

Anybody know the game of Risk?

It's a board game played on a map of the world in which players pit their armies against one another until one person has all the armies.

My brother liked to play it with me because, being 9 years older and an excellent strategist, he always won.

I was always the underdog.

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Last Sunday, we heard the good news that God can do great things with something small or someone young.

Today we hear one of my favorite Old Testament stories – David and Goliath.

It is a story of conflict:

- two armies facing off over land – coastal land and a fertile valley.
- It is conflict between older brothers and the youngest brother who was anointed king
- And, most importantly, it is conflict between false gods and the one living God,
  - Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus.

...

What are the conflicts we face in our lives?

- Expectations between parents and children
- Husband and wife
- Boss and worker

Conflicts of interest in governance and negotiation.

Conflicts of worldview, political view, and ideology.

Conflicts over possessions – *mi casa es su casa* vs. “what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours”

Conflicts over whose religion is truer,  
whose church is better,  
whose faith is most authentic.

But of all the conflicts we are likely to face,  
the most crucial – the most important  
– and the most difficult, **is the conflict with evil,**  
with Satan the accuser, the taunter, the tempter.

Satan is the one who turns difference of opinion into personal attack.

Satan is the one who whispers in our ear,

- “You aren’t good enough.”
- “You are too weak.”
- “You can’t beat me.”

Satan is the one who blinds us to the truth of God’s purpose  
and who would have us believe that love is for losers and  
compassion for cowards.

**Satan is the prince of lies and deception,**  
making good seem evil and evil seem good.

When the Israelite army and the Philistine army face off against each other, they are matched for battle.

Until the Philistine champion comes out.

It is a common tactic in ancient Near Eastern warfare for opposing armies to send out their single best soldier to fight one-on-one to settle the conflict.

And part of the scheme is for the instigating champion to taunt and intimidate the other champion and his army.

For 40 days, Goliath comes out and challenges the army of God's people

and each time, the Israelite soldiers become afraid and pull back.

**Why? Because the Israelites judge Goliath's power according to his outward appearance**

**and believe the lie that they are only King Saul's army.**

It is David who reminds them that they are fighting not only as King Saul's army, **but first and foremost as the army of the living God!**

And therefore, no show of power is too strong for them

– there is nothing to fear.

God's power is greater than all the armies of the world.

So David faces off with Goliath, who taunts him and curses him by the Philistine gods:

*45-47 David answers, "You come at me with sword and spear and battle-ax. I come at you in the name of GOD-of-heaven's Armies, the God of Israel's troops, whom you curse and mock. This very day GOD is handing you over to me. I'm about to kill you, cut off your head, and serve up your body and the bodies of your Philistine buddies to the crows and coyotes. The whole earth will know that there's an extraordinary God in Israel.*

The conflict between giant and boy **is really the conflict between false gods and the true God – the living God of Israel – the God who raised Jesus from the dead.**

David is seen as the underdog – but **God reveals his almighty power by having the underdog win.**

This is underscored by contrasting the heavy armor of Goliath with the exposed vulnerability of David the shepherd boy.

**David does not believe the lie of weakness and trusts the Lord God of Israel.**

He wins the battle against Goliath and against the evil he represents.

But over time, God's people forget the power of God and wind up on the losing side.

And that would be the end of the story, but for another underdog – John the Baptist.

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John the Baptist is an underdog, but in a much different way.

**He is the underdog as the opening act for the Big Feature – Jesus.**

His birth sets the stage for Jesus to be revealed as God's Anointed Savior.

**John's birth heralds both the end of the beginning  
and the beginning of the end.**

- He is the last of the prophets of the old Covenant
- and the herald of God's fulfillment of all that was prophesied.

If you've ever read the old Testament prophets, especially the later ones, they had brutal news for God's people.

They hammered on the rebellion of the people and the harsh consequences that befall sin.

**It is a necessary message – we all need to know the truth about ourselves and be warned when we are going the wrong way.**

The problem is that God's people are unable to live faithfully in the covenant relationship.

What hope is there for deliverance from ourselves and our own evil ways?

John is the one who brings hope.

His very name – the name so unexpected and unusual

– **John – means God is gracious.**

*God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.*

John is the opening act for Jesus

– **the living, breathing,  
dying and rising grace of God.**

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David and John – both underdogs serving the one true and living God.

**Both victors in the name of God in the battle against sin, death, and evil.**

Both revealing the power of God in weakness,  
the victory of God through the underdog.

...

John is the opening act for Jesus

– descendant of David

– who is the **Champion not just for Israel but for all humanity.**

It is true that this Champion is not like Goliath

– the armored ten-foot giant vs. the tortured man on the cross.

But just as the giant was slain – defeated by death at David's hand,

**So Jesus, the crucified Champion, was raised from the dead to die no more.**

He is the one John was born to proclaim.

With such a Champion as Jesus,

we can face all our battles – all our conflicts – without fear,  
knowing that the worst has already been defeated.

And the Champion has given us his Spirit of victory over the worst of our enemies.

Martin Luther gets it right in the great hymn:

*The old satanic foe  
has sworn to work us woe!  
With craft and dreadful might  
he arms himself to fight.  
On earth he has no equal.*

*2 No strength of ours can match his might!  
We would be lost, rejected.  
But now a champion comes to fight,  
whom God himself elected.  
You ask who this may be?  
The Lord of hosts is he!  
Christ Jesus, mighty Lord,  
God's only Son, adored.  
He holds the field victorious.*

Those conflicts we face?

The Goliaths in our lives that seem insurmountable?

**They cannot defeat us when we call on the name of the Lord.**

**For our God has destroyed evil and death forever and fights for us in these last days.**

It is no shame to be David against Goliath – we have our five stones:

1. **faith** in God, the Father Son and Holy Spirit

2. **prayer** to call on our Lord and Savior
3. **hope** in the resurrection of the dead
4. **trust** in Jesus' forgiveness of our sins
5. **grace** as the confidence to stand up and fight

*For we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Bonus Bonus Bonus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM-maXcgEho>