

The Battle Is the Lord's
1 Samuel 17:32-49
Second Baptist Church, Memphis
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One of my favorite movies of all time is the movie *Hoosiers*. It's about a small school in a small town in Indiana where basketball is king. For the people in this town in Indiana, how their team does each year seems to be about the most important, or at least the most talked about, thing there is.

This year at this school they have a new coach who is basically starting over in life and in coaching, and he and the team endure all sorts of hardships and face all kinds of obstacles, but they make their way to the playoffs. And they advance all the way to the state championship game which is played in a huge arena in the big city of Indianapolis.

There's this great scene when the team arrives at the arena for the first time. They walk out onto the court of this empty arena, the day before the game, and they stand and stare—obviously in awe of their surroundings as they look up at thousands and thousands of empty seats that will be full the next day.

Their coach has one player get on the shoulders of another, and he hands them a tape measure, and he has them measure how tall the basket is. They measure it: it's ten feet. Then he tells them that if they were to measure the court, they'd see that it

was 94 feet—regulation size—the same length as the court in their cracker box of a gym back home.

The point is, they're not out of their league here. It's the same game played on ten-foot tall baskets on 94-foot court.

And the next day they play their game. It's these small town and small of stature boys against the bigger, stronger, faster team from an Indianapolis high school. And, of course, the underdogs win. They win by running a play called “the picket fence” and making a last second shot.

Whether it's in sports or just about anything else, we love the underdog. Most of us love to root for the underdog. And, in sports, when we have a situation of a clear underdog playing a much stronger opponent, the announcer might say, *It's David vs. Goliath today*.

David and Goliath. The ultimate story of the underdog beating his more powerful opponent. David and Goliath is one of the most popular and best-known Bible stories. Because it's a great story, and because we love it when the underdog wins. That's why I like the movie *Hoosiers*.

The only problem with all this is that I don't think that's what this story is really about. The story of David and Goliath is not a story about the triumph of skill or bravery or hard work over brute strength and size. That's not what this story is about at all. This is not an underdog story.

The main character in this story is not even David, I don't think. The main character is God. If David is a model for us here, he's not a model of the plucky underdog taking on the evil giant. He's a model of faith.

When God is on your side, you're never the underdog.

The scene is set for this story in the lower hill country of Judah, in territory disputed by the Philistines (1 Samuel 17). The two armies—the Israelite army and the Philistines—have gathered across a valley; but before the battle begins, the Philistine champion Goliath strides out and—in mocking and insulting tones—challenges Israel to send out somebody who can out fight him.

Trash talk is not just a recent phenomenon.

Goliath and his armor are described in terrifying detail. His words and appearance apparently have the desired effect of intimidating the Israelites, and no one accepts Goliath's challenge.

Then David is introduced in verse 12. The scene changes from the battle to Bethlehem, to the home of a man named Jesse, who has several sons fighting in Saul's Israelite army; but one who is too young and small for battle has been taking care of his father's flocks. Jesse sends this son, David, to the camp with food for his brothers.

David arrives just as the armies are setting up the battle lines, and leaving his food with someone called, in verse 22, the

“keeper of the baggage,” David runs after his brothers just in time to hear Goliath issue his apparently daily challenge and see the Israelites flee in fear.

As the soldiers talk about what has happened, David becomes more and more incensed. He's angry with the Philistines for defying the armies of God, and he's angry at the Israelites for their lack of bravery. When his brothers hear his reactions, they let him have like big brothers do, saying, *Don't you have sheep to take care of back home?*

But David's bold talk has reached the ears of King Saul, and Saul calls him in. David volunteers to fight Goliath. Saul objects, but David argues that he is indeed capable of doing such a thing.

David's reason for fighting and for his confidence is this: this Philistine has defied the armies of the living God, and *The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine* (v. 37).

Saul has David clothed in the king's own armor and weapons. But all that heavy gear didn't fit this young shepherd. He couldn't even walk weighted down with the armor and the heavy weapons. So, taking only his shepherd's staff and the typical weapons that a shepherd would carry—his sling with five stones—David approaches the giant.

This picture of David awkwardly trying to walk around in the king's armor that doesn't fit has stayed with me this week. It

reminds me of the things we sometimes do trying to accomplish the will of God using our own devices.

You've probably heard the old jokes about how many people it takes to change a light bulb.

How many TV evangelists does it take to change a light bulb? One. But for the bulb to continue to shine, send in your love gift today.

How many fundamentalists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, because any more might result in too much cooperation.

How many liberals does it take to change a light bulb? At least ten, as they need to hold a debate on whether or not the light bulb exists. Even if they can agree upon the existence of the light bulb, they still might not change it to keep from alienating those who might use other forms of light.

How many Pentecostals does it take to change a light bulb? One—hands are already in the air.

How many members of an established, 44-year-old church does it take to change a light bulb? One to actually change the bulb and nine to say how much they really liked the old one better.

How many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb? 109—7 on the Light Bulb Study Committee who report to the 12 on the Light Bulb Task Force, appointed by the 15 on the

Nominating Committee. Their recommendation is reviewed by the Finance Executive Committee of 5 who place it on the agenda of the 12 member Finance Committee.

If they approve, they bring a motion to the 27 member deacon body, who appoints another 12-member review committee. If they recommend that the church board proceed, a resolution is brought to the congregational business meeting. They appoint another 8-member review committee.

If their report to the next business meeting supports the changing of a light bulb and the congregation votes in favor, the responsibility to carry out the light bulb change is passed on to the Coordinating Council, who in turn appoints a 7 member committee to find the best price in new light bulbs.

They report back to the Personnel Committee who then commissions the Personnel Sub-Committee in charge of the janitor to ask him to make the change. By then the janitor discovers that one more light bulb has burned out.

Isn't it clumsy sometimes the way we Christians go about doing the work of God, the way churches go about it, certainly the way conventions and denominations go about it. Sometimes it seems like we're stumbling around in somebody else's equipment that doesn't fit when in reality God is equipping us just fine to do what he is calling us to do.

We try so hard to devise plans and gather together the tools that perhaps we've seen somebody else use or that we think would really be great. But they are not the plans and not the equip-

ment that God has given us for what is ahead. They are *my* plans. And it is *my* armor.

So David, realizing that the armor that Saul gave him doesn't fit, goes ahead with the things that are his.

David approaches Goliath, and Goliath curses David, vowing to feed his flesh to the birds and the wild animals. But David has a speech too. And this speech is why we're here today. *You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied* (v. 45).

Enraged, Goliath charges. David rushes forth, takes a stone, slings it and hits the giant in the forehead. If you look at verses 50 and 51, they seem to be in tension with one another about how Goliath died, but whether he died from the rock or was only stunned and died when David stabbed him with his sword, it doesn't matter. The Philistine army quickly fled with the Israelites in pursuit.

I said at the beginning that this is not a story about the little guy beating the big guy. As much as we like those kinds of underdog stories, that is not really what this is about. What David is modeling for us here is faith in the living God in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulty.

The key to the story is David's speech. David does not win the battle because he is cleverer or stronger than Goliath is. He wins the battle because he is on God's side, and God is cleverer and stronger than David or Goliath.

As David said in his speech (v. 47): *The Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's.*

The battle is the Lord's. It's not my battle. The battle is the Lord's. If we could just remember that as we face the challenges and difficulties of life—the battle is the Lord's. I don't need to scrounge up some borrowed armor that doesn't fit. The battle is the Lord's.

What does all this mean?

I think it means something profound for those of us who may be going through the darker moments of life.

I was reminded this week of Frederick Buechner's autobiography where he tells the story of his father's suicide, which occurred when he was a little boy of ten.

He tells how, several days after his dad took his own life, his mother found a farewell note that Mr. Buechner had scribbled on the back page of a brand new copy of a recently released novel called *Gone With the Wind*. The note said, *I adore you, and I love you, and I am no good.*

I adore you, I love you, and I am no good. Those are the words that Mr. Buechner left for his family. Concerning his father death, Frederick Buechner wrote these words: *For many years, if ever anybody asked how my father died, I would say, "heart trouble." That seemed at least a version of the truth. After all, he had a heart. And it was troubled.*

Not only did he have heart trouble, I want to say that he also had eye trouble. His vision was so clouded by guilt and shame and despair and self-hatred that all he could see was that he was no good. But there were many things that Mr. Buechner could not see. He couldn't see the whole picture.

There's a line from Earnest Hemingway's book, *A Farewell to Arms*. *The world breaks everyone, and, afterwards, many are strong at the broken places.*

The world breaks everyone. Everyone is hit with failure and despair and a sense of powerlessness at one time or another. But the hope is, the part that some tragically never come to see is, that many are strong at the broken places. I know some people in this sanctuary right now who are strong at the broken places.

Have you thought about the fact that the moment when David was most powerful, the moment when God was able to bring David to victory, was the very moment when David was the most weak, when he was the most vulnerable?

It wasn't when he was weighted down with heavy armor. It wasn't when he was stumbling around in impressive looking battle gear that was not genuinely his own.

God brought David to victory when he was stripped down to nothing more than the weak and vulnerable person he really was. And that is when David became great.

Please don't ever forget that. David was not the great instrument of God when he was covered head to toe in the king's armor. David was great when he was nothing but what God gave him.

See, it's not all about us. Remember this in times of struggle and challenge and self-doubt. Everything is not dependent on how good you are or how strong you are. The welfare of your family, the world, whatever, is not riding on how good you are or how strong you are.

God is good. God is strong. And God has enough strength and goodness to share. The battle is not ours. The battle is the Lord's.