

God's Big Story – Part 2 – Israel's Kings

6 August 2023

INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

One of the stories that we're reading today is about Jesus and a great big picnic and lots of hungry people. But there was just one little problem ... no food! How were they going to feed all these people?



Jesus asked his friends what food they had. One boy in the crowd had brought his lunch – five little loaves and two fish. But how could such a small bit of food feed so many people?

I wonder what will happen?

Jesus took the food, prayed and blessed the food, broke it and gave it to his friends to give to all the people.



And everyone had enough to eat! There was even some left over.

Later in the service we will also be taking bread and breaking it and sharing it.

It's what we call Communion as we remember all that Jesus has done for us.

BIBLE READINGS

1 Samuel 17:1-11, 32-37, 40, 50

Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Sokoh in Judah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. ...

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His was nearly three metres tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore scale armour made of bronze ...

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, 'Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of King Saul? Choose a man and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him,

you will become our subjects and serve us.’ Then the Philistine said, ‘This day I defy the armies of Israel. Give me a man and let us fight each other.’ On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified. ...

David said to Saul, ‘Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.’

Saul replied, ‘You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.’

But David said to Saul, ‘Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.

Saul said to David, ‘Go, and the Lord be with you.’ ...

Then David took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. ...

David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

Matthew 14:13-21

When Jesus heard what had happened to John the Baptist, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.’

Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’

‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered.

‘Bring them here to me,’ he said. And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

MESSAGE

As many of you know, I'm involved in a sport called orienteering which involves navigating around an area – whether in the suburbs or in the bush – following a map. In the suburban form of orienteering, there are lots of decisions to make – which control points to visit and in what order as well as choosing the best route

to go from point A to point B each time and all of this while running. There are big penalties for getting back late. It's quite a challenge.

Life can be equally challenging with lots of decisions to make regarding how to best use our time amid competing demands and how to navigate through each day. What is the map that we follow to guide our way?

For Christians like us, one really important map is the Bible, which gives directions on how to live a good, compassionate and fulfilling life.



But as we started to explore last week, there are many ways to read and interpret the Bible so it's not always a straight forward task. Also, the Bible was written a long time ago in cultures that were very different to our current world. So there is always a step of translating what the Bible says into our culture.

You may recall from last week that I suggested three ways of reading the Bible:

The first way is to take a short passage, focusing on the characters involved and what moral lesson we might learn from their actions

A second way is to place the passage in its historical context of what was happening in Israel or the church, so that whatever interpretation we come up with would at least have made sense to the original hearers

*A third way is to consider what the passage or the biblical book it's taken from reveals about **God** – God's character and God's will for the world*

Last week we used these three lenses to explore Moses' encounter at the burning bush within the larger story of the Exodus.

This week we'll take a similar approach to explore David's encounter with Goliath within the larger story of the emerging role of kingship in Israel.

The story of David and Goliath is one of the better known OT stories from Sunday School. David is the hero of course as he bravely confronts the giant Goliath and triumphs over him with just a slingshot

and a stone.

What sort of lesson might we learn from this story?

Perhaps that there are situations in life that require us to be crazy brave like David, although most of us would turn away from such a life-and-death confrontation. But if you live in Ukraine and your country is threatened by a big neighbourhood bully in the form of Russia, perhaps you find the courage to fight even if it does put your life in danger.



Another lesson might be that we have to trust our instincts and our experience when facing a major problem. If David had just followed reason, as Saul did, he would have concluded that his chances of overcoming Goliath were minimal as Goliath was well trained in how to fight.



Yet David's instincts told him that he'd faced similar threats like bears and lions while guarding the sheep and had found ways to kill these predators. Facing Goliath would need a similar approach ... he would need to be quick and agile and use his wits but be prepared to stand and face his enemy head on.

So when you are facing a significant problem – whether it's a health scare or a financial concern or a relationship breakdown among the family – do you draw up a long list of pros and cons or do you go with your instinct based on what you've done in the past and what has worked well?

Taking our second historical approach, the story about David and Goliath takes place as Israel is in a time of transition. It's a transition from being a loose coalition of tribes to becoming a single unified nation under a recognised leader, a king.

Under David, the nation of Israel moves to having a central place of worship in Jerusalem as well as a standing army led by the king.

Under the reign of David and his son Solomon, Israel reached its golden age. Jerusalem was established as the main city, the temple was built and there was peace with the surrounding nations after David in particular had defeated them in battle.

This gave time to reflect on life, which gave rise to the wisdom writings such as Proverbs and the first collection of psalms as songs of worship.

What made all this possible was the fighting skills, courage and strong leadership that developed around David. And these skills, courage and leadership are all on display in the story of David fighting

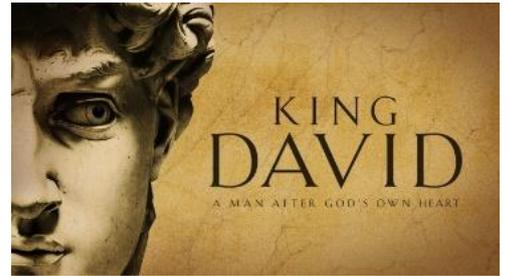
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Kingship established
Enemies subdued
Temple built
"The Golden Age"

Goliath.

When David is anointed to be the next king after Saul, he is described as a man after God's own heart. This may reflect his skills as a warrior – with Yahweh also seen as a powerful warrior – but more likely it reflects on David's trust in God to protect and guide him in every part of life.



As we read on in the story of David, we discover that David is very fallible and makes some shocking mistakes, yet is quick to seek God's forgiveness. May we learn not only courage from David but also trust in God.

Which brings us to our third approach of interpreting the story of David and Goliath as part of God's big story. So we might learn that God can work through various forms of leader, whether a deliverer like Moses, a judge like Samuel, a king like David or later the High Priest.

the Golden Age
Nature of kingship
Covenant with David
Royal theology
Blessing the nations?

We learn that God is both powerful and faithful. Unlike the Exodus where God's raw power is on display, here God's power works through humans like David. Time after time when Israel is in trouble and seeks God's help, God faithfully responds by raising up new leaders. God's power and faithfulness have not changed, so they are still available to work through us.

Later in the story of David, there is a new promise spoken through the prophet Nathan. God promises to build a house for David, a lineage of kings, who will rule over the kingdom of Israel. This kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom. When the king goes astray from God's ways, God will punish them through human means but will never withdraw love.

This gives rise to what is known as royal theology, that the king who reigns in Jerusalem will never be defeated. While this holds true for a few centuries after the time of David, it all comes crashing down when Babylon conquers Jerusalem and takes all the leaders – including the king – into exile. The exile thus became a crucial time for reflecting on God that we will explore next week.

It was during the time of exile that hope arose for a Messiah, a new king David, the fulfilment of the prophecy to always have a king on the throne. God's faithfulness to Israel demanded such a response.

As Christians we claim that Jesus is the promised Messiah, but not everyone in Israel thought so, as we know from the pages of the NT.

That is enough for today.

Our next song is a traditional hymn that I hope will be known to many of us. Its first line is *We limit not the truth of God*. It was written by George Rawson, a 19th century Congregational Minister in England. The words are based on a prayer spoken for the Pilgrim Fathers before they set off for America in 1620.

As David did, the prayer expresses trust in God to reveal new truth and light for new situations that shines forth from God's word.