

What's in Your Wallet?

a sermon

by Dan Griswold

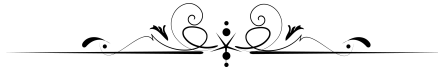
Trinity Reformed Church

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I Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49

But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (I Samuel 17:45).

What's in your wallet?



Really, now: Don't we all love a David and Goliath story?

Sure we do! We love a tale of bravery. We relish narratives about those who beat impossible odds. We enjoy hearing

of the underdog beating the big dog,
the loser becoming the winner,
the unexpected or overlooked coming out on top.

Don't we all love a David and Goliath story?

We feel in such stories a promise of justice, a sense of hope,

that wrongs will be righted,
that the wicked will get their due,
that those who abuse their power will find it suddenly stripped away.

Don't we all love a David and Goliath story?

Well, unless we're in it! Unless *we* have been cast (against type!) in the role of David. Unless we feel like *we're* the underdog, the one facing down Goliath, the small and ill-equipped placed in battle against the gigantic and impressively armored.

Then, we're not so sure we do love a David and Goliath story: when it becomes *real*, when it becomes *our* story.

Then it becomes scary: a test of our courage, and strength, and faith. And the outcome then is in question, and it becomes a question: will we pass the test, or not? And about that we may feel more than a little uncertain. In the unwilling role of little David against the Goliaths in our lives, we may find it hard to imagine ourselves showing up with David-like virtues.

Yet if we're not taught something by the tale of David and Goliath,

something practical,
something abidingly true,
something that makes a difference,
something connecting with our own living,

then why bother?

If we learn nothing from it,

about how we're supposed to act,
about how we can and must *live*,

then there seems to be little point.

What's in your wallet?

I think what it teaches us, what we can learn from it, is good news for us. And by that I mean that it tells us something much more than what some perhaps take it to mean, much more than merely an insipid little lesson of "believe in yourself."

It is not that. It cannot, must not, be that.

Sure, "David and Goliath" is about faith. But it is not about faith in yourself. To turn it into a fable about believing in yourself, believing in your hidden strength, having faith in the diamond-in-the-rough that is you, is to wildly misunderstand it. And it puts on you a very heavy burden.

What's in your wallet?



David's people are under attack. His brothers and fellow country-men have been fighting the Philistines. Things aren't going well. The Philistines have them on the ropes.

And then, as if to make things even more demoralizing for the soldiers of Israel, the Philistines bring out their champion, Mr. Goliath of Gath himself (hey, he's a big guy; I thought I should address him with respect): ten feet tall, amazingly strong, wearing armor and carrying weapons that added together weigh more than some men. Taunting them, Goliath demands that they send out someone to fight him... *if they dare*.

Crickets.

No one will fight Goliath.

But David will.

David?

Yes.

Really?

Yes.

Little David?

Yes

The shepherd boy?

Yes, David!!

Saul, the king, wasn't sure about this. But eventually he sees that David truly believed that God would give him victory against Goliath, and so he relents.

But first, Saul wants to make sure David is ready. And what better way to ready him than to give him the standard tools of war, to outfit him with armor and weapons.

Ah, maybe not.

David tries these on, and he just can't use them. They don't fit. They're too big. They're too clumsy. They won't work.

He tosses these aside, and instead reaches for what God had provided for him again and again in dangers past, against lions and bears (sadly, no tigers). He goes to a stream and pulls from the water five smooth stones, to use with his sling.

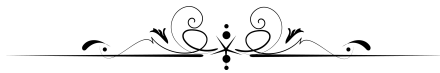
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Soon, the giant is felled, David is victorious, and the people rejoice.

How has this happened? A major point of the story, the point that should be impossible to miss, concerns how it did *not* happen. It isn't with the conventional tools of war. It isn't with the typical and accepted implements of violence that David wins. In fact, David is unable to use these. They are a burden to him. They are useless for him.

And in this we are pointed to a saving truth, the good news of this scripture. For it is by the power of God that the worldly-weak yet strong-by-the-Spirit triumph over temporal powers. Trust in God rather than in armaments strengthens and delivers God's servants.

What's in your wallet?



Let me be honest, here. I am uncomfortable with the violence in this passage. I am. It bothers me a bit.

Likewise, I am uncomfortable with all the violence found throughout the Old Testament, some of it even featuring God ordering the complete destruction of other people, including women and children. In other words, divinely sanctioned ethnic cleansing.

These texts are disturbing.

I believe we ought to be disturbed. We ought not to ignore that uneasy feeling. We ought not to come up with easy answers that evade and obscure. Out of such discomfort, I believe, we can arrive at a deeper and more faithful understanding of scripture, and especially of the God whom we worship, who is *worthy* of our worship, and whose love for us is always far greater than our love for God.

Anyway, as with such texts, this passage, the David and Goliath story, not only assumes violence but in that assumption seems to celebrate it. Again, this makes me uncomfortable.

And yet, the story of David and Goliath also appears to break out of that pattern, or point beyond it. It implies a qualified rejection of physical violence, or at least a transcending of it. Because it brings us down to a profound reliance on God, in which the faithful put aside the conventional tools of war and enter a battle that seemingly cannot be otherwise won.

“You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts...”

Here, salvation comes from God, who brings David through the impossible. And faith is portrayed as seeing God's possibilities that lie beyond the horizon of what can be seen. Faith perceives God's deliverance beyond the obvious.

My friends, *this is resurrection.*

Yes, resurrection. In the David and Goliath story, we may rightly anticipate God's overruling of the powers of death in raising Jesus from the dead. The reliance on God's power over against the technologies of violence that would halt the good, we see this supremely in the way of Jesus to the cross and through the empty tomb.

What's in your wallet?



Yes, what's in your wallet? What is it on which you truly rely? What is the object of your faith?

“What is your only comfort in life and in death?”

What is your faith truly centered on? In what, or in whom, do you place your trust for protection, your hope for a good life?

Is it in guns? It is in armies?

Is it in a robust economy? Is it in growing businesses?

Is it in strong political leaders?

Is it in yourself?

What's in your wallet?

The Goliaths we face in our day are many. And not all of them are flesh and blood human beings.

Maybe your Goliath is financial uncertainty.

Maybe your Goliath is depression.

Maybe your Goliath is cancer.

Maybe for you, the Goliath most vividly before you is a painful and seemingly unbridgeable rupture of a relationship between you and someone once dear to you.

Maybe the Goliath present to you now is the forced separation of children from their parents, stirring up in you sorrow, anger, and even rage.

Perhaps Goliath, for you, is doubt, about God, about Jesus, about the Bible, about the claims of the Christian faith.

Goliath, for you, could be a deep and reasonable disappointment in Christians, who again and again fail to live up to the teachings and example of Jesus, and often too-well resemble those who opposed Jesus during his earthly ministry.

With any of these, and all of these, the question I want you to ask yourself again and again is what's in your wallet?

Will you meet that Goliath with the technologies of violence provided by the world?

Will you do battle with that Goliath with the armaments of coercion given to us by those whose whole lives are a whirlwind of coercion?

Will you confront that Goliath solely on your own strength?

Will you even enter into that conflict, or will you instead shrink away, run away, hide under the covers, retreating into fear and cowardice and excuses and blame?

Or will you stride onto the battlefield armed with what God gives you, as God has prepared you, holding in your hands the plenty provision of the Lord God? Will you enter the conflict as a servant of the risen Jesus, as a child of the resurrection?

What, my friends, is in your wallet?