

TITLE: "The Lord, Who Saved Me"

TEXT: I Samuel 17:1-53 (OT pp. 261-262)

Introduction – "Who Pushed Me?"

A billionaire owned a 1500 acre ranch in Texas that included a huge ranch house, a swimming pool, tennis courts, horse barns, pasture land, streams and a deep pond. After touring the grounds, the owner gathered all the young executives from his company together next to the pond, which was surrounded by a wooden platform. Then he called their attention to the pond, threw in some large pieces of meat, and they all watched in stunned silence as the pond was churned to a froth by huge alligators.

When the feeding frenzy was over, the man said, "I value courage more than anything else. Courage is what made me the billionaire I am today. I've seen how that wimp Trump chooses executives, but I have a better way to do it. If anyone here has the courage to jump in this pond and swim to the other side, he or she will succeed me in the business and I will give you this ranch."

No one took up the absurd offer, so they turned to follow him to the house for lunch. Suddenly, there was a splash. Everyone spun around and watched in horror as a guy frantically thrashed through the water followed by a swarm of hungry alligators. After several death defying moments, the young man made it to the other side and climbed a ladder to the platform, where he lay gasping for breath.

The first one to reach him was the billionaire. "Son," he said, you are my successor and now this whole ranch is yours! Come on, let's get you some dry clothes."

On the way back east on the plane, the young man, who was now head of the company said, "I just want to know one thing—who the HECK pushed me into that pond?"

How do YOU make important decisions?

Do you wait for someone to push you?

Do you decide what you will do by yourself?

Do you decide by what makes financial sense?

Do you take the most comfortable option?

Or do you go to the Living God for guidance?

I will be reading this morning's text throughout the sermon. First some background on the cast of characters. Saul is the king of Israel. Last week we heard that he was NOT faithful to God and God told him, through the prophet Samuel, that the kingdom would be taken from him and given to another. That "other" was David, who was the boy we will hear about in the text.

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. ²Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. ³The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.

⁴And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was [9' 4"]. ⁵He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was [125 lbs] of bronze. ⁶He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. ⁷The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed [15 lbs] of iron and his shield-bearer went before him.

⁸He 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. ⁹If 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." ¹⁰And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man that we may fight together." ¹¹When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

How do we, as Christians make decisions? Two different tacks are taken here and they are worth looking at. The Philistines made some decisions by trial and error. Rather than risking a potential loss of many soldiers, they chose a champion and had him fight against a champion of their enemy's army. If their champion won, it meant their gods approved and they attacked. If their champion lost, they headed for the hills.

A version of this method CAN work, and does work, with Christians today. I call it the "know as you go" process of decision making. If you think the Lord is leading you in a particular direction, start taking steps toward it and then you will know if it is God's will.

I began college as a Biblical Studies major. Sophomore year, I was having a VERY hard time with Ancient Greek. I prayed about changing my major to biology, which I had always loved, but did not receive a clear answer. So I decided to change my major to biology second semester. One week into my new courses, I KNEW I had made the wrong decision. Fortunately I was able to change back. This is the sort of "know as you go" method of making decisions and, as I said, it can work in some circumstances if you really DO want the Lord's will for your life to begin with. (Let me just say that seeing how things go AFTER the wedding is NOT a good way to choose a spouse.)

The other decision making process demonstrated in the text is the process used by Israelite soldiers. They looked at the impossible odds of beating this giant warrior and they simply said "NO WAY." It would be nice if God never asked us to make a potentially dangerous or difficult decision. ...But that is not the case. If you have faith in Jesus, I can guarantee you will be given challenges that you will think are too difficult for

you to handle. However, some Christians do make decisions based upon what seems to be the most comfortable option.

When I lived in Florida, I met a lot of people who had moved there hoping to find the same relaxing and carefree life they had experienced when they vacationed there. A year after their move, they found that they had brought most of the same problems they had experienced back home right along with them. ...God's answers are not always the ones that look the easiest.

¹²Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years. ¹³The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle; the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. ¹⁴David was the youngest; the three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. ¹⁶For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

¹⁷Jesse said to his son David, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers; ¹⁸also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them."

¹⁹Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

²⁰David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry. ²¹Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army.

²²David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. ²³As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him. ²⁴All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid.

²⁵The Israelites said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel." ²⁶David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" ²⁷The people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done for the man who kills him."

The soldiers were trying to motivate one another to fight Goliath by talking about the enticements offered by King Saul. What were these enticements?

1. A lot of money.
2. Marrying into the king's family.
3. Freedom from taxes and military service for life.

Money, fame and power were strong motivators back then and they still influence the decisions of many Christians.

I have a colleague who has been a college chaplain for many years. She has asked this question to students who grew up in Christian families throughout those years: “How did your parents make decisions such as where to live or what job to take?” Never, in all that time, has one single student EVER said, “They prayed about it.” When I asked what WAS the most common motivating factor, she said, “Money.” If the move or position was advantageous financially, they took it.

But money is not everything. Years ago, a man in his early 30s, married with two children, lived here in Dryden and worked in Ithaca. At the time, he was making about \$30,000 a year. Then he was offered a job in Connecticut, doing the same thing, but making \$80,000 a year. He said, “This offer is simply too good to pass up.” ...I spoke to him a couple years later when he came back for a visit and he told me that because housing costs were so much higher there than here, his standard of living was a LOT lower than it was here, he really did not like the company he worked for or the people he worked with, his wife was not finding friends and the kids were not doing well in school. We all need money, but money does not solve all life’s problems.

²⁸[David’s] eldest brother Eliab heard [David] talking to the men; and Eliab’s anger was kindled against David. He said, “Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down just to see the battle.”

Do not allow other people to control you decisions. When I dropped out of school at 16, I looked for jobs all over town. Every employer said pretty much the same thing: “If you quit school, you’re a loser, and I don’t hire losers.” It turned out that they had all agreed to do this in order to force kids to go back to school and finish their high school education, which was a good thing in a way. But I did finally get a construction job and it turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life; ...and I did wind up going back to school anyway. We should always listen to other people, especially our Christian family members and friends, but we should not allow others to dissuade us from doing what God tells us to do.

³¹When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. ³²David said to Saul, “Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” ³³Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

³⁴But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and

kill it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷David said, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.”

The account of David and Goliath has a plot that has sold millions of books and movies. Youngest kid of the family relegated to a humble job, despised by older siblings, steps out in faith against all odds and becomes royalty. Change genders and you practically have the story of *Cinderella*.

But there is MORE to this than a heartwarming tale. The main point of the account is the fact that David trusted God. In the wilderness, while tending his father’s sheep, he had single-handedly killed bears and lions. A few weeks ago, we had a black bear in our neighborhood out on Lake Road. While would have liked to SEE that bear, I certainly did not want a close encounter with that bear.

However, the boy David said to King Saul: “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both lions and bears.” ...Whoa!

This is another thing about God. God PREPARES us for what we are to do. It’s interesting that David had been a shepherd. Moses also had been a shepherd. I’m sure they each learned a lot about dealing with contrary critters and lost sheep which they used later to lead the Israelites.

And God gave David success in killing the bears and lions so that he could have the confidence to say to King Saul: ³⁷David said, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Please notice that David gave credit to the Lord for his abilities. David ALWAYS gave God the credit for his successes and victories. Humility is one of the characteristics that God admires most in people and, no matter how important David became, he always humbly gave all the credit to God.

So Saul said to David, “Go, and may the Lord be with you!” ...⁴⁰Then [David] took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd’s bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine. ⁴¹The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴²When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.” ...⁴⁵But 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. ⁴⁶This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

⁴⁸When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. ⁵⁰So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. ⁵¹Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

⁵²The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. ⁵³The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp.

Conclusion - Ponder anew what the Almighty can do.

There are still giants out there to be fought today.

Some people face surgery, radiation and chemotherapy—they are giants.

Some face the loss of a loved one, another giant.

Some face the loss of a job, job insecurity or underemployment.

Some face divorce.

Some care for elderly parents, young children, or both.

There are house fires, car wrecks, thefts and natural disasters.

Some have to face physical or mental illness each and every day—all giants

These giants stand before us and they defy us and they defy the God we serve and they say, "There is NO WAY you can beat me! I am BIGGER than you! I am STRONGER than you! I don't care WHO your God is, you will NEVER be able to defeat me!

When they come, and they will come, let us stand our ground and, with our hand in the hand of our Lord Jesus, let us look them square in the eye and say: "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 Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶This very day the Lord will deliver you into

my hand, and I will strike you down ...so that all the earth may know that there is a God;
...for this battle is the Lord's and [God] will give you into my hand." ...Amen