

Prayers

Opening prayer

Dear Lord, forgive me when I have failed to live up to the standards to which I aspire, for I long to be Your servant and to do Your will. In the face of temptations, give me the courage to choose to do what is right and turn away from the tempter, and in the face of spiritual danger, give me the strength to stand firm in faith and the resolve to do what is good and right. Show me Your pathway and lead me within it I pray, and receive this my prayer, dear Lord; AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: PREJUDICE

1. For yourself

Pray for strength to stand against the enemy when he tempts you into the pathways of prejudice, and pray for the courage to love all people equally

2. For your friends and family

Offer all your loved ones and friends to God without prejudice, and in prayer, seek God's will for them and for their daily work

3. For the church and its work

Pray that God's people will always stand against favouritism and prejudice, stand as a beacon of what is right within the darkness of our world

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for your own country, that it will always choose the path of godliness and give all people equally opportunities and equal value.

Meditation

Lord God, Almighty Father, Rock of ages,
Inventor, Designer, Composer and Artist.

Flood my senses with the ecstasy of life,
And overpower the fruitless pains of death.

Irradiate my soul with the brilliance of Your light,
And absorb the darker evils of self.

Energise my enthusiastic soul with love,
And purge the dismal paths of gloom.

Stretch my mind with the intricacies of truth,
And burst all selfish myths of supremacy.

Lord God, Rock of Ages, Prince of Peace
Principal, leader, colleague and aide.

Excite me by the possibilities of life,
And paint me with colours of godliness.

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Samuel 17:38-49

³⁸ Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armour on him and a bronze helmet on his head. ³⁹ David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. He said to Saul,

‘I cannot go in these, because I am not used to them.’

So he took them off. ⁴⁰ Then he 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.

⁴¹ Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield-bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David.

⁴² He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him.

⁴³ He said to David,

‘Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?’

And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. David then said,

⁴⁴ ‘Come here, and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!

⁴⁵ You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

⁴⁶ This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. ⁴⁷ All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’S, and he will give all of you into our hands.’

⁴⁸ As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet him. ⁴⁹ Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground!

Review

At last, the story line of 1 Samuel arrives at the climax of Israel’s battle with the Philistines, and David faces Goliath. But by the time the fight commences, we already know that David has equipped himself to win, guided by the Lord, and he dedicates the victory to the Lord.

The famous story of David and Goliath draws towards its climax, but the story line continues as previously, which is very slowly. Today’s reading begins with David preparing for battle and ends with him victorious, standing over the body of his fallen opponent! But this story is not just about the slaughter of Goliath. As we read, it yields advice about how someone might prepare to face an enemy (17:39f.), and for the first time, David stands tall to give a powerful address (17:44-47), defying Goliath and telling everyone that God’s hand is on Israel for success in battle.

As we get drawn deeper into the story, we must bear in mind one particular feature. Saul was clearly unable or unwilling to fight Goliath himself, and as King, he cut a rather pathetic figure. In those days, people expected that their King would ride out before them and be a ‘champion’ on the field of battle. But if we have read the previous chapters of 1 Samuel, then we will remember that Saul had indeed lost his way. This acclaimed warrior King was now afraid to fight, and in a desperate attempt to find someone brave enough to challenge Goliath, he had made some rash promises. He said that anyone who killed Goliath would receive this combination; great wealth, the hand of his daughter in marriage, and freedom from paying taxes in Israel (17:25)!

Saul’s package might have tempted any man to fight, but we already know the outcome of the story. David will kill Goliath, but his reward will not be easy to grasp. David certainly ended up getting married to Saul’s daughter (18:17f.), but we do not know whether he received any wealth from Saul. However, Saul’s protestations of generosity will soon sound rather hollow as his darker moods get the better of him, and he begins to realise that David is a competitor for his throne (18:10f.)

But what of our reading today? Most of it is a stunning description of how David strips away the fear and terror of battle, so that he is able to fight Goliath on his own terms, and win. We pick up the story in the court of Saul, where David has presented himself to the King as one able to fight Goliath, and Saul attempts to address him in his own armour (17:38). Surely, the writer of this passage intends us to laugh at the sight of

the young David walking around in a suit of armour too big for him, and weighed down with a bronze helmet that obstructs his view and means he cannot get his balance (17:39)! David declines the offer of armour, saying politely, *'I am not used to them!'* (17:39)

The tension mounts as David chooses his weapons of war. He has rejected the complex armour created by humanity, and now he selects the simple tools of a shepherd, carried by every shepherd boy in the hope they will not have to be used, but played with and practised over and over again so that their use might save his life. He chose a sling and five stones (17:40), and we can only imagine the incredulity of those who watched David. The King and the entire army of Israel were about to place their destiny in their hands of this handsome young man (17:41) and his sling and five stones!

If Israel was shocked by David, Goliath was dumbfounded! Again, the storyline accepts that the reader knows what will happen, and we are tempted to laugh out loud at the sight of the great Goliath cursing and swearing at this young and the vulnerable man standing before him. It is a curse too far for the man who believes that his physical might can bring down the armies of God! David now delivers a speech that stands out at the heart of this story of David and Goliath. In it, he dedicates everything to the *'name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel'* (17:45). He tells Goliath in no uncertain tones that he is to be killed in a very public manner (17:46), and declares what is now obvious to all of us who read the story. This is not battle about physical might, it is about the will of God to give his people victory.

So David delivers the coup de grace in two different ways. Firstly, he declares God's will (17:45f.), and secondly, he fires a single shot from his sling into the forehead of the aggressor, Goliath, and kills him (17:49). If we are too sensitive today to the fact that David killed a man, then we must point out that in those days, people had to fight each other simply to exist. For Israel, the price of failure on the battlefield would most likely be annihilation and the end of God's covenant. If the descendants of Abraham were slaughtered on the battlefield, God's plan of salvation would have to start again, and God was not going to let this happen. In the midst of this apparently insurmountable problem, David was the man who stepped forward to God's will.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What does this passage teach us about spiritual warfare, especially David's rejection of Saul's armoury?
2. Read through David's speech (17:45-47)? How does this give glory to God, and what is special about Israel?
3. What can we learn from David's slaughter of Goliath? Or is it inappropriate for us to try and learn a spiritual truth from the death of someone on the Old Testament?

Discipleship challenges

- *Think about the first part of the passage. It teaches in a straightforward manner that the weapons for our warfare are simpler than we think, and we must trust them. How do you fight evil? What are the simple weapons of your warfare, and where do they come from?*
 - *Pray for those who face difficult decisions in this life, and feel that life is something of a battle. Pray that they will have the courage to face the 'Goliath' that stands before them and slaughter him as David killed Goliath. Pray for courage and godliness in spiritual warfare.*
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Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You fought a tremendous fight against the enemy Satan, and You won that battle on the Cross. May we have the courage to persist in doing what we are called to do even though it can be hard to press on, and guide us through the perils of this life into Your Kingdom. We praise You, Jesus our Lord and our Victor. AMEN

