

March 31

1 Samuel 16 and 17

Hello and welcome to the March 31 installment of Project 4:4. My name is Lisa Ashton and I serve as an intern with Christ Community's Adult Ministries. Today's reading covered 1 Samuel 16 and 17, the beginning of our adventures with one of the most popular characters in the Bible – David.

Our first lesson about David is found in chapter 16 verse 7. "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart." This was God's response to Samuel's expectation that David's older brother, Eliab, was the one that God will choose to be the next king of Israel. Eliab was tall and handsome, athletic and strong, but God's choice for a future king followed a different set of criteria.

Although we could read no specific reason offered for God's choice of David, we can imply from the verse that God's choice was supported by the state of David's heart. Samuel and Jesse were both looking at the outward appearances of Jesse's sons, but God was looking for something much deeper, a man's heart – his character, his passions, his courage, his affections.

This makes me wonder - how often do we (to use a modern expression) 'judge the book by its cover?' I know I do that at times. Think about this: Is there anything or anyone in your life that you may be wrong about because you are basing your opinions on external factors? Do you make snap judgments about someone based on how they look...how old they are...or what they have? Thankfully, God doesn't do that. External appearances don't impress Him much. Remember, it's what's inside that really counts, and God always knows what is on the inside of a man or woman.

Moving on. To close off chapter 16, I wanted to comment on a verse that may be troubling to you... It says that when the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, an evil spirit "from the Lord" came upon Saul. There is no passage of Scripture that would justify an understanding that God sends demons to trouble people and destroy them. What the author is probably acknowledging with his choice of words here is the fact that even demons are subject to the sovereignty of God, and can work no mayhem that He does not allow and to which He ultimately sets the boundaries. We will have more opportunity to speak together about this when we read the Book of Job. For now, suffice it to say that Saul rejected God and was rejected by God. There was no evidence whatever of genuine repentance. Because Saul had persisted in his own selfish schemes, I believe the repetitive principle found in Romans 1 is in effect here. – God gave Saul up to his dishonorable passions and debased mind. When a person rejects God and walks away, he does not often remain without any spiritual influence. Spiritual vacuums tend to be filled, and when the Spirit of God left Saul, another spirit was ready to fill the void.

Ok, are you ready to tackle chapter 17? I sure am. Chapter 17 contains one of the most memorable showdowns in the Bible. A classic underdog story where an unlikely

hero emerges, defeats the enemy, and claims a seemingly impossible victory! It's the story of David and Goliath. What's not to like about a young man who took five smooth stones from the brook and went out to face the armored giant on behalf of his nation and in defense of the glory of his God! It is a magnificent story worthy of being read and re-read.

Before we plunge into the story itself there are two insights I wanted to share with you. First, when Saul laid out the honors that would be given to the warrior brave enough and strong enough to defeat Goliath in single combat, one of the "perks" that was offered was an exemption on taxes for he and the whole of his father's family. As far as I know, this is the first mention of taxation under the newly established monarchy in Israel, and it is interesting to me because of the prediction that Samuel made before he anointed Saul as king. He told the people that one of the burdens a king would force upon them was the burden of excessive taxation. By the time of David's youth, it was already becoming a reality!

Second, the concept of allowing the result of a battle between two armies to rest upon the result of single combat between two champions is not unique to the biblical account. We know that this practice existed in the world of the ancient Greeks, in the age of Homer, at a time not long before the events of this chapter occurred. Since the Philistine people were almost certainly related to the Greeks, it is not surprising to find them proposing such a contest here. I am sure that the physical superiority of Goliath was all the more satisfying to the Philistines, in light of the rather painful memory of the late judge of Israel named Samson. "Now", they would have reasoned, "We have a Hercules of our own! Now it's our turn to taunt and shame the Israelites and their God" – little did they know the faith of the young, unlikely warrior.

I want for us to notice that the faith of David is clearly rooted in two things. First, there is his understanding of who God is. His first reference to his understanding of the nature of God is made in the indignation that he displays at the daily scene he witnesses when Goliath issues the challenge. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine," he asks. "Who is he to defy the army of the living God?" Israel's God, unlike Dagon of the Philistines, is alive; He is real! That fact makes all the difference for David's faith. When he walks onto the field of combat to accept Goliath's challenge, he says, "I come in the name of the Lord Almighty." David really knew who God was and that gave him incredible faith.

But there is a second foundation stone upon which David's faith is also built, and that is the "bedrock" of his own experience of the faithlessness of God in his life. In his own experience as a shepherd, he had relied upon and experienced the faithfulness of God in delivering him from the paw of the bear and the jaws of the lion. Since God's power and faithfulness have already been proven on those fields of conflict, there is no reason to fear that it will not be proven once again in this battle.

When we know who God is and we can reflect upon what He has already done in our own experience, it is not difficult to trust Him for even greater things to come. What demonstration of God's faithfulness in YOUR past can help you trust him today?

I was impressed again as I read chapter 17 with the motive of David's heart. He is displeased at the open insult given to the dignity of God's glory by the unmet challenge of the Philistine. And he is completely committed to seeing the glory of God magnified. His motto might well have been "to God be the glory." His desire, stated in his own words to Goliath is that "The whole world will know that there is a God in Israel." That is David's agenda. Contrast it with Saul's, who after the last battle went up to Carmel to erect a monument to the glory of himself. David wants the whole world to know, not about the new champion of Israel - David the son of Jesse, but about the greatness and the glory of the God of Israel. Remember his words, "It is not by spear or sword that the Lord saves, for the battle is the Lord's."

Our story today ultimately points us forward to the true champion and saver of our souls, Jesus Christ. If David was an unlikely hero who defied the enemy, how much more so is Jesus, our greatest hero because he defeated sin, conquered the giant of death and offered we, his people, victory in him!

This is Lisa Ashton reminding you that Almighty God has the power to help you overcome any impossible situation. I pray that the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, will equip you in whatever battle you face today. Blessings.