

## It's All About God

### *1 Samuel 17*

***1 Samuel 17*** turns us back to the story of apparent power confronted by apparent weakness.

We've been considering this; God has, I think, confronted us with this as a church to remind us that we're very foolish and wrong to start to rely upon ourselves, to start to think that we are strong in and of ourselves, to perhaps rely on any strategies we may feel able to develop, and so on.

And in the course of that we were reminded of the underlying principle of God's perspective in *1 Samuel 16:7*, where God has to remind his servant Samuel that he shouldn't consider the appearance of Eliab in terms of his height or the externals, because, he explains, ***"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at," and then he explains what he means by that: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."***

Now, there is cause for great encouragement and great challenge in that.

The encouragement, of course, is that God is not put off by many of the superficial externals of our lives; he does not set us aside because of the things that others may choose to use as bases of disqualification.

And there is encouragement in that.

There is challenge, too, that we cannot hide from God the reality of what's going on inside of us, and that there is in each of our lives a distinction between reality and reputation. All of us have over time created some kind of reputation; it's an ongoing process.

It is God who knows how much reality there is behind the reputation.

Whether that is the reputation of the person in the pulpit or the reputation of the person in the pew, God knows our thoughts, God knows our motives, God knows how much life there is behind the curtain.

And we do well routinely to not only remind ourselves of the principle, but to pray again with the psalmist, ***“Search me, O God, and know my heart—know my heart. Try me, and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there is a wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”***

**We cannot hide from God the reality of what’s going on inside of us.**

Now, we can only assume that David, by whatever mechanisms and means in the pilgrimage of his young life to this point, had fastened on this truth in such a way that he stands out from the rest of the company as being ***“a man after [God’s] own heart,”*** and a man who views things in a way that puts him out of kilter with the way everyone else views things, so that when you take that verse, you fold the page over, you go into ***chapter 17***, you realize that the armies of Israel were looking at things from a purely human perspective.

That’s why in ***verse 11*** when they heard the cries of the Philistine Goliath, ***“all the Israelites were dismayed and [they were] terrified.”***

It was the same perspective that marked out the response of David’s brothers, and particularly Eliab.

You will remember down in ***verses 28*** or so that he tells David, ***“I know how conceited you are and [I know] how wicked your heart is.”***

The fact is that he didn’t know how wicked his heart was, and he was dead wrong in any case.

It is only God who searches and knows our hearts.

It is only God who knows our motives.

That, incidentally, is why we ought not to be too concerned about cultivating or being debilitated by the court of human opinion.

If you constantly get up in the morning on the strength of whatever flattery or encouragement you receive, if you allow yourself to be lifted up on the tide of human opinion when it swings for you and cast down on the tide of human opinion when it goes against you, then you're going live your life up and down, crazy all the time, one moment rejoicing, the next moment debilitated and neutralized.

And David somehow or another had an even keel, and it was offensive to his brother Eliab, because Eliab was not even-keeled.

Eliab essentially accuses David of what is true of himself.

And were it not for the fact that David was able to take recourse to the fact that "God knows my heart," then he would have had to spend a long time arguing with Eliab: "Oh, no, you don't know my heart! Oh, I can explain my heart to you," and so on. There's no indication of the fact that David defends himself. "I know you think you know my heart," he may have said to his brother. "That's not my concern. You don't."

Because we are all moving inexorably towards the bar of God's judgment!

And while the court of human opinion is not irrelevant, it certainly isn't to be the controlling influence in the life of God's child.

David gets that, in contrast to the army, in contrast to his brothers, in contrast to Saul, who, viewing things from a human perspective, seeing David, seeing the giant, says to David in **verse 33**, "**You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him.**" **Why not? "[You're] only a boy ... [he's] been a fighting man [since] his youth."**

Well, from one perspective, that is absolutely straightforward, isn't it?

You might say, “Now, here’s a sensible fellow! Here’s somebody who is able to weigh things up and come to the right kind of decision!

Here’s the kind of practicality that we like in a leader!

It’s obvious: total power vs total weakness. You can’t go.”

Wrong perspective.

And Goliath, he obviously looked at things from a human perspective.

There’s no surprise in that.

He looks David over in **verse 42**, sees he’s “only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him.” “He despised him.”

I think it’s more than likely that when David walks out, as we now come to the section here in **verse 41**—as David walks out to engage this Philistine in armed combat, the armies of Israel to a man were saying, **“Who does he think he is? I mean, who does he think he is?”**

When in point of fact the real question they should have been asking was, “Who does he think *He* is?”

See, they’re asking the question all in lowercase.

But the second “he” should be capitalized: “Who does he think *He* is?”

And when we see someone stepping out in faith and it is a challenge to us, when we see somebody trusting God and it is a rebuke to us, the temptation of our perverse hearts is to say, “Who does she think she is?” when in point of fact the answer may be, “Who does she think *He* is?”

Some of us remain this morning neutralized on the sidelines of the battle.

And it all has to do with perspective.

## The Shepherd Meets the Giant

Now, we've seen these dialogues as they've been taking place—David and Eliab, David and Saul—and we come now to David and Goliath.

“Meanwhile”—*verse 41*—“*the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David.*”

He “look[s] David over.” You can just imagine him looking down at him.

But the response of David in *verse 45* proves that for David, this is not between David and Goliath. This is not even about the armies of Philistia against the armies of Israel.

For David, this is a battle between Yahweh, the living God, and the non-gods of the Philistines.

This is about who is God.

It's the kind of battle that takes place in our contemporary society. There are lots of gods with a small *g* in our culture.

There's the god of sport, perhaps the greatest idol in contemporary America.

Sport! Just about at every level of our culture, from little league all the way through to big league. “Oh, we couldn't possibly do that. Oh, we couldn't possibly go there. Oh, we couldn't possibly rearrange that. Oh, we can't come at four o'clock. Oh, we won't be able to go at seven.” Why not? Because we're worshipping! We're worshipping our god! We pay vast sums of money to pay homage to it. Some of us invest in it. Some of us gamble on it. So when we look at



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a situation where the battle is between the true and living God and the non-gods of the nations, we shouldn't say to ourselves, "Oh, I wonder what that kind of battle is like?" We should be honest and say to ourselves, "That's the kind of battle we're engaged in!"

**Faith is not the absence of fear.**

**Faith is not the dismissal of circumstances.**

**Faith is facing straight on what confronts us but coming at it from a different vantage point.**

**When you choose to serve the living God from your heart, then you don't have to make choices about the non-gods that put up their hands for our attention.**

You turn over the pages and the pages and the pages, and here you come to the battlefield, and here are all the products of the background standing neutralized by a giant—albeit a giant—not aware of the fact that the reason that they are in the predicament in which they find themselves is on account of their unwillingness to do what Joshua had said back in *Joshua 24*.

And now the gods, the non-gods of the Philistines, have got the armies of the living God completely debilitated on the field of battle.

It's hard for me not to suggest that it is a picture of the contemporary church: standing on the sidelines, paralyzed, fearful, unwilling to send out a champion.

Why?

Because we're serving the wrong gods.

Now, there is a big gap between reputation and reality.

I think the whole of the Christian life is actually trying to close the gap, isn't it, by God's enabling?

Paul says to Timothy, ***"You're a pastor; watch your life and your doctrine closely."***

Watch your life and your doctrine closely.

By God's help, close the gap between what you say and what you are.

Because if what you suggest and what you are is different to any degree at all—to any significant degree—then you will ruin yourself and you will ruin your hearers."

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