

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord God, speak to us above the noise of our world. Speak clearly, so we do not mistake Your voice, as we have done so often in the past. Speak with wisdom, so we can hear, learn, and do what You have said. Speak directly to our hearts so we may know for sure that the voice we hear is Yours. Speak to us, Lord Jesus, make Yourself known, and inspire us by Your love. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: SCHOOLS

1. For yourself

Praise the Lord for all His blessings; do not hold back. Praise Him until you have no more breath, and praise Him still ...

2. For your friends and family

Lift those you love to the Lord and give thanks to God for the way they have blessed you and contributed to your life

3. For the church and its work

In prayer, ask the Lord to show you His plans for the young people of your church. Wait on Him, and then share these things with others ...

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

Pray that your country will meet its obligations to educate the young, and pray for those who drop out of the system because of social problems. Pray in earnest, and listen to what the Lord says to you while you pray.

Meditation

What seems so glorious in this life can never lead heavenward;
So let the Spirit lead you to where He can give you new life.

Forsake wealth, it pledges much, but consumes the weaker soul;
So, accept such poverty as leaves you free to find salvation!

Forsake status, it saps the human heart of honesty and warmth;
So, accept the lowest role so God can shape you as He will!

Forsake power, it tempts the strong to trust in strength and force;
So, accept your weaknesses, and trust in His empowering love.

Forsake success, it traps you into thinking that you have achieved;
So, accept that losing marks the place where new things start.

And if you did not think that God had come to turn the world around,
You may just find that when He does, true life begins!

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Samuel 17:50-58

⁵⁰ So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. ⁵¹ David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

⁵² Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron.

⁵³ When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp. ⁵⁴ David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem, and he put the Philistine's weapons in his own tent.

⁵⁵ As Saul watched David going out to meet the Philistine, he said to Abner, commander of the army,

'Abner, whose son is that young man?'

Abner replied,

'As surely as you live, O king, I don't know.'

⁵⁶ The king said,

'Find out whose son this young man is.'

⁵⁷ As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head.

⁵⁸ 'Whose son are you, young man?'

Saul asked him. David said,

'I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem.'

Review

The story of David's early life is certainly complicated! We have followed David now from when he was found by Samuel and anointed king of all Israel (1 Sam 16:1f.), to his introduction at court, and now his appearance on the battlefield. David had come to the battle at first to supply his brothers, but he was able to see the predicament of the disheartened Israelite army. With great personal courage, trust in God, presence of mind and agility, he put himself forward to fight Goliath, and overcame the enemy. His dramatic victory (17:50,51) secured the unexpected defeat of the Philistine army, and catapulted him to fame.

The first part of our passage today is a text which give people great difficulty today, because it appears gloat over the death of Goliath (17:50,51), and we find it unpleasant. But we must think of this event in terms of what a battle was really like in ancient times. If Israel had lost, she would have endure the horrors of rape and pillage, and the destruction of her young state. This is what the Philistines planned, so the Israelites were fighting for their lives and the existence of their nation.

Against this background, it was important that David win and be seen to win (17:51), and that the Philistine threat was terminated (17:52). As was the practice in those days, David also had the right to present a trophy of his battle so that everyone could see that he was responsible for Israel's deliverance (17:53,54). All this is quite a story, and it might make a good 'storyboard' for a Hollywood movie, but David's life was only just beginning.

Today's reading presents us with a quandary, for when King Saul asked '*who is this young man?*' (17:55) we think Saul must surely have known David already. David had been appointed as a court musician and had played in Saul's presence (1 Sam 16:23)! Now perhaps Saul did not recognise David, which might be understandable given that David played when Saul was manic, but Saul's question still sounds curious, had he not talked with him before the battle (17:31-40)? Some reckon that this is an example of different parts of David's story being pieced together without concern for historical sequence, but it may be more simple than that. The scribes who put this Scripture together were probably intent on conveying David's spiritual significance to Israel, so the historical sequence was not important to them.

Nevertheless, at the centre of this story is the amazing and enigmatic figure of David. He was still young, and described here as a 'stripling' (17:56), an obedient son, a hard worker, an experienced shepherd, a keen observer of everything around him both natural and human, a skilled musician, and, more to the point, a national hero who, quite literally, held the head of his enemy in his hand (17:51)! Moreover, he had won over the people of Israel for saving their lives! David had clearly demonstrated the key qualities of service and obedience which would enable him to become a great servant of God and Israel in his later years. But the real intrigue of the story is this; how would David, already anointed King by Samuel, eventually become the true King of Israel? And what would he do in the uncertain times ahead while King Saul still lived, before he could become King?

In any other ancient nation, a young pretender who had just defeated an enemy single handed would have claimed the throne immediately. His ascendancy would have been hard to resist, so there is a tense scene in our passage, where the commander of Israel's armies has to introduce the triumphant David to King Saul (17:55f.); it is an incredibly tense moment. The King had let his people down by not fighting Goliath himself, and now he was now faced by the man who had, and won. Abner may well have expected David to take out his sword and dispatch Saul on the spot, whereupon he would have raised David's hand and all Israel would have shouted 'Hail King David!' But this was not God's way, and this is the clear message of this passage of Scripture. David accepted Saul's authority as the anointed King of Israel even though he had failed, and in this way, David shows his humility and honour as God's servant.

David had made a good start, not as a potential King of Israel, but as a servant of the Lord. He also showed these gifts and graces; he used his natural gifts of strength and wisdom in God's service, he showed a clear desire to serve God above all else, he showed that he had an ear for God's voice, and also had the valuable ability to discern when to act and when to submit to his elders.

At a time when people too easily look with awe at what happens in the world, and see the astonishing things done in commerce and industry as well as science and technology, David's story reminds us of the simple truths of what God looks for in His servants. It begs us look carefully at human motives and the long lost qualities of honesty and integrity that have been abandoned by many today. Most importantly, they show us what happens in real life when God's servants follow His will and do what He wants. Perhaps the time has come for some Davids to slay a few more Goliaths so that God's will is done again on earth.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Which characteristics of David are, in your opinion, relevant to leadership within the church today?
2. Does this story tell us any more about David than what has been discussed in the study?
3. In what ways would the story of God's people would have been different if David had assumed authority after killing Goliath?

Discipleship challenges

- *What has featured in your mind as you have read this text? Write it down and then pray about it over a period of time such as a week.*
- *Look at the leadership of your own church and assess whether you feel it is built on godly principles. Talk to the leaders themselves about this.*
- *Have you longed to be in leadership, to be a 'David'? Bring this to the Lord in prayer; few people are like David, so ask the Lord to reveal your true calling.*

Final Prayer

You, Lord God, are my leader; You are my inspiration and my guide. You are one who goes before, alongside and behind me, and You are there when I need You in all the circumstances of life. Do not leave me, for I rely on your faithfulness. Bless me, Lord God: AMEN
