

The Power of Truth

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

20 July, 2025

Children's Talk: Armed for Battle

What would you want to bring if you were going to go into a battle? You would probably want weapons and armour. You would want something to keep you safe and something you could use to fight against the bad guys. In the Word there was a bad guy, a mighty warrior called Goliath, who was well-prepared for battle:

And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had bronze armour on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him. (1 Samuel 17:4-7)

Goliath's height, 6 cubits and a span is 3 metres. The weight of his armour, 5,000 shekels of bronze is 57 kg. The weight of his spear head, 600 shekels of iron is 8 kg. In short, Goliath was massive and was well armed for combat.

The only man brave enough to fight Goliath was named David. Let's see what David had for his armour and weapons:

So Saul clothed David with his armour, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. David fastened his sword to his armour and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them." So David took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:38-40)

At first, David tried to wear armour and weapons from Saul, the king. But they didn't work, so all he had was a staff and a bag with stones in it.

That sounds like he had basically nothing. But he had something that Goliath did not have, something more important than armour or weapons:

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." (1 Samuel 17:45)

What did David have? He had the Lord. With the Lord on his side David didn't need powerful weapons or strong armour. The Lord was going to keep him safe and give him victory. And that's exactly what happened:

So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. (1Samuel 17:48-51)

So what do we need to have to be successful in life? There are lots of things that we *think we need*. But the thing we really need is the Lord.

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The story of David and Goliath is one of the most well-known stories in the entire Word. Even people with no direct experience of the Bible will have heard the basics of how the young shepherd David took on the mighty giant Goliath and defeated him. Part of the appeal of the story is that it is so easily applicable to our own lives: we face giants and need the encouragement to believe that we can overcome them. Unlike some stories in the Word, it is easy to find relevant and applicable messages. That being said, one of the central teachings of the New Church is that every detail of the Word contains deeper spiritual meanings, and that applies equally to this story. If we look to the spiritual sense, the symbolic meaning of the various pieces of the story, we can actually find even more significance and application.

1. Goliath the Philistine: Pride in Self-Intelligence

At heart, the story of David and Goliath is about reliance on self versus trust in the Lord. Let's start with Goliath. It is obvious from even a cursory read through that Goliath was prideful and arrogant. He defied the entire army of Israel, confident that he could take on any champion who might come to face him. He was armed to the teeth with bronze armour and an iron spear. The spiritual sense, as described in the Teachings of the New Church, gives some more insight into the kind of pride that Goliath might stand for. The Philistines in general represent a trust or reliance on one's own knowledge and intelligence, and Goliath himself represents the pride of self-intelligence (*Doctrine of Faith* §52). In other words, he stands for us when we rely purely on our own senses and ideas to figure things out, to the neglect of anyone else or even the Lord's guidance.

I want to spend some time reflecting on this meaning, because it asks us to put ourselves in an awkward position: not of David the plucky young shepherd boy, but the giant Goliath. Because if we're honest, we spend a decent amount of time being Goliath. Supremely confident (or so we try to tell ourselves and project out to the world) in our own abilities, armed to the teeth with our justifications and defensive postures, and adamant that we have no one to rely on but ourselves. That feels like an incredibly strong position to be in:

- It means we don't have to take the risk of trusting anyone else.
- It means we don't have to rely on anyone else for our needs to be met.
- It means we can make our own decisions.
- It means we aren't beholden to anyone else.
- It means we aren't in debt and owing anything to anyone else.

In a theological sense it means that faith alone is sufficient; in other words, that it is our thoughts about spiritual things that matter, and there is no obligation to do good or to serve others by means of those thoughts. Faith alone, although overtly directed towards God, ultimately means faith only in ourselves. Relying on faith alone is to say "how I treat others is less significant than what goes on in my own mind and thinking." These are attitudes that can be particularly appealing when we feel vulnerable and feel a need to keep ourselves protected. They are also appealing when all we want to do is serve ourselves. The problem is that these attitudes are destructive of everything that matters spiritually: charity, love, goodness, and relationships with other people and the Lord.

2. David Provides: Seeking Goodness

So how do we resist that mindset and become free of it? We turn now to David. Before anything else I want to focus on what seems like a minor detail that

has a great deal of significance. Why was David at the battlefield in the first place?

He was a shepherd boy, not a soldier.

Then Jesse said to his son David, "Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried grain and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp. And carry these ten cheeses to the captain of their thousand, and see how your brothers fare, and bring back news of them." (1Samuel 17:17-18)

David came to the battlefield not to fight but to bring food for his brothers. In the Word, food stands for goodness and love. This gives us a pretty good idea of where to start if we are wanting to resist that arrogant or selfish mindset. If we are going to address the pride that keeps us cut off from others, we need to find some motivation in love and goodness. If that is not what our goal is, if we are not motivated by love, we are going to get stuck.

That might sound a bit naïve when we are struggling with pride and reliance on ourselves. Is relying on selfless love actually going to accomplish anything for us? And in fact, that's exactly how David's brothers felt about him when he asked about how Goliath was going to be dealt with:

Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger was aroused against David, and he said, "Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." (1 Samuel 17:28)

David's soldierly brothers felt disdain for David's naïve curiosity. The shepherd boy had no place on the battlefield. We might feel similarly towards goodness and love and innocence as the things that will save us when we want nothing more than to rely on or serve only ourselves. How can innocence, goodness and love be what saves us, keeps us safe, allows us to succeed at life? Surely what we really need is to withdraw and fortify ourselves against anyone else, and make sure our reasoning is secure and justifications unassailable.

Say you're in a conflict with a friend and you're not sure how to resolve it, but to ask for help from anyone else would reveal that you did something wrong, or would show your weaknesses and expose you to hurt. So instead of taking the risk of asking for help, you simply soldier on alone, justifying it with many false ideas such as that I don't need any help or that it's not fair to burden someone else with my own problems or that the Lord has nothing to say about this particular issue or many other ideas that have the ring of truth but are really just excuses to go it alone. We need to come from love if we are going to overcome this. To trust someone, or accept help from them, or reveal ourselves to them, takes opening ourselves not just to ideas, but to love and goodness. And we also need to love the well-being of others enough to be willing to be vulnerable and actually get the help we need.

3. Five Smooth Stones: A Few Truths Applied to Life

If we are willing to be loving, and open ourselves up to the love of others, the next thing we need to make use of is spiritual truth, which is represented in the weapons that David acquired for himself so that he could take on Goliath:

Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:40)

In the Word, stones stand for truth and a brook stands for the Word itself. Five stands for just a few, a handful. So this represents taking just a few, simple truths, from the Lord's Word, and arming oneself with them, and taking them into battle.

Now for this to make sense, we have to understand what we are talking about when we say "truth." Otherwise we can easily end right back where we started: trying to figure out exactly what is "right" for ourselves without any outside help, and thinking that having it right is sufficient. This is perhaps why David is at first described trying on Saul's armour, equipping himself much the same way that

Goliath was (1 Samuel 17:38-39). But the armour didn't work for David; nor will we be able to find our way out of prideful thinking with just more facts. We cannot fight fire with fire, we cannot just think our way out of fallacious thinking. Think of the person who can name all the reasons it makes sense to rely on themselves and not on other people and who has countless examples from their own life to confirm that idea. Their friends might think the solution is to convince them out of this mindset by arguing against them and listing all of the counter examples from their life. That actually tends not to work as well as we might hope. For every reason you can put up to rely on other people, hell can throw up a dozen more on why it makes sense to rely only on oneself. There needs to be a deeper realization of a truth about oneself and/or about how goodness works.

So again, we need to know what we mean by "truth" and how it is not merely an idea or a fact or an argument in favour of some position or decision. Truth from the Lord, or spiritual truth, is in fact one of the most powerful things in the world.

Listen to this description of what truth can do in heaven:

In heaven Divine truth has all power, and apart from it there is no power whatever. From the Divine truth angels are called powers, and are powers to the extent that they are recipients or receptacles of it. By means of it they prevail over the hells and over all that oppose them. A thousand enemies there cannot stand against a single ray of the light of heaven, which is Divine truth. As angels are angels by their reception of Divine truth it follows that the entire heaven is from no other source, since heaven consists of angels.

That power comes when we use a truth from the Word, even a simple truth, to shape how we see ourselves and the world. Take for instance the truth that "the Lord, Jesus Christ, is God." A simple and basic truth. That's not one that even seems hugely practical in the sense of telling you to do something specific. And yet if taken to heart, and brought to mind over and over again, and brought to bear on whatever is at hand, it can be life-changing. If we go back to the example of the individual who

knows that he cannot be helped and is responsible for so much, imagine what could be different if instead of trying to argue himself out of this belief, simply came back again and again to the truth that the Lord is God:

- The Lord is God: He is in charge, not me.
- The Lord is God: I am not responsible for how everything turns out.
- The Lord is God: I don't know everything but He does

It's not just that this truth is one more factoid to be added to the one side of the ledger as opposed to the other; it is a change in perspective, in worldview, that although simple, can change everything.

The same can be true for any truth from the Word. We do not need to understand everything the Word teaches, nor even to understand most of it. We do not have to study for years or perfectly grasp all the nuances. We need to find a handful of truths, and let them shape who we are, how we see the world, and the choices we make. Take even just one from that handful of truths that you find meaningful or significant to you, and just keep coming back to it again and again. That's what it means to rely on the Lord instead of our own selves. In our pride we think we can do it all on our own, or at the very least that we cannot rely on others and the Lord. There will always be a thousand excuses that seem reasonable and true that will justify this position. But if we trust in the Lord, and take to heart those few truths, and live them regularly, the giant of pride will be brought low and we will be free from its grip, free to love and to receive love.