

Title: The Heart of a King, pt.1
Text: 1 Samuel 17:1-11
Theme: Our need for a defender
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmt: We all need someone to fight for us, and who can win.

There is something about our American culture that values the dark horse, the underdog, the come from behind and the little guy. Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Marvel Movies and the rest of the Super Heroes all repeat it. We love the David vs. Goliath stories where the little guy, the good guy, the longshot overcomes impossible odds and delivers a victory for the home team. 1 Samuel 17 is the actual David vs. Goliath account. It is the longest chapter in 1 Samuel and is the hinge on which the entire book turns. In fact, now, 3,000 years later, the flag of the star of David flies as the emblem of the nation of Israel. If you think you know this story, you may be pleasantly surprised.

Read Text:

Norman Ohler wrote a book about the influence of drugs in the 3rd Reich. His research focuses a lot on the role of cocaine and opiates that Hitler's personal physician gave to Hitler. Hitler's doctor saw what Hitler was really like. Everyone else saw something else. In a sense, Hitler wasn't running the 3rd Reich, his doctor, Theo Morell was. Every presidency in recent years has had people in the inner circle who have revealed insider information that is turned into exposes, documentaries or books. Inside knowledge is viewed as power and there are many people who use that power for their own advantage. The last half of 1 Samuel 16 is dark. The king is having what would appear to be psychotic episodes. He is coming unglued. He is a man consumed by fear. This is an incredibly dangerous combination. A man who is consumed by fear has ultimate power at his disposal. He is mentally unfit. It is rare to find a person who is capable of handling power, particularly supreme power without being consumed by it. Mortals cannot be treated as immortals without dire consequences. Saul is a psychopath and he has the power to declare war, and has the power to order the death of others whom he deems a threat. If his mind will turn on him, then he is liable to turn on anyone who is near him. Fear is not rational. Even Samuel is afraid of the monster that Saul has become. And so, it has happened. Israel has a king, just like all the other nations.

How can Saul wield power or control power, when he cannot even control himself? His psychotic episodes depicted in the text as a harmful spirit from God makes him unfit to rule and exposes the nation to chaos. Something has to be done and the result is an incredible providence of God. A young shepherd boy who is skillful on the harp is conscripted to come into the inner court and play for Saul in an effort to change his mood and help him function. This boy, is none other than David, who, in the first part of chapter 16 was chosen by God privately to replace Saul as king. Now Saul chooses David to come and see what Saul was really like. David saw and experienced Saul at his weakest and worst. He saw the ugliness and unpredictable nature of his wrath as the man who was consumed by fear tried to control his world by fear. It was a terrifying orbit around the throne. But, now, Saul's life was in the hands

of this boy, young man, David. Saul was literally emotionally, and in many ways, actually dependent on David. His life was in David's hand. We've seen what power did to Saul, what will power do David? The comes this account. It is fascinating. What happens now? The boy who has to rescue Saul from himself in private now rescues Saul's kingdom in public. And it is very public. This victory is David's – all by himself and it takes place with every eye of Saul's armies on him and every eye of Saul's enemies on him as well. Everyone knows that David killed Goliath. Everyone knows that David, killed Goliath. It was a military victory for Israel, but a political disaster for Saul. Everything that Saul has is now in the hands of David. It's fascinating, but not a sustainable situation. Saul loved David, to the degree that a man like Saul could love. He trusted David and yet David knew things about Saul that he could use for his advantage. So, even though Saul loved David, we are going to see how Saul's dependence upon David will turn into a resentment so deep that his love will turn into hate and drive Saul to seek to destroy the man who was everything, he wasn't and will become everything that Saul couldn't be. Saul was the king, the people wanted. He was a king after man's heart and the result was fear. God has provided a king after his own heart because he wants you to know love. God always wants so much more for you than you do and we always fight him over it. How foolish we are. Now, this king, this shepherd, this musician, this warrior, anointed in private, whom God knows is a man after his own heart, needs to be introduced to the nation. The nations need to see the heart of a real king. The valley of Elah is the stage designed by God, who is the writer and director of the play where this incredible and beloved story is staged. Welcome to one of the majestic mountain peaks of the Bible. This chapter shows us the heart of a king which helps point to the answer that 1-2 Samuel asks: Who should be the king? 1 Samuel 17 is an incredible chapter. I plan to preach 5 sermons from it, beginning this morning with how the text lays out our desperate need for a defender.

1. We need a defender. (1-3)

I will say many times in this series. I think that the writer the Spirit of God used to pen the books of 1 and 2 Samuel is a literary genius. The story is fascinating and he grabs our attention and imagination with both hands with how he relates the account. He does this both by what he says and by what he doesn't say. Look at v.1. Where is the Philistine army gathered? Where have they set up camp? They are in Socoh. Where is Socoh? He tells us. It is in Judah. The army of your enemy is not supposed to be setting up camp in your country. Things are not going well for Saul. The enemy has invaded the land – again and Saul has not been able to stop them. The king's number 1 job is to defend the borders and protect the people and he is failing at both. And don't forget that Israel demanded a king because of the Philistines perennial threat.

Did the Philistines have a mole in Saul's palace? I think it is very possible. Bribing an insider in your enemy's inner circle for information is not new. Did word leak out about Saul's instability and fits of insanity? Did the Philistines determined that this was a ripe time to attack? The stakes are always high in war and the drama is always intense. The setting of this battle makes that even clearer. The Philistines are on a mountain on the south edge of the valley of Elah and Saul and Saul and the army of Israel are on the mountain on the north side of the valley. Therefore, whatever happens in the valley, everyone will be able to see. At this point, which

proves to be true, whatever happens in the valley will determine the outcome of the war. Right now, what is happening in the valley is an enormous problem for Saul, his army and people.

The text specifically refers to “Saul and the men of Israel.” Goliath refers to Saul by name in v.8 and the writer again says, “Saul and all Israel” in vs.11. Eyes are on Saul. He is the king. What is he going to do? The enemy has attacked and is in the land. Now what? Notice the subtle but insightful change in the shade of grammar. In verse 1, the Philistines “gathered” their armies (active voice) while Saul and the men of Israel (v.2) “were gathered” (passive voice). Do you see the writers nuance? The Philistines are active and Saul is passive. Once again, he looks lost, unsure, and overwhelmed by a job way too big for him. Saul is responding to his circumstances and is not taking any initiative. This is how he is depicted throughout the chapter.

We always have an enemy who is ready to fight and who is always on the attack. There is never a day off in our own spiritual battles. Like the people of God in the OT, we need someone to defend us and deliver us. The problem is, we are like the people of God in that we go after defenders who or that cannot protect us.

Who or what makes you safe? One of my grandsons has a blue blanket that he “has to have” in order to sleep at night or nap in the afternoon. Another has a stuffed animal giraffe. We indulge that for 2-year-olds. In fact, when it comes to getting a kid to sleep, we can be so desperate that we’d be tempted to let them sleep with an image of Baal if we thought it would work. So, a child having a blankie is cute, tender and comforting. But, if that kid is 18 or 30, and they only “feel safe” if they have their blankie and come apart without it, we’d say, that is unhealthy and sad. That blankie cannot make that person safe. What is your blankie? Who or what do you look to, to defend you and deliver you? Who or what is it that you think you cannot live without? Is it your 401k (before the last 2 months)? Is it your children? Is it your job? Is it your health? Is it your car? Your pet? Your house? Your talent? Is it the affirmation of others? Is it your success? Is it your spouse or your parents? Friend, you are no match for the war that you are in. You have an enemy in you and outside of you. You need a defender who can deliver you because our enemy is terrifying. Your blankie may give you the illusion of comfort, but is powerless to actually do a thing. Like Israel, you need a real king. We need a defender because...

2. **Our enemy is terrifying.** (4-11)

This location is about 13 miles west of Bethlehem. In the center of the valley floor between the two mountains is a deep ravine that floods in the winter time from the rains. This ravine would separate the two armies as they came forward from their respective camps. Both sides are singing their songs, repeating their mantras, encouraging fellow soldiers and threatening the other side, when the Philistine army parts and a man who seemed as big as a mountain steps forward. The Philistines have put forward their hero. This is their representative. The word “champion” literally means “the man of the between.” This refers to the fact that he is their man sent to be between the two armies. He is the representative of the Philistines. We rightly see him as the representative of the enemy of the people of God. He personifies evil and Satan. What hope do we have fighting him?

a. Our enemy is bigger than we are. (4)

The Hebrew text is clear. Goliath was 9 feet, 6 inches tall. Some laugh at that as if it were exaggeration for the sake of effect. You know, making David more heroic than what he actually was and seeking to minimize the victory. But the Bible consistently spoke of a line of giants known as the Nephilim and they were clearly in the land of Israel even when Israel was originally conquering the land.

The presence of Goliath reveals the lack of presence of Saul. Goliath was certainly a hulking figure, but the very threat of his presence now begins to reveal to others what was privately known before. Saul is no match for this. Saul is the best we have, and he is no match for this. Sure, he can suit up, take a few brewski's for courage, listen as his troops cheer him on, but the truth is, if he tries to fight this guy, Saul is dead and Israel's king is dead. Saul has a problem that he cannot solve. His enemy is bigger than him, and Saul has literally no idea and no plan.

What is it like to face an enemy whom you are absolutely no match for? What is worse, if that enemy is your own sin. What if that enemy is your own insecurity and you don't know what to do? Your anger? Your bitterness? Your guilt? Your haunting or accusatory past? These 11 verses describe the hopelessness of Saul and Israel. But, in describing them, it describes anyone who tries to rely upon himself in this life. Our sin reveals the fact that we have a problem that we cannot solve. The enemy of our souls and our sin is bigger than we are and we don't know what to do about it.

Goliath was not the last giant that Israel would fight. One of the reasons why I believe he was this big is because of the description of his weapons.

b. Our enemy has weapons that are intimidating. (5-7)

Not only is this guy the size of a grain elevator, he has very impressive armor and weapons. Back in chapter 13, we were informed that Israel had basically no swords. She probably fought improvised farm tools. Due to a couple of victories, she was probably able to pick up some swords, spears and shields along with the way, but what Israel had was nothing compared to the bronze work that the Philistines had. Working with iron was a thing around this time and the Philistines seemed to have some initial experience with it. This giant of a man is not only massive in size but his helmet is made out of bronze. His coat of armor (mail coat) weighed about 125 pounds. The dude even had bronze armor on his legs and his shield was so big that it required another man to carry it. One guy described him as "a one-man indestructible fortress." There was no easy or obvious way to kill him and besides that, he had weapons. He had a javelin (which may have been a long-curved sword) that was slung between his shoulders and a spear that was so big that the iron head weighed 15 pounds. You couldn't kill him, but he could certainly kill you. What could one man do against him?

If his presence wasn't threatening enough, his words only added to the psychological terror. Our enemy knows our weaknesses. He knows that we are vulnerable to accusations. Satan means accuser because he delights in destroying the people of God with them. And he uses carefully worded accusations because he knows our weaknesses.

c. Our enemy knows our weaknesses. (8)

Why have you come out to draw up for battle? The obvious answer is because the Philistines have invaded the land and the army of Israel is called upon to defend it. But based on what Goliath says next, I don't think he means that. I think he is asking a deeper question. Why do you even bother? You have no leader to speak of. He has no plan. And who can defeat me? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. That's the point, isn't it? Israel had demanded a king. They got what they wanted, but what they wanted could not help them. He was back in his tent, far from the front line of the battle with no plan and no idea of what to do. He knows that we cannot defend or deliver ourselves.

d. Our enemy is a liar. (9)

Goliath proposes a representative form of war. Each side picks their champion who, in those days not only represented their army and nation, but represented their deity/god. War was always seen as an earthly expression of a fight for the supremacy of one god over the other. So, when you are "roughly the size of a barge" it is convenient to propose this sort of battle in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. But, notice the terms. "If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants." That's pretty clear, isn't it? If your champion kills me, then we will concede and we will serve you. You already know what happens. Goliath is killed and the Philistines do not surrender, concede, humbly lay down their weapons and sign a treaty of peace. No way! They run for their lives in order to be able to fight another day.

e. Our enemy defies us and God. (10a)

When Goliath said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day." David understood exactly what he was saying and he rightfully interprets Goliath's words as we will see next week. Goliath is mocking Israel and Israel's God. Our enemy seeks to destroy us, belittle us, control us, marginalize us, addict us, corrupt us, condemn us, isolate us, humiliate us, terrorize us, and utterly dehumanize us because Satan hates God. Satan initially pretends to befriend you so that he can poison you, smoke you, waste you and damn you because he seethes with hatred of God. Satan is bigger than us. He is a supernatural being. His weapons include flaming darts that are heat-seeking missiles of accusations that are designed to kill you. His weapons are powerful because there is some truth to them. Satan uses truth, but he will not tell you the entire story. He will tell you that sin is fun, and then condemn you with your own story of it. He will tell you some truth about your insecurities, but then will threaten to expose you to the world. He will accuse you of failure and liable for judgment but will not tell you the truth of the gospel. He will terrorize you with his size and might, but will not tell you that the resurrection of Christ broke his back, that he is on a chain, that his days are numbered, that the cross has defeated sin. Like this story, if

all that you see is what is presented in these first 10 verses, you have no hope. If all that you see is what your enemy says about you. Then you are left wondering, how can we be saved?

3. **How can we be saved?** (10b-11)

Why is this story here? Israel needed a king after God's heart. But even that king, as good as he was, would fail them. Look again at these first two points. I want you to specifically notice the way that these points are intended to help you find your place in this story. While there are going to be things about David that we are going to learn from, David is not whom we primarily identify with, although we want to. We want to be the hero. We want to know how to fight the bullies and giants in our lives. But, the story line of the Bible is not how we can be a superhero – sorry. We are not David. We are the frightened soldiers who run when Goliath appears. We are the cowering people who feel terror in our bones and trauma in our hearts when the enemy of our soul exposes our insecurities and inadequacies and vulnerabilities and failures and sins and rubs our faces in it. We are not the savior or the superhero. We are the ones who need to be delivered and desperately need to be defended. You cannot save yourself. You try to find things or people or experiences, or status, or appearance to validate you, affirm you, defend you, protect you, but they are powerless to do so because they did not create you, nor do they define you, really know you or love you. You need a Savior that is not from this world. We all need a king, thank God, we have one, who can not only defend us, he can deliver us. His name is Jesus. He not only can deliver us and defend us, he is the only One who can.