

“Mountains, Valleys, & Caves: David in the Valley of Elah”

Asbury United Methodist Church

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- Church, I have a question for you today: What does a cheeseboard, a bear, and five smooth stones all have in common? Well, they are all a part of our Scripture passage today. We’ll get there in a minute.

- Right now, let’s recap where we’ve been over the past several weeks. We began this new year with a new sermon series called “Mountains, Valleys, and Caves.”
 - In this series, we are journeying together through the entire Bible, as well as talking about the mountains and the valleys (the highs and the lows) that we all go through in life.

- We began this series by looking at the first chapters of the Bible. Where God creates the heavens and the earth and humankind – and everything is very good.
 - Yet, humankind rebelled against God and sin, death, and darkness entered the world.
 - Even in our rebellion, though, God loved us and sought to redeem us. God had a plan for redemption.

- And this plan for redemption began with a man named Abraham. The Scriptures called him a friend of God, a person who believed God and walked righteously before God.
 - He became the great patriarch of the Jewish people. His son Isaac had a son named Jacob, and Jacob had a son named Joseph.

-Joseph became the second highest-ranking official in all of Egypt and helped bring prosperity to his people. That's how the first book of the Bible (Genesis) ends: on a high note in Egypt.

- The second book of the Bible, Exodus, begins in a very different place. After Joseph died, a new pharaoh had taken over. He was cruel and treated the Israelites harshly.

-However, God raises up a man named Moses to deliver God's people out of slavery in Egypt.

-Although there were certainly challenges along the way, and many valleys, Moses does that. God uses him to bring His people out of slavery in Egypt and through the wilderness.

-However, after leading the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years, and finally bringing them to the edge of the Promised Land, Moses dies. God doesn't permit him to enter the promised land.

-That's where we ended last week, in Deuteronomy 34. The Israelites are ready to enter the promised land, they're at the border, and Moses (their faithful leader of 40 plus years) has died.

- Today, our Scripture passage is in the book of 1st Samuel. However, a lot happens between the book of Deuteronomy and the book of 1st Samuel. In fact, there's three books in between: Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.

-Let's have a brief overview of them.

- So, who was Joshua? He is often called "Joshua, son of Nun" in the Bible, so Pastor Tom likes to joke and say "Joshua didn't have any parents. He was the son of none."

- But Joshua was Moses' successor. He was the person that was to lead the Israelites into the promised land.
- He is very well received. In fact, at the beginning of the book of Joshua, the Israelites say to him: "Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses!"
- And, in many ways throughout Joshua, he is presented as this kind of "New Moses" figure.
 - Joshua leads the Israelites into Canaan, where they defeat different cities of the Canaanites. And, Joshua reminds the Israelites to obey the commands of God.
- The book of Joshua ends with Joshua's death. So, that leaves the Israelites in the promised land, yet (once again) their leader has died. That leaves a vacuum for other leaders to rise.
 - Enter, now, the book of Judges, the next book of the Bible.
- This book tells what happened after Joshua died. And, spoiler alert, things don't go very well. The nation of Israel seems to go down a slippery slope.
 - Even more, the leaders of Israel are these very imperfect people. They're called judges.
- Now, don't think of a modern-day, courtroom judge. A judge in the Old Testament, as a regional, political, military leader in Israel.
 - Some of these Judges saw success, but this is how the book of Judges ends. This is literally the last line in the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

- That'd be a scary place to be. Imagine today, not having any kind of guidelines or boundaries or rules or laws.
 - Everyone drives whatever speed they want. Everyone steals whatever they want. And so on. That's not a good place to be.

- So, I know very little about sports. I can't even tell you the last time I watched an inning of a football game.
 - But, I do know that rules are important in sports!
 - We need the referees and officials and umpires in order to play. And we need the rulebooks and guidelines and all of that for anything to happen. Any sports game out there would be chaos if all of the players just did exactly what they wanted to do.

- Well, that gives us an idea of where the Israelites are, as the story of 1st Samuel begins. There is no king, and everybody is just doing anything they want.
 - We don't have time to look at the book of Ruth today, but it takes place during the time of judges. It's a short book with only four chapters, and is one of the two books in the Bible named after a woman. The other one is Esther.

- Alright, well we have finally arrived in the book we're looking at today! 1st Samuel!
 - The first chapters look at Samuel, who becomes a prophet and also a judge of Israel. The Bible says that he "administered justice" and was a good judge. However, once he gets up there in years, he passes the "judge baton" to his two oldest sons.
 - Now, let's just say they weren't the best. In fact, this is what we read about them: "[They] did not walk in [Samuel's] ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice."

-So, here again, we see Israel being affected by bad, morally corrupt leaders and judges.

- So, the tipping point had finally been reached. The Israelites could take it no longer. They made a request... a big request.

- They wanted a king. They wanted a king to govern them.

- Let's unpack that for a second and ask why they requested a king. On the surface, it looks like a pretty innocent (and, quite frankly) reasonable request. "We've had these bad leaders. Let's get a king! All of these other nations have kings. Why don't we have one?!"

- But, on a much deeper, and more spiritual level, the people asked for a king, because they weren't satisfied with God being their king. That wasn't enough for them.

- God Himself says this to Samuel the prophet: "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."

- God had delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. God had watched over them in the wilderness. God had made a way for them in the promised land. Yet, here they are, saying, "God, you are not enough. We need a king."

- And let's just pause there for a minute. We read that, and think to ourselves, "How could they do that? How could they ask for a king when God was right there with them, every step of the way?"

- But, if we're being honest, so often, we have done the same thing. So often, either with our words or our actions, we have said, "God, you are not enough."

- Instead of finding our everything in God, we try to look to a person to find eternal fulfillment. Maybe that's a significant other. Maybe it's a politician. Maybe it's our employer.
- Or, maybe we look to our careers or education or possessions. Maybe we look to pleasure or even substances in order to experience that which only God can provide.

- Friends, this morning, I want to remind us that God desires to be our everything. He desires, not to just be A king in our lives, but THE king of our lives.
- He is enough. His grace is sufficient. We won't find true, lasting peace or security or comfort or hope anywhere apart from Him, the King of all Kings.

- Alright, back to 1st Samuel. After Israel requests a king, God allows it, and a strong, tall man named Saul is chosen to be king. He starts off really strong, then makes some major mistakes.
- These mistakes cause Saul to be rejected as king. While he is still on the throne, though, a small, ruddy, shepherd boy named David is anointed, and he will become the next king of Israel. ///
- Now, we have covered everything, and we are ready to read our passage of Scripture: Saul is the king of Israel, David will be the next king (although Saul doesn't know that yet), and Israel is at war with the Philistines.

- Our Scripture passage today is 1st Samuel 17:1-11. If you don't have a Bible with you, there are pew Bibles beneath you. This passage is on page 282 in them.
- Out of the reverence we have in our hearts for the word of God, let's stand together.

-I will read most of this text out loud myself, and as a congregation, we will read together the words that Goliath says.
Sound like a plan? Alright.

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. 2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. 3 And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. 4 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six[a] cubits[b] and a span. 5 He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels[c] of bronze. 6 And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. 7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him. 8 He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, **“Why have you** come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” 10 And the Philistine said, **“I defy the** ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together.” 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

- Alright, so the Israelites are in the Valley of Elah, and they are up against the big, bad Philistines.
 - And, they find themselves in a very interesting position. Goliath stands out and says, “Hey, I challenge one of you to fight me. If you win, we will serve you. But if I win, you will serve us.” Thus, the stakes are pretty high!

- Now, while this style of combat seems very foreign to us, it wasn’t uncommon during the time.
 - However, it rarely brought things to a nice resolution. Often, battles would still ensue after one person from one side defeated one person from another side.
 - We actually see that in this text. Even though there is a clear winner at the end between David and Goliath, the winning side still pursues and defeats the losing side.

- But today, our theme is enemies. Now, let’s just be honest for a moment. Our enemies today are likely very different from the enemies that David and the ancient Israelites faced.
 - While we may have human enemies in this life, odds are many of us have enemies that look more like difficult circumstances, or financial challenges, or injustices, or burn out, or anxiety, or sicknesses, or temptations, or Covid, and so on.
 - But, the question isn’t whether or not we’ll have enemies and have battles. We all do and all will. Instead, the question is how we will fight them.
 - And so, today, my hope is that we would look to David and learn how to fight our battles well. We’ll look at how, in just about every way imaginable, David differs from Goliath.
 - I have 5 points of comparison to make, which is cool, because David had 5 smooth stones in his shepherd bag.

- For starters, we see that even their titles are vastly different from each other.
 - Throughout this chapter, Goliath is given a name. What is it? **“Champion.”** He is the Philistine Champion. He is the hero that little Philistine boys would look up to quite literally.
 - Maybe, similar to how little boys today really look up to superheroes...
 - But, all of that to say, Goliath was in the spotlight. People saw him. All eyes were on him.

- Let’s compare that to David. David is not called “champion” in this passage of Scripture. Instead, what is David’s title?
 - “Shepherd”!** David is a shepherd in this passage of Scripture. He’s not even a soldier.
 - We read that David’s older brothers were soldiers. But David, he would go back and forth, caring for his father’s sheep. That’s who David was. The shepherd.
 - So, this is the story of a CHAMPION verses a SHEPHERD.

- Of course, this story has inspired countless more stories and books and movies about the “little guy,” the “underdog,” defeating the seemingly undefeatable powers.
 - I’m sure you can think of many.

- Moving on, we can see that Goliath used his resources to **scare others**. He knew what to say, and how to say it, in order to scare people. And that’s exactly what he did.
 - The last verse that we read claims that “Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine and were dismayed and greatly afraid.

-Goliath had a tactic: scare people. Get in their minds. Make them afraid. Make them terrified.

-That's what Goliath was doing in this text: scaring people.

- We see David doing something completely different in this text, though.

-David isn't scaring people. He isn't even scaring his enemies.

Instead, what is David doing? He is **servicing others**.

-Here's what we read in this chapter: "And Jesse said to David his son, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand [first charcuterie board mentioned in the Bible]. See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them.'"

-And David obeys his father. (SBS, Emily, and "errand boy") He goes and brings the bread and the cheese to the front line. He is servicing his father, he is servicing his brothers, and he is servicing his people.

- What a great example for us to follow. In the presence of our enemies, in the presence of giants... LET'S SERVE!

-Even when the world around us is fearful, let's do something different and service others – like David did.

-I'm reminded of all that we did as a church once Covid hit...

-(Food distributions and covid vaccine clinics)

-And today, I am so inspired by all of our health care workers. In the midst of many challenges, many "Goliaths", you all are showing up, servicing, and saving lives.

-Thank you. Thank you for what you are doing. Thank you for servicing others. You are seen and loved and appreciated. ///

-Like David, let's service others, even in the presence of fear.

- In this passage, we also see that speech matters. Words matter. What we say really does make a difference.

- So, we see Goliath making **self-centered speech**. He's talking about how great he is. He's taunting the people of Israel. He's making them fearful. That was his tactic.

- David stands in stark contrast to that though. Instead of speaking self-centered, arrogant words, **David's speech is God-centered**.

- That is found all throughout this text. David pointing to God. David using his speech to give God the glory.

- That's seen very clearly in verses 31-37.

- In them, David offers to fight Goliath. However, King Saul basically says, "Are ya crazy? You're just a youth. Goliath has been a warrior since he was a youth!"

- But David has a powerful, God-centered response to King Saul. David says, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 36 Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God... The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

- David knew this wasn't about him. David knew that, if he beat Goliath, it would be the Lord's doing. And his speech reflected that.

- And so, I think that begs the question: Who is the center of my speech? Am I always at the center, or is God always at the center? When I talk to others – and even when I talk to myself – who is at the center? For David, it was God.

- If you find yourself up against a giant, a mighty enemy, today, what are you telling yourself? What are you telling others?

- Like David, may our speech reflect the power and might of our awesome God.

- And, I think a great, practical point of application here, is to memorize Scripture.

- Whenever we are actively memorizing the words of the Bible, our speech (like David's) is going to be so much more God-centered.

- Here's a quote from Dallas Willard, my favorite author, about Scripture memorization: "Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization."

- Friends, if we want our speech to be God-centered, let's memorize Scripture.

- Alright, so David and Goliath had different titles (Champion verses Shepherd), different ways of treating people, and different centers of speech.

- We also see that their confidence wasn't placed in the same things either. Let's look at Goliath first.

-Where was his confidence? It was in his armor! He had some very **heavy armor**.

- In fact, I found this to be very interesting this week. The passage that we read out loud earlier, it gives more attention to Goliath's armor than anything else! We often want to emphasize how tall Goliath was. But actually, the text wants to emphasize how heavy his armor was!

-Three whole verses are devoted to describing it.

-Now, there are differing opinions upon how many pounds Goliath's armor weighs. Some say it was over 130 pounds, while others say it was closer to 75 pounds.

-Regardless, Goliath has some thick, protective armor on! And due to that, he felt confident. He felt safe. He wasn't afraid when little shepherd boy David came out against him.

- And, if you're familiar with this story, do you remember how heavy David's armor was? How many shekels it was?

-Oh, that's right. David didn't have any armor on when he faced Goliath! When he tried it on, it just wasn't the right fit and felt awkward and he couldn't move very well in it.

-So, David approached the giant wearing 5,000 shekel armor, wearing shepherd's clothing.

-Again, that just goes to show that David's confidence wasn't placed where Goliath's confidence was. David was confident in the Lord.

- I'm reminded of Psalm 24, which says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

-Goliath trusted in heavy armor, and a large spear, but David trusted in the name of the Lord his God.

-And today, some people trust in their health, or their investments, or their career, (which are all good things) but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

- The final difference we'll look at today is this: The Why. The purpose behind Goliath and the purpose behind David.

-Goliath's purpose was simple: to bring **glory to the Philistines**. To dominate over the Israelites. To, once again, remind the world that he was the champion.

- **David's purpose, David's why**, however, was much different. And his why/purpose wasn't to defeat the Philistines. Wasn't to be the next hero. Wasn't even to get the Israelite troops out of this bad situation.

-David actually gives us his why, his purpose, for facing Goliath. When David stands before Goliath, David tells him this: "The Lord will deliver you into my hand... [so] that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear."

-David wasn't concerned with all the earth knowing his name. David was concerned with all the earth knowing God's name. And that He is protector and provider and redeemer.

- You know, whenever we look at Goliath and David, we see so many differences.

-David shows us how to fight our battles and face our enemies, in a different way.

-Bruce C. Birch wrote, “David is the model of another way, of those without the benefit of superior arms and armies who nevertheless trust that God can make deliverance possible against the odds, that there is hope even when faced with apparently hopeless situations.”

-I love that. David is the model of another way. A better way. A way that ends up working and beating Goliath. The world says to do these things when facing enemies (Be a champion... scare people... talk about how great you are... place your confidence in materials... and make your own name great...)

- Instead of doing that, let’s do what David did. Let’s serve those around us – even our enemies. Let’s point to God in all of our words. Let’s be confident in who He is. And let’s give Him the glory, for great things He has done.

-That’s the better way, the higher way, when we face our enemies.

- I’ll end with this. In the New Testament, Jesus gives us the best way to treat our enemies.

-He teaches us, not to hate our enemies, or belittle our enemies, or say negative things about our enemies on Facebook. Instead, what does Jesus say to do for our enemies? Love them. Pray for them. Greet them. That is the most excellent way.

- And as we get ready to come to the Lord’s table for communion, we remember the way in which Jesus Himself defeated/CONQUERED death, the age-old enemy. The enemy the no person has ever been able to defeat.

-Jesus defeated death, not by becoming strong and acting like Goliath. Instead, Jesus defeated death by humbling himself and by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

-Three days later, He rose from the dead. Triumphant over our enemies of hell and death and the grave.

-As we come to the Table this morning, we respond and we remember that Jesus is victorious and that He has defeated death itself. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.