity. God delivered me from the lion and the bear. Goliath has defied our God and his army. Therefore, God will deliver me from this Philistine. David's faith is in the Lord who delivered him from the lion and the bear, the same Lord whom Goliath has defied. For David, then, it's no contest, because the contest is not between David and Goliath; it's between God and Goliath, as David will soon say, *the battle is the Lord's*.

READ 1Sam 17:38-47 (David's faith contrasted with Goliath's confidence J. Baldwin, 135)

Vv.38-40 David won't use Saul's armor, but it's not because David is too short. It's because he knows God doesn't save with sword or spear, as he says in v.47. Listen to what he wrote in **Ps 33:16-17** "The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death." David would have resonated with **Zechariah 4:6**, where God says "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." And again in **Hos 1:7** "I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen." God is free to use means, but has no need of them. So David sticks with his sling, which was not just a boyhood toy. Slings were grown-man weapons, but by now they were old-school. Remember the Benjaminites in Judges 20, they could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. Egyptians were known for

decision to reject Eliab as Israel's next king (16:7). Like Eli and Saul, Eliab lacked the ability to make proper judgments about others—his 'heart' was not right."

¹⁰ "Eliab is angry with his youngest brother because he presumes to enter their military world and implies that he may supersede them" (J. Baldwin, TOTC 136).

¹¹ But see Tsumura on David supposedly swimming in Saul's armor in 38-39 "This is almost a comic interlude—we can picture this youth trying to walk in armor too big for him" (NICOT 459). Firth, though, rightly recognizes that the issue is not David's size, but his inexperience, his lack of armor, his primitive weapon, and especially his faith in Yahweh. David doesn't refuse the armor because it's too big for him, but because he hasn't tested it. This is not how David does battle.

¹² Saul's comment, in context of David's perspective, is unbelief, which functions as a foil for David's faith in God, which drives David's faithfulness to God. "Saul continues to accept Goliath's portrayal...Saul was responding within Goliath's frame of reference: if one wants to fight a heavily armed giant, one should go out heavily armed. Saul intends that David fight on Goliath's terms..." (Firth, Apollos 199).

slingshots back in the early 2000's BC.¹³ Goliath's iron and bronze was great; but David had his own history with God, so he goes with what he knows—a sling and five stones smooth enough to fly straight.¹⁴

V.41-47 Of course, Goliath disdains, curses, and then threatens David in v. 41.44. "What am I, a dog? You gonna beat me to death with your stick?!" He curses David out theologically, by his own Philistine god, probably Dagon. But remember what happened to Dagon—face down decapitated before the ark. No matter. Goliath invites David to come and get some. But David doesn't flinch. In fact, he pits Goliath's sword against the name of the Lord in v.45. It is this God whom Goliath has defied. And for that reason, David returns the threat in v.46, but before he does he actually says "I'm gonna come over there and cut off your head." That, from a guy who's not even taking a sword into the battle. It assumes he's going to use Goliath's sword. We call that sanctified moxie. And this in turn assumes that David is not diminutive. He's big enough to handle Goliath's sword. But his confidence to do all this is not in himself. It's in the Lord "this day the Lord will deliver you into my hand" and that is why I will be able to strike you down and then take off your head with your own sword. It's your carcass going to the crows.

David then explains the **dual purpose** of this whole episode in **v.47**, "*so that (1) all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that (2) 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.*" (Cf. Ps 33:16; 147:10; Zech 4:6; Ex 15:3; divine warrior).¹⁵ The purpose of this whole battle, and the story that recounts it, is the proclamation of God's glory in all the earth—GOD IS—and the proclamation of his method among His people—it's not pragmatism, or human effort, strength, or technology. It's faith in His word, Spirit, and power.

READ 1Sam 17:48-51 (David's faith vindicated/God victorious) All this time David is talking about cutting off Goliath's head, you can imagine what Goliath is thinking, "boy, please... you can't even reach my head...besides what are you going to use to cut it off with? You don't even have a sword!" And that is probably the last thought that ever ran through Goliath's enormous head. David runs right at him, slings a strike right into his forehead, kills him instantly. As if to reiterate the Lord's favor as the reason and power behind David's victory, the text reminds us "*There was no sword in the hand of David.*" As soon as Goliath falls, David decapitates him with his own Philistine blade—the ultimate indignity.

What's remarkable about this account is not the battle itself, but the set up. You get 47 verses of description and dialogue, and when battle finally begins, it only lasts 2 verses, and those are matter-of-fact, no frills. This is a TKO in the first round. It happened exactly as David said, and for the same reasons. Goliath ends up face down and decapitated, suffering the same fate as his powerless god Dagon back in chapter 5 (so also Firth, 201). Yahweh is the living God, he is the only God there is, and you defy him at your own peril. "*There is a God in Israel, and he doesn't save with sword or spear.*"

In 17:51 "*When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.*" How the tables have turned now that the mighty have fallen. The Israelites fled when they saw Goliath in v.24. But the Philistines fled

¹³ "Sling (*qela* ') is a military weapon, common in the ancient Near East; Egyptian evidence goes back to the beginning of the second millennium BC. Note the slingers, wearing iron helmets and coats of mail, depicted on the reliefs in the royal palaces at Nineveh and Nimrud" (Tsumura, NICOT, citing ABD and HALOT).

¹⁴ It's tempting to think of the five smooth stones as if they pictured the simplicity of the gospel word to take down its enemies either by conversion or conquest, but there seems little warrant for that.

¹⁵ "David is a lad (*na'ar*) and apparently lacks formal military experience, but the narrative's comparison is not to the champion's size but rather to the means employed to gain victory" (Firth, Apollos 193).

when they saw Goliath dead. Nobody saw that coming before breakfast. But now that it's happened, Israel is free to fight in v.52 (Col 2:15).

READ 1Sam 17:52-54 (David's faith imitated). Only when David had decisively conquered Goliath did the Israelite army have the power and courage and freedom to go to battle. And eventually, this episode raises the issue of David's identity in v.55....

READ 1Sam 17:55-58 (David's identity and origin confirmed) The whole narrative resolves into a conversation over the "savior's" identity. Whose son is he? Abner needs to know that, in the first instance, because Saul needs to know whose family is getting his daughter by marriage. But the question is posed three times in these last four verses. *Whose son is this youth? ...Inquire whose son the boy is. Whose son are you? I am the son of your servant Jesse.* David's identity is an issue of his sonship. And as God's anointed, he will become far more than Jesse's son. As king, David will become God's royal son, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." And yet one day, Great David's greater Son would come and pose the question of His own sonship. **Matthew 22:42** "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, 'The son of David.' He said to them, 'how is it then that David in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying "The lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'" If then David calls him Lord, how is He his son?" And it is this identity question that sent Jesus to the cross in Matt 26:63, "tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Before we go any further then, let's get each shoe on the corresponding foot. Your Goliath is not your big job interview this week, or the playground bully who won't leave you alone. It's not your midterm or your final in your hardest class, nor is it tomorrow morning's big sales pitch at work. It's not even the disease that won't go away, or the medical bill you can't pay. Our enemies are not situational. They are spiritual, and they do not simply oppose us, they defy God. What's more, you and I are not David. You and I are Saul and the rest of the army on the sidelines, trying not to wet our pants from the specter of our most enslaving sins, and from fear of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Goliath is sin and every sinful appetite and world philosophy or -ism that dares rise up to mock God in Christ. Goliath embodies Satanic rebellion against God and is a precursor to the ultimate antichrist. David represents Israel in battle, like Jesus represents the church on the cross. And David conquers Goliath, as the Risen and Returning Christ Jesus will conquer the man of lawlessness, for God's glory and for the salvation of the church.

POINT: God is, He saves us for his glory by His unassuming Son, Jesus, and we can trust him with our fears. The real God saves sinners without our help for his glory through His Son who represents us in battle. **Jesus saves sinners without our help for God's glory by representing us in battle.** This is not ignoring the text to read Jesus back into it so that we can "make Scripture Christian again". It's paying attention to the major themes, categories, historical people, institutions, and images and seeing how God intended and crafted them all to testify to Jesus from the very beginning. This is a representative battle—one-on-one for all the marbles. Is that not precisely the office Jesus took at his own baptism—representative of all his sinful people? Is it not what Jesus did at the wilderness temptation when he repelled Satan by God's word, and what he did at the cross when he defeated death by death? This is David earning his office as chosen king of God's kingdom, pointing to great David's greater Son, Christ Jesus, rising to the throne of God's kingdom by prevailing over His enemy and ours. It is David, whom Saul though unable to win, whom Eliab thought unworthy to win—it is this David so aptly pre-figuring

the Christ whom no one thought looked the part of a Messiah.¹⁶ David prefigures the chosen seed of Adam and Eve, cutting off the head of the Serpent's seed, "*to help the offspring of Abraham and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery*" (Heb 2:15-16). And as David cut off Goliath's head without our help, and with the very weapon Goliath thought would give him victory, so Jesus cut off the Serpent's head with the Serpent's deadliest weapon, death itself, "*that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil*" (Heb 2:14). He did it all without our help, while his disciples all fled for fear of their lives. He did it for God's glory. And as David did it to earn Saul's daughter as a bride, so Jesus did it to take the church for himself as His bride, for the joy set before Him. And even the Philistine refusal to become Israel's servants according to the deal testifies to Satan's refusal to give up after his crushing defeat at the cross.

Is this not what Jesus would have taught his disciples about 1Sam 17 on the road to Emmaus? Is this not how he would have taught the 500 he appeared to after his resurrection? Is it not how the Apostles would have preached 1Sam 17 in the synagogues to prove that the Christ is Jesus, based on their Christ-centered expositions of the OT in Acts 2 and Acts 13? Then how is it that so many of our evangelical seminaries are full of OT professors who rail against just this kind of preaching and yet still think they are the ones advocating that we "preach the text"? We are preaching the text, precisely because we are preaching the divine author's intent for His text. The Spirit breathed out Scripture, and when he did it, he was testifying to Jesus, because according to Jesus, that is what the Spirit does. He testifies to Jesus. And in fact, any other way of reading the text is un-Spiritual with a capital S. Why would any Christian want to hear the text preached in any other way? Why would any church want to get their next preacher from any so-called seminary? Isn't this better for your soul than "Be brave like David?" "Conquer the Goliaths in your life"? If you'd rather read David and Goliath like that, then you might as well read Norman Vincent Peale's books on positive thinking, or Robert Schuller prosperity sermons, or a Ron Hubbard video on Dianetics. That's not a Christian way to read your Bible.

17:47 The purpose of the battle is proclamation of God's glory to both unbelievers and believers, "*that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel* (that is the purpose for the non-Christian—faith for conversion), *and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword or spear* (that is the purpose for the Christian—faith for perseverance and growth in Christ). "All the believer's life, and all the church's life, requires theocentric thinking" (D.R. Davis, 184). **Psalm 24:8-10** *Who is this king of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!"*

Christians need not fear the appearance or power of those who oppose Jesus. What many Christians fear right now are cultural, moral, economic, and political appearances. It appears the world is growing in hatred toward biblical Christianity and intimidation tactics against Christians. We fear what we see coming. "It's coming," people say to us. "Get ready." Christians today fear the consequences of losing the culture wars, the Senate, the House, the White House. To many Christians, the future looks threatening—persecution, loss, ridicule, marginalization. And God says, still today, "*do not look on his appearance or the height of his stature.*" Do not look at what things look like. Look to the living God in Scripture. Because of who Jesus is and what He did, we say with David, of all that rises up against Christ and the Bible, "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?*"

¹⁶ "Eliab tells him, 'You're a pain' (v.28), Saul warns, 'You're green' (v.33), and Goliath sneers, 'You're puny' (v.42). But he is the one Yahweh uses to deliver." (Davis, FOTB188).

The NT translation of that is **Rom 8:31-35** “*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”*

Transition: If we have Jesus, we have the Lord of History, and He will deliver us from those who defy God, whether in this life or the next. So we don’t fear those who can kill the body. We fear the one who can kill the body and send the soul to hell. Jesus has already won the decisive battle with sin and death, and we are now free from our fears so that we can work and wage war against godless worldviews in the train of Jesus’ victory.

We do spiritual battle with God-defying worldviews in the train of Jesus’ victory (17:52-54; Eph 6:12-18; 2Cor 10:3-5). Once David defeated Goliath, the floodgates opened and Israel’s army turned from fleeing to pursuing. At the cross of Christ, God “*disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame triumphing over them through him*” (Col 2:15). Therefore, we *put to death what is earthly in us* in **Col 3:5**, and we “*destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.*” (2Cor 10:4). That doesn’t mean we seek to make those arguments and opinions illegal and exposed to state punishments. It means we display Christ-denying worldviews as empty and misleading in light of gospel truth. In 1Sam 17:43 “*The Philistine cursed David by his gods.*” That means that even in its original context, as David Firth says, “The battle is not merely between David and Goliath; it is between competing systems of belief” (Firth, 200). So it is today, which might intimidate us if we didn’t have the promise of **1John 5:4** *Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.* Goliath personifies the world in unmitigated, unrepentant defiance of Christ and ridicule of His people. And it is David’s faith—not faith in himself, not faith in serendipity, not faith in the supposedly indomitable human spirit, not faith in “God however we like to think of him”—but rather faith in the true and living God who is, who promises, who provides, who empowers and makes himself present—it is faith in this creating, covenant-making, judging, forgiving, redeeming God that drives David’s courage—and ours—to face down intimidation, threat, and the appearance of an invincible enemy who mocks God and God’s people.

But before we have courage to face down those who mock God, **we have to actually care that they are mocking God.** David cared about the cause of God’s glory in the world. He cared that people honored God as God deserves to be honored. David’s primary purpose and goal in confronting Goliath in v.46 is “*that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.*” God’s glory mattered to Him. It mattered enough to risk himself for it. Church, God’s honor in the world, His reputation, should matter to us. David’s initiative here is a great example of positive obedience to the **third commandment**—do not take God’s name in vain. God’s name is the reputation of his character. Goliath is dishonoring God’s name. David is defending and promoting God’s name. In fact, the rest of Israel is guilty here of taking God’s name in vain. None of them stand up for God’s name, until David makes it safe for them. Christian, God’s name is more important than your safety or success, and God’s name is worth your suffering and the risk of suffering. We will all die. The question is, what will you die for? Will it be worth it?¹⁷

¹⁷ He doesn’t put it in terms of the third commandment, but D.R. Davis put me on to this train of thought. “Yahweh’s reputation is at stake; that matters to me; that matters enough to risk my life for it.’ Can we say that? Is that our vision, our point of view? What situations are there in our own day, in our own various worlds, where we can clearly see God’s honor is at stake? Can we say that that matters to us more than our advantage or reputation or security?” (Davis, FOTB 190).
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Transition: As we do battle with these worldviews for God's name and glory, we do so God's way—by God's power, by God's word and Spirit—because God saves by His power, not ours.

God saves by His power, not ours. David has another purpose or goal in confronting Goliath in v.47, *“that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's.”* God is self-sufficient. He doesn't need us and our ingenuity. He saves us without our help, contrary to our merit, and by His own method. He saves by sending His word, both written and incarnate. He sent Jesus to fight our battle against sin and death and hell as God's chosen Redeemer-King. God does not save us by buildings and budgets, by singers or smoke machines, by concerts or TED talks or self-esteem boosts or how-to sermons or therapy sessions or positive thinking seminars or politicians. He saves us by Himself, by the Lord our God as the prophet puts it in **Hos 1:7** *“I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”* He says in Zech 4:6 *Not by might, or by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord. Word and Spirit.* That is why we read God's word, preach God's word, pray God's word, sing God's word, and see it in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, because that is how God works—by His word, written in Scripture, personified in Jesus, made effective by His Spirit. God wants His churches—his assemblies—to know and respect that about Him, and to count on Him for it. {Sidlow Baxter, British pastor, reflected back at 85 y/o—3 churches, revival every time, not b/c of my preaching but b/c each time the members covenanted to pray for revival, and it happened each time }

The battle between David and Goliath is really between God and Goliath. There is a real God, the God of the Bible, who proves every other god a mirage. This God saves by His power, not ours. And if you defy and curse Him without repenting, He will bring back your curse on your own head.

What all this implies is that **Jesus is building his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it** (17:47). The battle is the Lord's, and he will give our spiritual enemies into our hands. It is not ours to bring in the kingdom by bringing out the vote. Christian conversion is not like converting to Islam or Buddhism. It's not a mere decision. God is the one who gives people new hearts, new life, new thoughts and feelings and priorities to turn from sin and self to trust and obey Jesus. There is a Savior God in the church, and he does not save by smoke machines and mirrors, buildings and budgets, or nickels and noses. He saves by His word and Spirit, for His own glory in the world and in the church.

Transition: But if hell will not prevail against God's plan to glorify Himself in His people, then unbeliever, neither will you.

Strident Defiance of God (unbelief) cannot protect you from His judgment. Goliath was decked out—a bronze helmet, 126 pounds of bronze chainmail, greaves, a scimitar. Yet by sundown, Goliath is dead as a doornail. Goliath got 40 days to mock and blaspheme and defy the living God. I'm sure 20 days in, 35 days in, he was confident as ever. Where are you, unbeliever, in your 40 day allowance of mocking this God? You pride yourself on your naturalism and nihilism. You preen yourself in the mirror of social justice and congratulate yourself for critical race theory. You protect yourself against God's judgment by projecting your own sins on him. All the while, you provoke God and promote your own demise.

Friend, if you are one who despises God and the Bible, you should know that this God—the living God—is neither fazed, nor phased out, by your unbelief and defiance. You neither intimidate him nor amuse him. You offend Him. This God is patient, forgiving, and good. But if you have threatened and defied

him, if you have consigned Him and his people to be eaten up, then God will return that threat on your head. In fact, Jesus uses exactly the same imagery in **Rev 19:17-18** “*With a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.’*”¹⁸ All who share Goliath’s defiance of God, will share Goliath’s fate. But it’s not too late. Repent of your defiance and believe in Jesus now. Join God’s people now.

CONCLUSION

Jesus has cut off the serpent’s head with the very weapon Satan thought would destroy Jesus—death itself. If all this is true, then Christian, you tell me—what are you so afraid of?



¹⁸ “If Yahweh is to have his glory, his enemy must be silenced....It is the same in the reign of David’s greater Son; some refuse to ‘kiss the Son’ (Ps 2:12) and so there must be a ‘rod of iron’ (Ps 2:9)” (D.R. Davis, 190).
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