

“Overcoming Giants”
Sermon Series on *The Life of David* #3
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(1 Sam. 17:1-4, 8-11, 16, 32-40, 45-50)
June 17, 2018

Introduction.

The highlight of the bowl season back in January 2007 was the overtime victory of the Boise State Broncos over the Oklahoma Sooners in the Fiesta Bowl. In one of the most dramatic finishes in college football history, the two teams combined for 22 points in the final 86 seconds of regulation. Boise State blew an 18-point lead in the third quarter and twice rallied from a seven-point deficit.

Then in the overtime, OU scored the first time it touched the ball on a run by All American Adrian Peterson. Boise State answered with a touchdown of its own. However, unexpectedly, the Broncos decided to go for a two-point conversion to win the game. Quarterback Jared Zabranski looked at three wide receivers to the right, faked a pass, and then handed the ball off in a Statue of Liberty-type play to running back Ian Johnson who ran it in for the winning score. People went crazy. The final score was 43-42 in favor of Boise State.

Many sports commentators at the time remarked that little Boise State’s unlikely victory over mighty Oklahoma was like David defeating Goliath. Anytime a smaller, less talented team, business, or individual overcomes a larger, more talented, better financed opponent, this metaphor is always mentioned. It’s because the story of David and Goliath is one of the best-known stories in all the Bible, and there is something about an underdog taking down an overconfident bully that resonates with all of us.

I. A Study of a Contrast in Character.

There are three major figures in this story – Goliath, Saul, and David. Each of them plays a prominent role, and we see a contrast in character when we study each of these men respectively. But before we get to that, let’s take a look at some of the background to this passage.

You’ll recall that up to this point David has been secretly anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel. He’s also been summoned to the reigning king’s court in order to play his harp to soothe the tormented mind and soul of Saul, who was the king at the time. And he’s been asked by his father to take provisions for his brothers who have joined Saul in the fight against the Philistines. So, he heads off for the Valley of Elah.

The Valley of Elah was not a narrow ravine, but more like a vast canyon. The ancient site was about a mile wide, and toward the mouth of the canyon it opened up even wider. At the bottom of the canyon between the slopes was the stream where David found the five smooth stones for his sling. To one side there was a great slope a half mile or more in width, and opposite was another vast slope of another half mile, stretching a full mile across the canyon. Over the centuries, numerous battles have been fought there for control over the region because the valley's rising from the Mediterranean Sea offers those on the coast a clear path to the cities of Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem. But the most famous battle of all those that were ever fought there took place about a thousand years before Christ.

Encamped on one slope was the army of Israel, and on the other was the army of the Philistines. For 40 days, every morning and every evening, a champion named Goliath came out of the Philistine camp and made great boasts which echoed off the canyon walls. “*This day I defy the ranks of Israel. Give me a man and let us fight each other!*” (*1 Sam. 17:10*). Winner take all. It was an approach that was common in the ancient world where a representative from each army would fight one-on-one. It was called “single combat.” Whoever won the contest, his whole army won, and whoever lost, his whole army was defeated. An example of this is recorded in *The Iliad and the Odyssey* where Achilles fought Hector on behalf of their respective armies.

For 40 days Goliath did this, but there were no volunteers from the Israelites. It's no wonder, because Goliath so intimidating. He was very tall and stood 9'9"! He was 2 ½ feet taller than Shaquille O'Neal! He was not only tall, he was also strong. The armor he wore weighed about 150 pounds by itself, and the head of his spear alone weighed another 25 pounds. Pause for a moment and picture in your mind's eye this imposing sight. Goliath had size and strength, and he had an attitude. Imagine how frightening it would be to take on a giant of this size in battle. Clearly the odds were stacked against anyone foolish enough to take him on.

There was another giant on the battlefield that day. His name was Saul. The Bible says that the king of Israel stood head and shoulders above any other man among his people. But by contrast this giant was a coward. So, he worked out a plan to get someone else to fight in his place. He promised the man who killed Goliath great riches. In addition, he pledged to give the victor his daughter's hand in marriage. But best of all, he promised to exempt the man's family from having to pay taxes – forever! A bride, great riches, and NO taxes for life! What a bargain! Still, there were no takers...for 40 days.

I think many of us are like Saul – sitting in our tent, hoping someone else will fight the giant in our place, hoping that maybe the giant will go away. Are you in a situation like that yourself today? Are you hoping the giant in your life will just go

away, hoping someone else will take care of it? But the giant never leaves, does he? Eventually, at some point you always have to face the giant yourself.

When David arrived to deliver the food to his brothers, he came upon the scene where Goliath repeated his challenge. All the men of Israel cowered at Goliath's defiance, but David was incensed that anyone would defy the army of the living God. He inquired about the matter further, and despite the mocking of his oldest brother, he volunteered to fight the Philistine himself.

When David talked to Saul, he drew upon past experience to demonstrate his ability to defeat Goliath. In the past, whenever a bear or a lion attacked the sheep of his flock, he went after the animal, killed it, and rescued the sheep from its mouth. David was convinced he could do the same thing again with this pagan Philistine. The young shepherd was also convinced that it was the Lord who delivered him from the paw of the bear and the claw of the lion, and he believed God would deliver him from Goliath, too. With remarkable confidence, David relied not only on his own skill but more importantly on the power of God to enable him to overcome the enemy.

You know the rest of the story. After trying to wear Saul's armor, which didn't fit and only restricted David's ability to lean on his strengths, he took his staff and his sling, went to the stream where he chose five smooth stones, and he approached the Philistine champion. Goliath mocked the young shepherd, and he cursed David by his gods.

But David responded with one of the great speeches in the Bible, *"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 hand you over to me, and I will strike you down..., and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel...for the battle belongs to the Lord!" (17:45-47).*

As the Philistine moved closer to attack, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd's pouch, he selected one of the stones, put it in his sling, swung it around his head several times, and launched it at Goliath. The rock struck the Philistine in the forehead, the one place that was unprotected by his armor, and it sunk deeply into the champion's head. Goliath fell facedown and on the ground, and soon he was dead. The rout was on. What a story!

II. The Lessons We Can Learn.

There are several lessons I think we can learn from this passage about overcoming the giants we face in our lives. The first is **all of us face giants of one kind or another**. There are times when each of us feels intimidated, and we shrink back in fear because of some kind of giant in our life. When I was in the third grade, I was the fullback on my YMCA pee-wee football team. I remember the day we played E. Rivers Elementary School. They had a big kid named Nat Cherry on their team, and he was mean and nasty. He was a giant to me. On the first play from scrimmage, the quarterback handed me the ball, but when I saw Nat Cherry coming at me, I handed it back to the quarterback! My momma didn't raise a fool!

We all face giants. They are a fact of life, and they come at us in a variety of ways and in different seasons of our lives. Some giants are people. Some are problems. But **all giants are intimidating**. Your giant may not be a physical one like Goliath, or even Nat Cherry. Your giant may be a broken relationship, or a serious financial problem. Your giant may be worry, or fear, or depression. It may be your boss at work, a coach or teacher at school, or a neighbor down the street. It may be a parent, or it may be a child. Or your giant may be an illness or a medical condition which is sucking the life out of you. Whatever your giant is, it is intimidating, and it causes you to be afraid.

Giants like Goliath don't just come once; they come day after day, morning and evening, for 40 days or more. They are relentless, and they never give up. We should never be surprised when this is the case. That's the way giants are.

Another thing we should realize about overcoming giants is that **the battle is often lonely**. David was out there all by himself, and there was no one who could help him. People tried to offer advice, and they suggested he wear Saul's armor. But all the advice in the world didn't help. Eventually, you have to stand on your own to face the giant by yourself.

But the encouraging news is that we really aren't alone in the battle. The Lord is with us just as He was with David, and **trust in God is the key**. The battle belongs to the Lord, and while other people are of little use to us in overcoming a giant, we can't do it without God's help. His supernatural power is the only thing which can save us, and by this advantage, that God is on our side, we can experience victory.

Another lesson this passage teaches is that **the battles of today are preparing us for the bigger battles of tomorrow**. David knew the tactics he learned from fighting wild beasts were just the skills he needed to take on Goliath. He understood how the battles of the past had prepared him for this particular moment in his life. Some of you are going through a struggle right now, and you have no idea why. Someday, though, you will win a great victory through Christ, and then

you'll understand why you had to endure this hard time. It is preparing you for something greater. I'm sure there were moments when David prayed, "Lord, please, no more wild beasts!" I'm sure he wondered why God allowed the attacks to come in the wilderness. But more bears and lions would come, and they were preparing him for a greater day down the road.

Finally, always remember, as the saying goes, **the bigger they are, the harder they fall**. When *God* is the biggest thing in your life, any other giant looks small in comparison. We should always remember that, as the Bible says, He that is in us is stronger than he that is in the world. Our God is at work both to will and to do according to His good pleasure, and if God be for us, who can be against us?! Jesus promised His disciples, "*In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!*"

Conclusion.

When I was a senior in high school, I weighed 244 pounds. I was an offensive tackle on the football team, and the coaches wanted the linemen to add weight, and I was happy to oblige. (There is a picture of me on the screens of me from the yearbook in my senior year.) Although I played sports year-round and could carry the extra pounds, there was no getting around the fact that I was overweight and I had a problem with overeating. It was a giant in my life. Even though I had many friends and appeared to be popular, I was deeply lonely on the inside, and my self-esteem was extremely low. I tried to fill the hole with food. I battled depression, and on one occasion I had thoughts of suicide. But then Christ came into my life. He gave me a new reason for living, and He turned my priorities upside down.

Over the next 18 months, I lost 70 pounds as I gained confidence in my relationship with Christ and reordered my eating habits. The Lord did some house-cleaning in other parts of my life too, and I began to appreciate the person God created me to be. I grew in my self-confidence and I discovered that the Lord had given me some gifts and talents that could be of service in His kingdom, and He laid a call on my life which I couldn't deny. The giant of overeating was put to death, and God gave me a victory that still amazes me to this day.

Over the years there has been a song which has always spoken to my heart and given me courage whenever I have had to face giants in my life. It's by Keith and Kristyn Getty, and it's entitled "In Christ Alone." In the third verse of that song are these words.

No power of hell no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from God's hand
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

I can remember singing this song in a worship service several years ago during a time when I was facing a big giant in my life. Tears streamed down my face as I realized that God was with me, and he would help me deal with everything I was facing. No power of hell and no scheme of man can ever pluck you from His hand. God will be with you, and He can help you overcome, just like He did David.

What giant are you facing in your life today? What Goliath looms large and intimidates your soul? A friend of mine once said there is a kryptonite that destroys giants, and it's called faith. Faith is what allows us to take off the heavy armor we're wearing to try to protect ourselves, and it enables us to be our true and vulnerable selves as we run to take on the giants of our lives. God has given us everything we need to overcome giants. He's given us the power of His love and the strength of His Spirit to overcome whatever giant you may face this day. Trust Him, and He will see you through. I know, because He's overcome the giants before. Just ask David. Amen.