

20. David and the dwarf

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Some of the stories we know so well that they no longer have the same impact like they did at the beginning. This is the case in point. We all know about David and Goliath story. Even non-Christians know about it. But I guarantee you that we will still learn something new from this famous truth, not a fancy fairy tale.

This is not only about slaying the giant Goliath with David's sling, but it is the principle of trusting God and stepping forward in His strength.

Nowhere was this more evident than in David's showdown with Goliath. Let's join David on the battlefield and see who the real giant was.

A. GOLIATH: FRONT AND CENTER

1 Sam 17:1-3 Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered together at Sochoh, which belongs to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.

The scene opens with the age-old enemies of God's people, the brutish Philistines, once again threatening Israel.

1 Sam 17:4-7 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 (about 200 pounds). And he had bronze armor 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 spear-head weighed six hundred shekels (about 25 pounds); and a shield-bearer went before him.

To avoid an all-out battle, the Philistines have chosen a one-on-one contest of champions to decide the victor. The earth seems to shake as their champion, a mean fighting machine Goliath, strides to within shouting distance and pulls up to his full nine feet, nine inches.

Some people have hard time believing that there was a man 9 feet 9 inches tall. Robert Pershing Wadlow, who was eight feet eleven inches tall at the time of his death on July 15, 1940, at the age of twenty-two.

Squaring his huge shoulders, Goliath bellows up to the Israelites who are peeking over the ridge. He shouts, "Fee, fi, fo fum, I smell the blood of an English man."

1 Sam 17:8-10 Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, "Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the 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 be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." And the Philistine said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together."

So what was Israel's response?

1 Sam 17:11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

This, of course, is a significant strategy of the devil against us. We don't battle against flesh and blood enemies like Goliath, but we have our "spiritual giants" that are principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places to battle against. The devil has a heavy interest in making you dismayed and greatly afraid before the battle ever begins.

Saul had special reason to be afraid. Goliath was the giant among the Philistines, and Saul was head and shoulder taller than other Israelite men (1 Samuel 9:2). Saul was the logical choice to square off against Goliath, and we can expect he knew others were expecting him to fight Goliath.

B. ENTER: DAVID, "THE GIANT"

1 Sam 17:12 Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced in years, in the days of Saul.

Just as the Spirit-filled David came to rescue the Spirit-emptied Saul in chapter 16, so we now see the faith-filled David coming to save the cowering, faithless Saul.

1) AT HOME

1 Sam 17:13-15 The three oldest sons of Jesse had gone to follow Saul to the battle. The names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the first-born, next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. David was the youngest. And the three oldest followed Saul. But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

David, Saul's comforter and armor bearer, divides his between caring for his aged father's flock and serving Saul.

2) WITH THE SOLDIERS

1 Sam 17:16 And the Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening.

Significantly, forty days (or forty years) is used in the Scriptures rather consistently as a period of judgment and or testing. It rained for forty days in the time of Noah. Israel was in the wilderness forty years. Jesus fasted and was tempted of the devil for forty days before He began His public ministry. So here, Israel is also tested by Goliath's mockery for forty days.

1 Sam 17:17-22 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." Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and took the things and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had drawn up in battle array, army against army. And David left his supplies in the hand of the supply keeper, ran to the army, and came and greeted his brothers.

92 Taking some cheeses to the big cheeses of his brothers.

1 Sam 17:23 Then as he talked with them, there was the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, coming up from the armies of the Philistines; and he spoke according to the same words. So David heard them. Suddenly, all eyes focus on the valley below. David catches his first glimpse of Goliath, who is "coming up from the armies of the Philistines". No longer satisfied with beating his chest from the valley floor, the giant apparently ascends the Israelite slope to bully his opponents on their side. And Israel's soldiers scatter like frightened sheep before a growling bear.

1 Sam 17:24-27 And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid. So the men of Israel said, "Have you seen (A-1) this man who has come up? Surely (A-2) he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be that (A-3) the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father's house exemption from taxes in Israel." Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "What shall be done for (B-3) the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is (B-1) this uncircumcised Philistine, that (B-2) he should defy the armies of the living God?" And the people answered him in this manner, saying, "So shall it be done for the man who kills him." David, however, sizes up this pagan giant in light of God's righteousness and power.

The soldiers then tell him of Saul's incentives: great riches, the king's daughter, and exemption from taxes for his family. Generous rewards, for sure.

Other soldiers focused on the danger of the battle or the material rewards to be won. It seems that David alone focused on the reputation of Israel and the honor of the living God.

This truly shows David to be a man after God's own heart. He cares about the things God cares about. He saw the problem in spiritual terms, not in material or fleshly terms. When the men of Israel said, "This man," David said, "This uncircumcised Philistine." When the men of Israel said, "Surely he has come up to defy Israel," David said, "That he should defy the armies of the living God." When the men of Israel said, "The man who kills him," David said, "The man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel." David saw things from the Lord's perspective, but the men of Israel saw things only from man's perspective.

1 Sam 17:28-30 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." And David said, "What have I done now? Is there not a cause?" Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones did. David's oldest brother, Eliab, overhears David's courageous words. But rather than support him, he slaps him down verbally.

Can you feel the slam? How true it is that as soon as you start stepping out in faith, somebody—will want to put you down—often another Christian or someone in your own family. Perhaps Eliab still battled the giant of jealousy that invaded his heart when Samuel anointed David instead of him.

3) BEFORE SAUL

1 Sam 17:31-33 Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported them to Saul; and he sent for him. Then David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."

The God of Israel is the only giant David sees. Saul, however, cannot see past the human rank.

David didn't care about his glory or success, but only for the glory of the Lord. Goliath was a dead man right then! This is where the battle was won!

1 Sam 17:34-37 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." Moreover 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 of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"

Saul has forgotten what it is like to fight in the Lord's strength. But David remembers past victories and uses them to fortify his faith.

God was preparing David to fight Goliath. This is generally God's pattern for preparation. He calls us to be faithful right where we are at, and then uses our faithfulness to accomplish greater things for glory.

1 Sam 17:38-39 So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. David fastened his sword to his armor 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.

Convinced (and relieved not to face Goliath himself), Saul says David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you." Then he suited up David the best way he knew how, with his own defenses.

In giving David his armor and weaponry, Saul probably calculated to be able to take credit for, or at least to share in, David's victory over the Philistine giant, in case David wins. If David loses, Saul would say, "I tried to stop him. I even gave him my armor to save him."

It must have been a sight. David, a 36 regular, wearing the armor of Saul, a 52 long.

Often, people try to fight with another person's armor. They see God do something wonderful through someone else, and they try to copy it without really making it their own. This is not how God's work is done.

David did not face Goliath unarmed. He had much better armor than Saul's. Saul had a bronze helmet, but David had the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17). Saul had a coat of mail, but David had a breastplate of righteousness (Ephesians 6:14).

Saul had a sword, but David had the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). David had the whole armor of God! (Ephesians 6:11).

C. EXIT: GOLIATH “THE DWARF”

1 Sam 17:40-41 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. So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield went before him.

Both hilltops now come alive with commotion, all eyes riveted on the two combatants on the valley floor.

1) WARMING UP

1 Sam 17:42-43 And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking. So the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

Equipped to battle Israel’s strongest, Goliath is insulted when a shepherd boy comes trotting out to meet him.

This is not a fair fight. It isn’t Goliath and his armor bearer against David. It is Goliath and his armor bearer against David and the Lord God of Israel. The battle is over.

2) LOOKING UP

1 Sam 17:44-47 And the Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!” 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 the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s, and He will give you into our hands.”

But David is not intimidated. The battle is the Lord’s. This perspective will be the hallmark of David’s life. Is it ours, too? Are we facing a giant of our own – mistreatment, fear, sickness, financial difficulties, discouragement, guilt? Remember, “The battle is the Lord’s.” Not ours. Our part is to trust His power, as David did. Because He specializes in “hopeless” situations, using the window of our weaknesses to shine through His strength and magnify His name.

2 Cor 12:9-10 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

3) WRAPPING UP

1 Sam 17:48-51 So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hastened 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. And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

David's confidence enrages Goliath, who is but a youth. Fearlessly, David runs to within range, loads his sling, and "Wham!" A perfect strike! David's fast ball hits Goliath right between the headlights. You could hear David saying, "Timber!"

I guess we can say, "Goliath was really stoned and out cold."

Goliath's friends used to call him "Golly." Now he is dead, they said, "Bye Golly."

Everyone else thought, "Goliath is so big, I can't beat him." David thought, "Goliath is so big, I can't miss him."

4) MOPPING UP

1 Sam 17:52-58 Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines as far as the entrance of the valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell along the road to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath and Ekron. Then the children of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their tents. And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent. When Saul saw David going out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." So the king said, "Inquire whose son this young man is." Then, as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" So David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

With a shout of victors, the Israelites chase the Philistines back to their hometowns, killing as many as they can catch and plundering their camps.

Why is that Saul did not recognize David? There were some time passed between chapter 16 and 17. Besides, Saul could care less for a shepherd boy from Bethlehem who played music for him when the distressing demon tormented him.

D. APPLICATIONS

Goliath endures as a symbol of the giants we face daily. The following reminders not only help us confront our Goliaths but, God's strength, slay them as well.

1) Facing giants is an intimidating experience.

Even through the eyes of faith, Goliath's nine-foot frame still towered over David. Faith doesn't blind us to reality, but it does enable us to see beyond the externals as we draw on God's power.

2) Doing battle is a lonely experience.

Your Goliaths are your Goliaths. In fact, they may not be gigantic to anyone else but they are to you. The battle is for you and the Lord to fight together. Your pastor can't fight it for you, nor can your counselor or friend. They may stand behind you, but only you can cross the battle line to fight.

3) Trusting God is a stabilizing experience.

It's amazing how calm David was. It was as if he knew the outcome even before he stepped into the battle. And he knew, because he knew His God. That's the nature of true faith - *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* (Heb. 11:1). God of David who slained the giant, will also slain your giant if you step out into the battle field with trust in Him.

4) Knowing that Jesus won the battle for us is a calming experience.

David won a great victory, but not greater than the victory Jesus won on our behalf. David's victory over Goliath is a "picture in advance" of the victory Jesus won for us.

- Both David and Jesus represented their people. Whatever happened to the representative would happen to God's people also.
- Both David and Jesus fought when their enemy was able to dominate the people of God through fear and intimidation alone.
- Both David and Jesus were sent to the battleground by their fathers.
- Both David and Jesus were scorned and rejected by their own brethren.
- Both David and Jesus fought the battle without human strategies or conventional wisdom.
- Both David and Jesus fought a battle where the victory was assured even before it started.