

## Living With Giants

October 9, 2016

I Samuel 17

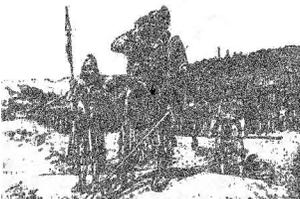
The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights

Pastor Dave Carver

This week we return to our year-long consideration of David and the role that he played in Israel's story, the ways he pointed to Jesus, and the things that we can learn from that. As we do so, a little refresher is in order.

The man who is acting as the King of Israel at this time is Saul. He was chosen, apparently, because he was really tall and pretty good-looking. I Samuel 9:2 tells us that Saul was "as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else." Yet it would appear as though his height and movie-star looks did not guarantee success, because in just a few chapters, Saul has disobeyed the Lord and as a result, has been told that the kingdom has been stripped away from him and his family.

Not long after this, we meet a nobody named David who comes from down south; he's the last-born son of a farmer who finds himself called in from the sheep and anointed as king-in-waiting in a secret ceremony.



And all the while the Philistines are making life miserable for the people of God. These coastal people are sending war parties and

conducting raids and generally wreaking havoc. It comes to a head in the low country around Socoh in the region of Judah. The Philistine army has gathered and has sent their champion forward. One writer describes him this way:

Goliath stood 10 feet tall in his stocking feet, wore a size 20 collar, a 9 1/2 inch hat, and a 52-inch belt. When he put his full armor on, he looked like a Sherman tank. Even stripped to the bare essentials, he had plenty to carry around, and flesh and bones were the least of it... When he tried to think something out, it was like struggling through a hip-deep bog. When he tried to explain something, it was like pushing a truck uphill. His dark moods were leaden and his light moods elephantine.<sup>1</sup>



Like Saul, Goliath was a big man. In fact, that's kind of the crux of the matter as we begin I Samuel 17: the Philistines have said, essentially, "Look – our giant is bigger than your giant. Here's what we do: we'll send our best guy, you send out yours, and we'll see who does what..." For forty days, Goliath and the Philistines taunt, curse, and demean God and God's people. Forty days! That's a long time. So long, in fact, that some of the folks in the Israelite army find themselves running short on provisions.

David, who had previously been working in the palace as a part-time musician, is back home tending the sheep. His father becomes concerned about his older sons who are serving in the military, and so he sends the boy on a grocery run.

David arrives at the front and see's what's going on. He is indignant at the behavior and language of the Philistine champion,

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures* (Harper: 1979, p. 41).

and he says so. The hardened soldiers at the front, including his own brothers, dismiss him as being naïve and out of touch with the real world. And yet, David claims truth and holds out faith that the reality the Israelites face is not in line with God's intentions. The shepherd boy makes his way into the king's presence, where at first he is taken as a lightweight. However, in the 37<sup>th</sup> verse of this story, something happens. For the first time, evidently, since the struggle began, an Israelite brings up God's name. And the Israelite who does this is, of course, David. Listen:

*"Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."*

Saul, the man who would be king, is caught off-guard by this sincere expression of faith, and he essentially says, "Oh, sure, well... give it a shot, kid..."

*Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you."*

*Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.*

*"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.*

David may have been glad, initially, to have been given the chance to fight the giant. It must have been a relief to be taken seriously, and to be recognized as one who could oppose the enemies of the Lord. That relief, though, must have been short-lived as soon as he stepped into the fitting room and realized that he was not, and never would be, Saul. The king does what the king thinks he ought to do, which is to try to make David as much like himself as possible. It becomes apparent to everyone, however, that David is no giant. He is not Saul, and he is not Goliath. He can't even walk in the armor that Saul gives him. So he gives up on his attempt to be like Saul, and instead looks to be David.

*Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.*

The shepherd, who has already testified to God's meeting him in the past, who has already pointed to the ways in which God has saved him, now once again reflects on his trust in God.

He steps into the creekbed, and he crouches, and he selects some stones that might fit into his sling. Think about

where David is right now, at this point in the story: he is kneeling between two giants. Saul is behind him, Goliath ahead of him, and David is on his knees looking for stones that are small enough to fit into his pockets.

David is young and inexperienced, but he knows that using one giant to defeat another is just a bad idea. There will always be more giants, and they will always just get bigger. There has to be a non-giant solution to these giant problems.

And there, my friends, is a word for the church and perhaps for our community here. Too often, the people of God take what the culture holds out and they try to baptize it and turn it around and use it just the way that the world might. Too often, we accept as "given" the tools and methods that are used in the world and we try to use them in the Church.

Sometimes, that kind of thinking damages the ways that we are together in the church. We hear about churches that are trying to function more like businesses, and about "executive pastors" and ways in which the church ought to produce more results... and it sounds like we're David wearing Saul's armor.

It's even more apparent in the political climate in recent

years as would-be leaders of every stripe are playing to the worst aspects of our humanity – our fear, our hatred, our selfishness, our insecurity – and the answers that are offered (and too often gladly accepted by people of faith) are really just an appeal to getting a bigger, stronger giant.

Think about the people who have run for office in recent years, and the ways that they have appealed to voters. “Do you know what you need? You need security. You need to be stronger than they are. And you know who can make you safe? Me... My opponent? Please. My opponent couldn’t wipe the spaghetti off a toddler’s face. What we need is someone who can wipe those folks off the map, and I’m telling you, I’m the person for the job.”

And the population – the *Christian* population – of this nation says, essentially, “Oh, good. Let’s get tough on *those guys*. Let’s make sure that we can wipe *them* off the face of the map!”

I’m reminded of the lyrics to a song written by the late Larry Norman, “Do you really think the only way to bring about the peace is to sacrifice your children and kill all your enemies?”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “The Great American Novel” on the LP **Only Visiting This Planet** (1972).

David's gathering stones while kneeling by the creek bed as the giants pace all around him is a reminder that the life of faith requires new strategies and that our Creator allows for and even expects creativity when it's time to face the giants in our midst.

Goliath, of course, knows nothing of all this. He has one way to handle conflict, and so he taunts and curses and threatens the boy, all the while promising what he'll do to end this stand-off:

*Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!"*

David's response is simple. He merely points out that the Philistine has apparently brought the wrong weapons to this battle.

*David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with*

*sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."*

His speech here would be remembered and re-worded by countless others. One scripture verse that comes to my mind is from Zechariah 4:6, which reads, "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty." David understands that the promise of God is stronger than the weapon of the enemy. Look at what happens next:

*As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.*

*So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and*

*a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.*

*David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.*

*When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.*



<sup>3</sup>Look at that: for forty days, the Israelites were hiding out behind the best giant they could find – Saul – while lamenting the fact that the giant over there was even bigger. Now, a shepherd boy arrives and raises up not his own stature, but the name of the Lord. And this shepherd boy is not hiding behind anyone or anything – David is running at Goliath and in so doing brings release and relief to the Israelites.

What do we learn here? How can we move ahead in our life of faith?

Think about your own life. My sense is that you've seen some giants roaming around from time to time. Maybe they even have names: anxiety. Depression. Addiction. Broken or

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<sup>3</sup>David und Goliath Osmar Schindler (1869-1927);, 1888

abusive relationships. Money. How are we to deal with these giants in our world?

Let me make three overly simplistic, but potentially helpful, suggestions.

Name the giant that you are facing. And as you do this, make sure that you name it correctly. For instance, you might think, "wow, Pastor Dave is right. I do have a giant, and that giant is that I don't have enough money." And that may be true. But is the giant really named "not enough money"? Or is the giant named "gambling" or "materialism" or "systematic racism"? In some cases, "not enough money" is simply a symptom of the fact that there's a giant on the loose. What's the name of the giant that's threatening you?

After you name a giant or two, try kneeling between them. In other words, remember that we are not to play by the enemy's rules. What resources do you have at your disposal? What else do you need? Remember, David brought his sling along with him. He had to stop to look for stones, but he had some of what he needed before he ever knew about Goliath. You've got a lot going for you right now. How can you bring those things to bear in your struggle against the giant? Ask God to show you options and to point you to allies

that will stand with you.

And lastly, know that God's intentions are for healing and life and victory. Believe the truth that before you were depressed or lonely or broke or addicted, you belonged to God. And you *still* belong to God. *That's* what this table is about. "On the night he was betrayed..." Jesus knew what was happening even as he took his friends aside and said, "this is for you." He commissioned them. And you know, Judas was there. Peter was there. And Jesus washed their feet and gave them the feast. Because he loved them. We, no less than they, are recipients of that amazing grace in the midst of tremendous brokenness. Trust in God's intention to bring you to healing, even as you ask God to help you see a path to the same.

We think that the story of David and Goliath, when we think of it at all, is just a kid's story. But I'll suggest that we tell it to our kids again and again and again because it is we who need to hear it. We are the ones who are ashamed and humiliated by the giants that keep calling us out... we are the ones who wonder if there is any way out of this mess... we are the ones who keep looking for other giants to hide behind... we are the ones who can't believe that God is willing or able to

bring us to a new and better place... Beloved, this story is not for your children. It is for you. And it's good news!

Name the giants. Kneel in their midst. And know God's intentions for our life together. Thanks be to God. Amen.