

David and Goliath

I Samuel 17:1- 49

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A number of years ago a good friend of mine, now with Campus Crusade for Christ at Kansas State University, in telling the story of his conversion, was describing some of his unfortunate experiences as a child in Sunday school. When he was five, his parents took him to Sunday School, and he cut out pictures of David and Goliath. That discouraged him, and he did not go back until he was ten. When he did return, they had him cutting out pictures of David and Goliath, he did not go back again until he was twelve and, you guessed it, they had him cutting out pictures of David and Goliath. "So," he said, "I just cut out!"

That may be the memory many of us have of some of these Old Testament stories -- they belong to some bygone Sunday school era, and we relegate them to the quaint and irrelevant. Yet, if we take seriously what the New Testament says, we are told by the apostle Paul that these stories happened to them as examples to us. These are actual historical events in the life of Israel. There *was* a man by the name of Saul, there *were* people called the Israelites, there *were* Philistines. Goliath was an actual person. We can take very seriously what the Scriptures say about those incidents.

The Philistines, remember, were a tribe from the Aegean Sea who had settled along the coast of Palestine, bringing with them the roots of Greek culture -- a very sophisticated, highly complex, extremely warlike people. They were a thorn in the side of Israel. Goliath was a giant who lived among them. It is interesting that in their excavations archeologists have uncovered hundreds of skeletons of giants in Palestine. In fact, a whole culture found along the Jordan valley is called "megalithic" because they built enormous structures of huge, heavy stones -- an entire civilization peopled by giants.

When my wife, Carolyn, and I were in Washington, D.C. a week or so ago we went to the Smithsonian Institution, where I saw to my surprise that in the Anthropology section of the Museum of History and Technology, there is the femur of a giant which was found in the southern part of the United States. These giants actually lived, both before and after the fall. They are variously called in Scripture the Nephilim, the Zamzummim, the Emim, the Rephaim. They had a variety of names, but all the names signified in some way the terror these gigantic figures struck in the hearts of the people around them. Goliath was one of them, and with his four brothers he lived in Garb.

But these histories find in Scripture are given to us in order that they might instruct us about spiritual matters. These events actually happened, but symbolically they have profound spiritual meaning. The Philistines represent the enemies of God in our lives -- anything which impedes the progress of God's people. Goliath stands for those specific things in our lives which oppress us and frustrate us and keep us from moving on and becoming the kind of people we know God wants us to be.

We all have giants in our lives -- no one is excluded. They may be faulty relationships with persons in your life - your mother or father, or your children -- even our relationships with little children can be giants, in that they cause us to fail, to fall, to repeat the same sins over and over again. They frustrate and inhibit us, keeping us from moving onto maturity. It may be with your husband or your wife or your boss or one of your employees. It could be your relationship with any individual in your life which oppresses you. That relationship is a giant in your life.

Or it could be a circumstance -- perhaps a crippling disease which afflicts you, inhibits you, and keeps you from doing what you know you could do if only you were free from it. One of the men on our staff has had for the past

year a physical condition which is a giant in his life, which oppresses him and keeps him from freedom. Or it may be something within you -- perhaps a habit, or a critical spirit, or some distressing, loathsome practice which you would like to be rid of -- you have tried desperately to overcome it but just cannot find the way to freedom. Those are giants. We all fight giants.

And there is a way to bring giants to their knees. Scripture tells us, as we have seen especially in the last few messages, that God intends us to reign as kings. He never intended that anything should oppress us and inhibit us. He wants us to go on to maturity. And when we encounter these giants in our life, there is a way through. Let's turn to the seventeenth chapter of I Samuel, the well-known account of David and his encounter with the giant Goliath. The setting is given to us in the first three verses:

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammin. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and camped in the valley of Elah, and drew in battle array to encounter the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on one side while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them.

There are two things to note from this setting. First, the Philistines were trespassers, occupying land which belonged to Judah. God had given the land to the nation of Israel, and the Philistines had no right to invade. We need to recognize that this is true of all these invaders in our life, whatever they may be. They have no right to be there. They may camp there for a short period of time, but the land does not belong to them. It is God's intention that they are driven out. Second, the situation constituted something of a stalemate, a classic standoff the Philistines occupying the high ground on one side, the Israelites on the other side, with the valley between, and both sides immobilized. And how often this is the way we feel when we encounter the enemies in our life pinned down, immobilized, unable to move, restricted. We can't retreat. We can't advance. We're simply stuck. There is no place to go. That is what Israel experienced. Now enters the villain, verses 4 through 7:

Then a champion came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. [Depending upon the particular bit used, he was anywhere from nine to ten feet tall].

And he had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale armor which weighed five thousand shekels of bronze [about 125 lbs.]. He also had bronze greaves on his legs and a bronze javelin slung between his shoulders. And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear weighed six hundred shekels of iron [about 15 lbs.]; his shield-carrier also walked before him.

That is quite a man! He is not only gigantic; he is powerful. Big men are not always strong men, but here is a man who is both large and powerful, indomitable, unconquerable. The result was that he threw fear into the hearts of the Israelites. And isn't that our condition? So often when we face these giants in our life they seem absolutely unconquerable. They challenge us, assail us. We go out to meet them and we are defeated over and over again, until finally we lose the heart to fight. They master us.

A friend told to me some months ago about a problem he had with pornography. There was a so-called "adult bookstore" on the way to his job, and as he walked up the street he **could not** avoid going into the store, picking up the magazines, and looking at them. He had **no** freedom, he **had to go** there, he was tyrannized by those magazines. I suggested to him what seemed to me the obvious solution - to go around the block the other way. He said, "You don't understand; it starts when I get up in the morning. It's not a question of walking by there, it's a question of being driven. I **have** to go." So often this is the way the giants appear in our life. They are far beyond us in power, completely dominating us. The struggle seems futile. We've given up. In verses 8 through 11, Goliath lays down a challenge:

And he stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, and said to them, "Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not the Philistine and you servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become

our servants and serve us. " Again the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

Israel had been stripped of its manhood. There was not a man among them. You can imagine how these words of Goliath must have stung them; "You are servants of Saul, and he's no man at all! Send me a man, any man will do, just send me a man!" But there was not one man among them. That is what giants do to us. They take away our sense of manhood and womanhood. We know that we were not destined to live oppressed in this way, but we have no freedom to change. We are tyrannized, stripped of our strength and power. That is what had happened to Israel, and it is what happens to us. And note that the issue is: master, or be mastered. There is no middle ground. You cannot make peace with a giant. There may be a standoff for a while, but it cannot endure. It is either serve or be served; there can be no truce. The Israelites knew the chips were down. Now the hero appears, beginning with verse 12.

Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of Benjamin in Judah, whose name was Jesse...

There follows an account of David's family, then of his journey to the camp, bringing supplies to his three older brothers who were in Saul's army.

David is an extraordinary character. It is my opinion that he is the greatest character in Scripture, apart from the Lord Jesus himself. It has always been significant to me that Messiah, in the Old Testament, and our Lord, in the New Testament, is called the "son of David." I realize this is because he was of David's dynasty, and therefore he gained his right to rule through David. But there is more involved than merely his regal lineage, David, as perhaps no other figure in the Old Testament, symbolizes the man in Christ, the man as God intended men to be.

David had tremendous assets. Imagine an individual with the literary ability of a Shakespeare, the musical ability of a Beethoven, the hand-eye coordination of a Johnny Bench, and an [Q of 150! And the Scriptures describe him as handsome and ruddy, with his auburn hair, and as rugged, having spent much of his life in the Judean wilderness. He was in every sense a man.

Yet David had a great sorrow in his life. He does not say much about it -- you have to read between the lines - but I am convinced it was there. David had a very tragic childhood. If you try to trace his genealogy you simply end in confusion. There seem to be more than one mother in the family -- at least two and perhaps more. There are older brothers with sons as old as David, And there are daughters who do not seem to belong to the family. It appears that his father had been married a number of times. And it may even be -- there is strong evidence to indicate -- that David was born out of wedlock. He was rejected as a child. If you doubt that, read the sixteenth chapter of I Samuel, the account of David's anointing. Samuel appears at Jesse's house to anoint a king. He calls for the sons of Jesse, and who are those presented? The seven older brothers. David is left out in the field tending sheep. Samuel has to ask for him, and David's father resists the idea -- "He is but a youth." In Psalm 27 David says,

**For my father and my mother have forsaken it me,
But the Lord will take me up.**

And there are other references by which David indicates that his childhood was tragic. He was unloved, scorned, put down. When he appears before his brothers on the battlefield they simply scoff at him. Yet that circumstance was a gift of God in David's life. David refers time and again in the Psalms to the fact that he had learned from his youth to follow the Lord. How did he learn that? Because the Lord became his father and his mother. He learned early to draw upon the Lord, to set aside his own assets and to trust in the living God, By the time David encountered Goliath he had already slain many giants in his life. He had learned the secret of walking in triumph over debilitating and oppressive circumstances.

In verses 20 and following we have an account of his appearance where the battle was to take place. I always chuckle when I read the last part of verse 20:

And he came to the circle of the camp while the army was going out in battle array shouting the war cry.

They must have gathered every morning, shaken their spears, and shouted the war cry, but nobody moved! In verse 23 Goliath appears again and repeats the same challenge. By this time he must have done it by rote -- for forty days he had appeared and issued the same challenge, but no one had responded. But this day David heard. It is a different thing when a man of faith hears. Verse 24:

When all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid.

Verse 26:

Then David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, "What will 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 taunt the armies of the living God?"

"What right does this Philistine, this pagan, have to hold at bay the armies of the living God?" Do you see what David is doing? He is taking the first step in overthrowing giants in the life -- he reminds himself of the truth. And that is where we must begin. You see, the facts are not always as they seem. We cannot evaluate a situation in terms of what we see. What is observable is real, but it is not the ultimate reality. Behind what we see is an all-powerful, living God. That is the reality that is what we must call to mind. When we are oppressed and feel dominated and see no way out, the first step is to remind ourselves of the truth. "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." We have a living God who is available to us. That is the ultimate reality we have to lay hold of.

This is what the New Testament calls "girding up your loins with the truth." The first step is to pull your mind together and remind yourself of what is true. This does not mean conjuring up some feeling. God does not care if you strong or powerful or adequate. That is irrelevant. You do not have to feel any special way. You just have to call to mind the truth. That is where we begin. And that is where David began. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the living God? How ridiculous!"

There is an account 2 Kings which I never tire of reading. Elisha and his servant were living in the little town of Dothan. And the king of Syria was set on capturing Elisha because Elisha always seemed to know where the Syrian army would be, and he would tip off the king of Israel. So the entire Syrian army surrounded this little town in order to capture and kill Elisha. When Elisha's servant looked over the wall and saw the Syrian army encircling, he panicked. Elisha said, "Wait, there are more of us than there are of them." And his servant said, "But, there's you, there's me -- **that's** more?" And Elisha prayed, "Lord, open his eyes." And the Lord opened his eyes, and the servant saw the hosts of heaven encamped on the mountainside behind the Syrian army. That is the ultimate reality. We have a living God, and therefore, "Who is this giant, that he would oppress us?" That is the first step -- to remind yourself of the truth as it is in Jesus.

Now note the reaction of David's oldest brother, Eliab. This is the sort of reaction you always get when you act in faith. Someone will always put you down, To the man of the flesh, faith always seems like impertinence, like the most irrational kind of activity. Verses 28 and 29;

Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger burned against David and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle." But David said, "What have I done now? Was it not just a question?"

I see in his reply something of the whipped child who, all of his life, had been put down. "What did I do now? I just spoke the truth," You can expect to get that kind of treatment, perhaps even from your brothers in Christ, when you start acting in faith, because it seems highly impractical to them. It will seem very impertinent.

Fortunately in this case the word found its way to Saul's ears, and there was enough of a spark of faith in Saul that he responded to it. He sent for David, verses 32 and following:

And David said to Saul, "let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the Living God." And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand [literally, "the paw"] of this Philistine.

"Goliath is just like any other animal I've faced in my past. God will deliver me." Do you see what he is doing? He not only reminds himself of the truth, but he reminds himself that God is faithful to the truth. When God promises, he performs, "He has delivered in the past; he'll deliver in the future. He has proved himself to be faithful to his word." Verses 38 and 39:

Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor. And David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." And David took them off.

You would expect Saul to respond in this way. All he knew were the weapons of the flesh. That is what he was accustomed to, that is what he used when he went into battle, that is what he trusted, that is where his strength lay. But they were not for David. Because he knew that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, not fleshly, but they are mighty through God unto the pulling down of strongholds. This is the second step we have to take -- not only to bring to mind the truth as it is in Jesus, but also to repudiate any attempt on our part to act out of the flesh. Because our mind will go back to some other alternative to faith anything but to trust God. When we are anxious, we take a tranquilizer. When we are lonely, we call up a computer dating service. Anything but to go out armed with the strength of God. That is the second step, to put away anything that we might count upon in the flesh. All the mechanical, human ways we have of solving problems simply *do not work*. They do not bring the giant to his knees. God has another way, a way described for us in verses 40 and following:

And he [David] took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

Then you have the account of David's and Goliath's jousting first with words, and in verse 45 is David's word to the Philistine:

You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted, [God's name was at stake. That was the real issue.] This is day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you.

Verses 48 and 49:

Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground.

Someone has estimated that this stone, traveling about 200 feet per second, had the force of a 45-caliber bullet. Goliath, in his self-confidence, had left his visor open, and the stone struck its mark and he fell. The third step is to

take initiative against the giant. Faith is not passive. Repudiating the efforts of the flesh does not mean that we are inactive. Faith is aggressive, active. It means taking a step of obedience and moving in faith against the giant, and acting on the basis of confidence and trust in God to carry you through the situation.

You might wonder why David chose five stones. You would think that faith would lead him to take only one. It is inviting to assume that he did it because Goliath did have four brothers, and David was going to take them all. I am inclined to think, however, that David realized the giant might not fall the first time. There might have to be repeated efforts to bring him down, but he would come down. When he marched out to meet Goliath, David's word was, "The Lord has already delivered you into my hands." He was certain of victory. But he knew it might take repeated attempts. Hebrews 6 tells us it is by faith and patience that we inherit the promises. The application of faith in one instance may not be enough, but the victory is certain. And if we continue to apply the principles, and we are not defeated and discouraged, and we do not give up and quit but we keep moving out in obedience against the giants in our life, God will bring those giants down. The problem is that we are tempted to quit too soon. We sling one rock and miss, and then give up.

Those then are the three steps we are to take against giants, these problems which overwhelm us - whether they are persons, circumstances, habits, or whatever. First we remind ourselves of the truth as it is revealed to us in the Word. This of course means knowing the Word, reading it, studying it, memorizing it, meditating on it, letting God mold our thoughts according to his thoughts so that we think his thoughts after him, so that we can call to mind the truth in a given situation. That is the first step, to reflect upon the truth as it is revealed in the Word.

Secondly, we renounce those temptations we all have to gird on the armor of the flesh and to try to act out of the old "tried and true" human methods. We repudiate those, and then move out in opposition to the giant, whatever it is, in confidence that God is going to bring it down, and that we are going to move right through the situation into a place of victory. Notice what happened when David did this. The entire nation was mobilized. When before they had given up, now, as a man, they arose and pursued the Philistines and defeated them. Why? Because David was willing to take that step of faith.

And Scripture promises the same result for us. When we move in faith against the enemies of our lives, as God's life begins to work in us, it will begin to work in others as well. They will be stimulated, motivated to move out.

What are the giants in your life? What are the things which oppress you? Remember, God is the one who has charted the course for victory, and it involves following the pattern which David establishes for us here. And the victory is certain. No matter how big your giant or how long you've been oppressed, no matter how many rocks you have to throw, victory is certain. That is a promise God has given us.

Father, we all have giants in our lives. We know they are trespassers; they have no right to occupy your land. We thank you for your promise of victory in Christ, and we thank you that you are the one who motivates us to act according to the truth, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Catalog No.3055
I Samuel
June 24, 1973
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Updated September 3, 2000.

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