

INTRO:

Amen!...If you have a Bible or your Order of Gathering with the passage QR Code there on it, make sure you're looking at **1 Samuel 17**...I wanna start by asking a question/think about your answer to this: ***When you're afraid, how do you deal? What are your go-to mechanisms, resources, even postures for navigating fear?*** Think about that for a moment...

Ya know in spite of what's happened over the last year, it's really no secret that we live in an infinitely more secure and safe environment than our ancestors ever did. AND YET, we are more anxious and fraught with fear than ever. Sociologists have actually noted that anxiety and fear has become so widespread as to have become a kind of "21st century equivalent of the Black Death."¹ We're literally dying under the weight of our fear. Cuz we all know, fear's one those problems right, that gives birth to all kinds of other problems. As John Piper says, "*Think about how many other sins are connected to the root sin of anxiety (and fear). (Cuz ya know fear) about money'll cause you to hoard or steal. (Fear) about succeeding'll make you irritable and impatient. (Fear) about relationships can make you withdrawn or indifferent towards others. (Fear) about what others think about you will make you lie or stretch the truth.*" He says, "*If (fear) could be conquered, a mortal blow would be struck to so many other sins.*"² ***Don't you feel that?***...Our passage today, which includes the culturally iconic story of David and Goliath - is all about navigating fear well. Where do you find the resources to really face life head-on/no matter how fearful? That's what this story's about! So follow along as we hear the reading of God's word... **Gregg Intro's Self > 1 Samuel 17.1-18, 20, 23-24, 26-27, 31-52...**

TEXT:

Thanks **Gregg**...So what makes this story, not only really instructive, but so iconic is that you have two things in it: An **Impossible Opponent** and an **Improbable Champion**/an *Impossible Opponent and an Improbable Champion*...It says, "*the Philistines gathered their armies for battle.*" Now let's remember where we are in the story: At this point, the kingdom of Israel is in it's infancy. You recall, back in **Genesis** God had promised to bring salvation to the world through a family, who would ultimately love, live-with and glorify Him forever. And that family started, you remember, with Abraham...whose descendants grew into the 12 tribes of Israel, as lead by the Patriarchs of Israel, and then multiplied under Egyptian captivity...until finally the nation was solidified when God powerfully freed Israel from that captivity, formally established her as His people under the covenant of His Law, and then marched them into His Promised Land, albeit after a couple tries...SO by the time you get to **1 Samuel 17** here, Israel is in the land, being lead now by a King named Saul, BUT surrounded by enemies. One of which is the Philistines. And the Philistines "*are gathered for battle.*"

Now little historical note for you here: The Philistines were Israel's arch-enemies. In many respects they were the reason Israel became a monarchy in the first place. Cuz even though Israel had GOD as their King, and after the Patriarchs, a bunch of Judges or Governors who lead them

¹ www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authormef=Becky+Barrow

² Lightly edited quote taken from Piper as cited in "Anxiety" // Matthew 6:24-34 // Smoke from a Fire #2 - J.D. Greear

over time, if you go back to *1 Samuel 8-9* you see that as they looked around at other nations who had Kings that “fought battles on behalf of the nation,” they became jealous. Sadly, national security was more important to Israel than spiritual security. And so they demanded that Samuel, who was a kind of spiritual-political figure, appoint Saul King. BECAUSE they thought, with Saul's good looks/commanding presence, he'll be perfect. And so it's not a stretch to say that the reason Saul is King is precisely for the kind of situation in which Israel finds itself here in *ch.17*: to be a champion for Israel!

But notice, while it says, “*the Philistines GATHERED their armies for battle,*” “*Saul and the men of Israel WERE gathered.*” And there's two things to note there: **One**, is that if Saul had been made king, first-and-foremost, to deal with the Philistine threat, he's obviously not doing a very good job, cuz the Philistines are alive-and-well here. But **Two**, the language there is indicative of Saul's leadership negligence. Cuz while the Philistines, it says, “*GATHERED,*” which is active voice, meaning they were strategically marshaling of troops for battle, Israel it says, “*WAS gathered*” - passive voice - meaning there's no sign of leadership here. SAUL is just among those who “*were gathered.*”³ And so the implication here is that he's a kind of absentee King, who at BEST, is in denial about the surrounding threats, and at WORST, is selfishly avoiding em!... Which is why, you see, Israel is at a dangerous stand-still with an arch-enemy. You see it says, “*the Philistines stood on the mountain on one side, and Israel on the other, with a valley between em.*” So you got two armies each occupying a ridge, but split by a valley. And they're at a stand-still because if you moved your army into the valley to advance on the opposition, you'd not only give up your high-ground, but you'd completely expose yourself. So presumably for weeks, neither the Philistines nor the Israelites are making a move...UNTIL a dangerous situation for Israel...turns into an **Impossible One!**

Because it says, “*There came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath,*” who calls to the Israelites across the valley saying, “*Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he fights and kills me, then we'll be your servants. But if I prevail...then you shall be ours...*” And what Goliath's doing here was something very common in ancient warfare. He's proposing what was known as a “Champion Fight,” whereby the best warrior from each side battled each other in a kind of winner take-all situation - Think the Brad Pitt movie “Troy” when Achilles fights Boagrius to save everyone a lot of headache...And so if we stopped here the assumption is, “*Ok, it's gonna be Goliath vs Saul/winner take all.*” Cuz of course Saul is Israel's champion! *1 Samuel 9:2* says the reason Israel chose Saul as their King was because, quote, “*there was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.*” Saul was Israel's “Goliath”...and yet, as *v.16* says, “*For 40 days (Goliath) came forward (issuing the challenge)*”, and not once does Saul step-up...He's afraid/looking out for himself or again, just in denial about the threat...Which to be fair to Saul, makes sense because Goliath literally embodies an **impossible opponent**. You see we're told he's from “*Gath,*” which was a city that Israel had repeatedly tried to subjugate, but had only ever been partially successful at. And so Goliath is of a people, who literally just

³ Insights about Saul from John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 304.

won't die! **Also**, you see that he's "six cubits and a span" tall. And depending on who you read, that means Goliath is anywhere between 6'9" and 9'9," likely somewhere in the middle - like 8" tall. Just a massive man, especially in comparison to the average Hebrew/certainly Hebrew boy like David. **And then Finally**, you see he's covered in bronze weaponry, cuz the Philistines had a monopoly on metalworking. And so he's got a spear, just the head of which weighs "six hundred shekels of iron" or 15lbs. Literally, just the point of his spear is as big as a dumbbell...He's got a shield that's so big it took another soldier just to carry it for him. And among other things, he's wearing a suit of armor that weighs "five thousand shekels of bronze" or 126lbs. Can you imagine trying to move/much less fight while wearing a 126lb coat? This is an **impossible opponent**...and given the way in which Goliath continually taunts Israel; "I defy the ranks of Israel" he says, and later to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" HE believes, just by the assessment of skills and abilities, that he's an **impossible opponent!**

But if you keep going you see that he's about to run up against an **improbable champion** in David. And I say, "improbable," because honestly David appears pretty weak. We're told, for example, that he's the youngest of 8 sons, so presumably no more than maybe 12 or 13 year here...He's a shepherd not a trained combatant...When Saul offers him his armor, David says, "I can't go with these, for I've not tested em," literally, "I've never worn armor like this." So David's young, unprotected, seemingly unskilled, and by virtue of the fact that he literally shows up to a knife fight with a rock, kinda unarmed...though unlike Saul, he is confident...But I want you to see WHY He's confident. It's not in the way Goliath was confident. No! David is confident because He knows who's actually going to be doing the fighting here - not him, but God through him!...That's why you see when David is sent by his father to check on his brothers, and he finds out, in **v.24**, that his countrymen aren't fighting cuz they're scared - literally, "shattered and greatly afraid,"⁴ he immediately questions their fear, because this is a man, you understand, who believed that what made Israel Israel was not their personal assets, but God's presence. Which is why he says to Saul in **v.32**, "Let no man's heart fail because of (Goliath). Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine," at which point he then says 2 things: One to Saul and one to Goliath: **To Saul**, he tells him he's confident to fight cuz, as a shepherd, he's fought off bears and lions before. And notice that's not a confidence in himself, but a confidence in the Lord. As he says in **v.37**, "The LORD delivered me from the paw of the lion and the bear and will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Then **Second**, he says to Goliath, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD...The battle is the LORD's."

And you know the rest: David picks out one of his 5 stones, places it in his sling, and hurls it at Goliath. And taking into account the stones in the area, which likely would've been Barium Sulfate stones, which are twice as dense as normal rocks and the fact that what David had was not a slingshot, but a sling; a double-corded hurling device that could turn around at 6-7 revolutions a second, and project a Barium Sulfate stone like at well over two hundred miles an hour and with a stopping power equal to that of a bullet coming out of 45mm handgun. So yes,

⁴ John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 304.

it's possible to take down a giant with a stone...which David does, hitting him in his most vulnerable spot, right between the eyes, and rendering him unconscious, so that, adding insult to injury, he can then run over, take Goliath's own sword, and chop his head off...the sight of which causes the Philistines to flee...And the formerly terrified Israelites? They're now filled with courage to pursue and kill the fleeing Philistines, cuz of course, their biggest battle had already been won. That's the iconic story of David and Goliath!

So let's pull it all together! What's it actually about? Is it about: *"The bigger they are, the harder they fall?"* Or *"there's always hope for the underdog, so never stop believing?"* Or how about, *"If you trust God, like David, God'll give you victory over the 'giants' in your life?"*⁵ Is that what this is about?...No! What this story is showing you is that there are about 3 ways to **face your fear**, but only 1 works. Take note of these: **First**, there's, we'll call it, **The Saul Way**: And this one's obvious; the reason why every instance we get of Saul is one in which he's just not being very kingly is because his posture toward fear is to, at best, deny it, and at worst, avoid it and look out only for himself...And to be sure, that's one way in which the world tells us to deal with our fear. We're told, *"Just don't think about it. Distract/entertain/protect yourself. Think positive thoughts."* Basically stuff your fear!...The problem of course with that is that it puts you out-of-touch with reality. You denying fearful situations is by-definition being out-of-touch with reality. But WORSE, if you're simply looking out for yourself and thinking, *"I'll play it safe and in a sense do the selfish thing here,"* we all know, that kind of posture can totally wreak havoc on your life. I don't do a ton of formal counseling, but I do get the opportunity to hear a lot of people's stories and one of the things that's so common for me to hear is how many people's lives have been warped or distorted in some way because their parents didn't know how to **face fear**. Maybe they were afraid of not being successful. And so what they did was take the selfish way out and overwork, which of course left em without any time for their children...Or they were afraid of their children growing up and not liking em, so instead of actually ever disciplining em, they again took the safe/selfish way out and instead of offering loving discipline, they only gave distraction; activities, hobbies, screens, whatever. And they probably knew that wasn't the best parenting, but they were afraid. And like Saul they dealt with fear by denying or avoiding it only to find it wreak havoc! The **Saul Way** and it doesn't work!

But there's also **The Goliath Way**: And you see it in all the details we're given ABOUT Goliath. Robert Alter, who's a great Hebrew scholar, notes that the inclusion of all these very specific details, ya know about his armor, demeanor - is intentional. Cuz typically hebrew literature was very sparse. So when there's lots of details, it's for a reason. And Alter says the reason is this/ listen: *"Goliath moves into the action as a man of iron and bronze, an almost grotesquely quantitative embodiment of a hero, - this hulking monument to an obtusely mechanical conception of what constitutes power."*⁶ What's he saying? He's saying: Goliath represents a kind of broken but common way of dealing with your fear; namely, by trying to banish it through looking at yourself. And I say common, because this is a very conventional way of approaching

⁵ Cliches adapted from J. D. Greear, *"Courage: 1 Samuel 17:1-54,"* in *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive* (Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017), 1 Sa 17:1-54.

⁶ The Hero of Heroes - The Gospel According to David—January 25, 2004 - 1 Samuel 17:32-50 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

fear. Cuz what Goliath does/what we often do is look at what we have at our disposal right? For Goliath, it was experience, skill, strength, self-esteem, even high-end/at least for the time - technology. He thinks, *“I’ve got all this going for me. David you got nothing. So why be afraid?”* And a lot of us/even a lot of counseling tells us to think that way. If you’re an athlete, you’re told visualize victory right? Imagine yourself having what it takes! If you’re in academia it’s all about your pedigree. We even tell new parents when they’re experiencing fear about raising kids to read this book, learn this technique and *“you’ll get the hang of it.”* ...But what are we actually saying? We’re saying *“You can do it! You’ve got it in you. So banish that fear.”* But of course there’s a couple problems with that. **One** is, it again, puts you out-of-touch with reality. Cuz it’s a kind of faux-optimism. In many respects, the reason Goliath was so easily taken down was because in all his assessing of himself, he became oblivious to the actual danger in front of him/that a kid could shoot a rock at the speed of bullet and take him out... We even have a saying for this right? Pride comes before the...*what?*...fall. But **Two**, it’s kinda ignorant to think you can just will yourself to not be afraid, by ya know, essentially marketing yourself TO yourself. Again, let’s say you find in yourself a lot assets. Great! Now it’s pretty hard to keep you from being arrogant and blind to danger. But let’s say you don’t. Let’s say you assess yourself and find you DON’T have the requisite education, ability, experience, looks, health, what-have-you. Well now, you’re not risking arrogance; you’re risking depression and being even more afraid than when you started, cuz you’ve looked at yourself and now you KNOW you don’t have what it takes! You see? Neither the **Goliath** nor the **Saul** Way works!

So what does work? We’ll call it the **Israelite Way**. And I say Israelite vs the “David Way,” because honestly David’s not much of an example for us to follow, and nor is he intended to be. Again, this isn’t a story about “facing your giants.” Or “having the courage of David.” Cuz you notice, not once does David ever call the Israelites to follow him. He’s never like, *“ok guys. Here’s what I’m gonna do and you just follow my lead.”* No! And nor does he ever indicate that WHAT he does is for anyone to emulate. No! He attributes it all to God. If David’s an example to emulate, he’s honestly a bad one...But he’s not. Rather, he’s a pointer. Cuz again, let’s not put ourselves in the story where most people try. We’re not David being called to face our giants. No, we’re more like Saul or Israelites shrinking back in fear. What we NEED is someone to step in and save us NOT through emulation but imputation. **You know that word? Imputation?** It means crediting through substitution! In other words its what David does for the Israelites. He substitutes himself/takes on the champion, so that when he wins, his victory gets credited to his people. It’s like in court. If you’re on trial for something, you get attorney who acts as your advocate. And if that advocate is brilliant and experienced and great in court, then his or her victory becomes your victory. Whatever happens to your advocate is imputed to you/comes to you.⁷ The same was true with David! His victory became the people’s victory...Imputation!

And you see the powerful impact that had on Israel. As **v.52** says, *“they rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron...”* You see? Because David took

⁷ Illustration from Timothy J. Keller, *“David’s Courage,”* in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014–2015* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2015), 1 Sa 17:32–50.

out the real giant on their behalf, they could now bravely face all the lesser giants.⁸ Cuz that's how it works right? If you know your truly great problems are taken care of, NOT because you've avoided em, or told yourself you have what it takes to overcome em, but because they've been defeated FOR you, then you'll most definitely find the ability/maybe even joy to face whatever lesser problems come your way... Friends, what God gives to fearful people like you and me, is not an example. He gives us a champion, who doesn't deal with our fears through emulation or even inspiration, but through substitution and imputation.⁹... Which is why we can say David is not an example for us to follow here, but a pointer... Pointing us to how YOUR greatest problem and mine/OUR biggest giant has been defeated!

Cuz ya know one of the really arresting things about Jesus as He's portrayed in the Scriptures, is how often He didn't seem to "fix" the problems those around Him thought were most pressing. ***You ever noticed that?*** Like, for example, everyone from the Pharisees to His own Disciples to even John the Baptist wanted Jesus to be this Messiah who showed up and made the world fly right, specifically, by overthrowing Rome... So like, when John is doing his ministry out in the wilderness we're told in ***Matthew 3*** that he rejoiced at the arrival of Christ and began telling people that Jesus had come to "*separate the good from the bad and to judge with fire.*" - the very definition of making the world fly right, right? And yet the more Jesus was on the scene, the more He seemed to be content, ya know, restoring sight to a few blind people, healing a couple folks, cleansing some lepers, and basically just preaching good news to poor, oppressed people. In other words, instead of intervening, and taking care of the "BIG giants," most of Jesus' life and ministry looked like non-intervention and honestly a focus on the wrong things... until in the end He simply died and disappeared (literally, was crucified, witnessed to have resurrected, but then ascended into heaven), seemingly leaving no solution to the big giants of our lives...

But here's the thing. All along Jesus had been showing and telling us why He'd come. And it wasn't to deal with the things we think are our true giants; ya know, the deterioration of our health, or loss of our family, jobs, ambitions... but rather our separation from God. That's why in that famous account in ***Mark 2*** of Jesus healing the paralytic after his 4 friends lowered him down through the roof of the house, He didn't say, "*I've healed this man so that you may know that I have the authority to fix all your perceived problems.*" No! He said, "*I've healed this man so that you may know that I have the authority to forgive sin,*" meaning deal with an even greater problem - your separation from God!... Cuz if that problem's taken care of, you'll be able to face lesser problems courage and even joy. For example, you no longer need to be afraid of death, because when that diagnosis comes/if it comes, the worst it can do to you, is usher you into the loving arms of your Savior for eternity... You no longer need to be afraid of your future flying out of your control, for example. Cuz if you lose your job/when you lose your job, or something falls through financially, you KNOW you've got something even more secure than a job. You've got the assurance of God who promises "*to never leave or forsake you*" and "*to work all things for your good*"... And among other things, you no longer need, for example, to be afraid of what

⁸ Adapted from quote in J. D. Greear, "[Courage: 1 Samuel 17:1-54.](#)" in *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive* (Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017), 1 Sa 17:1-54.

⁹ Quote adapted from Timothy J. Keller, "[David's Courage.](#)" in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*, (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2015), 1 Sa 17:32-50.

others think of you. Because in Christ, you have the approval of the only opinion that truly counts!¹⁰...If the REAL giant of your separation from God is taken care of, you'll be able to face all other lesser giants. And friend, that REAL giant is taken care of! Because you see, even more than David, Jesus is our true champion. Because of course, like David, Jesus was from Bethlehem...*Matthew 1:1* opens the NT by calling Him, "*Jesus Christ the son of David.*"...Just like David was sent by his father out of concern for his other children, so too God the Father sent Jesus into the world, as *John 3:16* says, "*so that no one would perish*"...Just as David obediently stepped up to face a giant, when no one else would or could, so too Jesus obediently stepped up to face the even greater giant of Sin, Satan and Death...And just as David defeated Goliath in a most improbable way, so too, on the Cross, Jesus defeated death in a most improbable way - By Himself dying in your place - So that in His death/the death of God on your behalf, would be as NT Wright said, "*the death of death,*" whereby you and I can now be forgiven of our fear, lack of courage and sin, while also being filled with the Spirit, and brought back into loving relationship with God once-and-for-all!...AND NOT not because you or I contributed something to the process, but because like Saul and the Israelites, we were helpless and afraid - like "*sheep without a shepherd,*" in need of a Champion to stand in our place and impute His victory to us!

Don't you see, this story isn't about "*having the courage of David,* or "*rooting for the underdog*" or "*facing your giants.*" It's about the Gospel: The Good News that Jesus Christ has won an extraordinary victory on your behalf, so that if like the Israelites, you simply acknowledge your need for a champion/a savior, and then place your confidence in His victory for you, you'll find yourself being able to **face whatever lesser fears** come your way!...***So let me ask you: If you knew the source of your ultimate fear/your separation from God was dealt with; would you believe it, and how would that change the way you approached whatever's got you concerned today?***...Take a moment to think about that...

¹⁰ Examples adapted from J. D. Greear, "Courage: 1 Samuel 17:1-54." in *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive* (Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017), 1 Sa 17:1-54.