

HOW STRONG IS YOUR GOLIATH?

Introduction

'The first casualty in war is truth.' That is certainly the case when Satan attacks the cause and people of God. Deception is his main weapon. He uses it to intimidate and weaken the saints. The conflict involving David and Goliath is an example of that and a help in showing God's people how to deal with the enemy.

The first thing we notice is that the writer is trying to surprise us. In many ways this is a most unlikely situation. Not only is there the obvious difference between David and Goliath, there is the fact that David should not even have been there. David seems completely out of place. He is only a youth, and this is a gathering of experienced soldiers. Everyone recognises that he is out of place – his brothers, King Saul, and Goliath. He is the only one who seems oblivious to it.

It reminds us of Christ and Christians in two ways: the world cannot accommodate God's people; and, Christ and his people take responsibility to fight the evil one.

People see things in opposite ways

Goliath, Saul, and the Israelite army viewed it one way; David viewed it a different way.

The majority saw Israel as a beaten people. Historically they had suffered at enemy hands, and were then under enemy control. Jewish history has been like that; so has much of the history of Christ's church. It is hard to unlearn what we think are the lessons of experience, and at times of spiritual stagnation we tend to remember the bad times more than we remember the good times.

There was no comparison between the strength of Israel and that of Goliath, and they all knew it. Stalin asked sarcastically, 'How many divisions does the Pope have?' Satan likes to point out the disparity in human strength between the church and the world.

People see the future in different ways – extrapolating present trends or basing expectations on something else. Israel lost hope every time Goliath appeared. The church often fears the worst when they look at human strength alone. It is a common mistake (Revelation 3:8).

David saw the situation differently. 'Man looks at the outward appearance', but David had learned to look at things unseen.

He was conscious of God's covenant with Israel. God was their 'husband' as Isaiah later described the relationship. He had committed himself to them and 'cannot deny himself' (2 Timothy 2:13).

He knew that God is a 'very present help in trouble' (Psalm 46:1). His power had saved Israel out of their enemies' hands many times. His presence was among his people.

He also reckoned that Goliath was doomed. The reason? – He had spoken against God and defied his armies. God was bound to deal with him – 'My glory will I not give to another ...' (Isaiah 42:8). And if Goliath was doomed he was easy prey even for a youth like David. God would fight for him. 'This uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them' (Verse 17). Do we think enemies of the gospel are a pushover? Or do we think like Saul and his army?

A picture of spiritual warfare

The way Goliath and David squared up to each other illustrates the child of God in combat with Satan.

Proud spirits cannot bear ridicule – Goliath ‘disdained’ David. He thought it an insult that such a supposedly inferior individual would challenge him. One of the reasons the gospel arouse hostility is because it appears so insignificant yet it makes great claims.

Goliath tried to demoralise the Israelite army. His tactic was to direct their attention to his strength and their weakness. Satan always focuses on what is merely human. Is that what we look at mainly? Appearance? Numbers? Training? Previous success or failure? Then we are doomed to fail through his deception.

It is common for a person concerned for their soul to imagine their sin is too great for God to pardon. They are looking at what is human – look instead at what God has promised, at his willingness to save, at Christ’s commission by the Father.

David was indignant at Goliath’s attack on God and his people. Are we? That is an evidence of love for the Lord. He could not bear it, and could not understand why the army did not rise to the challenge.

David was encouraged by that attack for he knew it would bring God out on the side of his people. That was the opposite attitude to that of Saul and the army who found Goliath’s conduct frightening. How do we view enemies of the gospel? As terrifying foes? Or as poor souls who will have to face an angry God?

David depended on God alone, not on human strength. Saul’s armour was no use to him though it was the obvious thing to use. The world always tries to persuade us to adopt its methods – our strength is to rely on God alone – and act on it. David did not wait for victory to happen – he went out and won it.

David was prepared to do it alone and look foolish in the process. That is hard. It takes either strong faith, or a lot of experience, or both.

David acted in the power of God. Using the name of God was not enough (c.f. the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-17), he had reason to believe that God would act. The gospel is not magic, a manipulation of unseen forces or psychological manipulation of the hearers. It involves the power that raised Jesus from the dead.

A picture of Christ

In this story David gives us a picture of Christ, and to some extent of the Christian.

Christ appeared in a world that neither expected him nor understood him.

Unlike the failed leaders of the world he took responsibility for humanity and acted to free those oppressed by sin and death.

Like David he was rejected by his own people, and Israel’s ruler wanted to kill him.

He was devoted to God – ‘The zeal of your house has eaten me up’ (John 2:17). He knew God’s covenant and knew the enemy was doomed. Like David, he acted on that faith.

His weapons were not great by human standards. It was ‘through death he destroyed him who had the power of death’ (Hebrews 2:14).

He fought alone. It was a clash of two individuals – Satan, and the Son of God in human nature. All the rest were spectators. Our privilege and duty is to rest in the finished work of Christ, contributing nothing.

He was victorious. That was seen as soon as he rose from the dead. Sin, Satan, and death were all conquered.

And the joyful task of his people today is to enter into his victory.

Since it is a picture of Christ it is also a picture of his people. We should ask ourselves a number of questions.

1. Do we identify with Christ and his people? There is sharp divide between his people and the world; it will become 'a great gulf fixed' (Luke 16:26) unless we receive Christ on his terms. The world is hostile towards Christ and his people – if you are not in Christ that hostility lies in your heart and there is a danger it will break out. It is vital that you obtain Christ's salvation.
2. Are we grieved when Christ is dishonoured or his cause attacked? Remember that 'the friendship of the world is enmity with God' (James 4:4). Christ who redeemed us with his blood is displeased when his people do not care about these things. Remember Meroz (Judges 5:23).
3. When the cause of Christ is attacked do we feel optimistic or pessimistic? It is possible to feel grieved and optimistic at the same time. Do we think the enemy is too powerful for us? Or do we think he is doomed because he has defied God? What does the state of our churches say to us – 'Give up'? Or 'God will arise now'?
4. When our sin is too powerful for us, or the sin of people we care for, do we despair or do we believe Christ can overcome it and ask him to? And do we obey him expecting him to work?
5. Are we like Christ in taking responsibility for Christ's cause and people? Or do we leave it all to others? We are called to have the mind of Christ in such matters (Philippians 2:5).
6. Do we feel it all depends on us? Or do we believe we will watch God work when we do what he says?
7. Do we use all the strength we can muster (like Saul's armour)? Or do we go out doing only what we know we can do but expecting God to use it (like David's sling)?

At the end of the day Christ will return in glory. Part of that glory will be the victories won during our lifetime. If we hide our talent (Luke 19:20) we will not share that glory. But if we identify with him and carry our cross after him we will reign with him forever.