

David and the Giant

1 Samuel 17

Gideon asked the question. When an angel of God announced that God was with him, he could not help himself. He had to know.

O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about? Judges 6:13 It was a valid question. The camel cavalries of Midian were overrunning Israel. And God's people were hiding in mountain caves.

The same question should have clouded the minds of Saul's soldiers. Camped on a high ridge, they stared across a narrow valley at a twin ridge where the armies of the five lords of Philistia faced them.

There was nothing unusual about that. But each morning a gigantic warrior would swagger out from the enemy battle line and bellow across the valley to the armies of Israel.

"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. Verses 8-11

The question looms large and demands an answer. If God is powerful, if He works through His people, and if He never changes, why did one man make everyone in the Lord's army tremble?

David came as a delivery boy and a messenger. Sent by his father, Jesse's youngest son arrived just as Goliath bellowed out his daily challenge.

But it did not fill David with fear. It boiled a rage within him. It was all crystal clear to him. He understood that it was a reproach to the blessed name of his God that the Lord's people were not only defeated; they were weak and powerless in the face of an enemy.

The same is true for us. Our God is brought to shame when His people live in defeat and fear. And it does not make any difference how outmatched or overwhelmed we are. Our God is greater than all. And His power flows through us. So we must be victorious.

Jesse sent his son to Saul's camp to deliver food to his brothers. But God sent the young shepherd there to fight a giant.

But Goliath was not the only giant David fought that day. Before he could challenge Philistia's champion, he had to face other threats. And if he did not defeat them, he did not have a chance against Goliath.

There are giants in our lives too. We face trials and troubles: addictions and ugly attitudes, fears and frets that are so vast, we feel like the faithless spies did after they had seen Goliath's ancestors.

...we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight. Numbers 13:33

Our eternal adversary, the devil dares and defies us to defeat the obstacles he places in our paths. And we cannot cower in our tents like Saul and his soldiers. We must face our fears and be victorious.

Or our great and glorious God is shamed.

Our Motives

David fought preliminary bouts with three adversaries before he ever got to Goliath. Those threats are woven like colored threads through the fabric of this story.

When David heard Goliath shout echo across the canyon, the young shepherd looked around and was astounded at the fear on the faces of Saul's soldiers. So he asked one them about it.

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?" Verse 26

Soldier after soldier told David the same story. King Saul offered rich rewards to any man who fought and killed the enemy champion.

...the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel. Verse 25

David eldest brother was also a soldier. Sitting nearby, he heard his brother talking to the other troops. And his faced flushed with anger.

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. Verse 28

Eliab remembered the glow on Samuel's face when the old man first met him. For a moment Jesse's eldest son was sure the prophet was going to anoint him as Israel's next king.

But suddenly, Samuel's face fell. And the prophet passed him by. Instead, he demanded that Jesse call his youngest son in from the field.

Eliab seethed when Samuel anointed David. His baby brother was given the prize he himself craved. Now David was acting like one who had been anointed.

Like many people, Eliab imposed his own motives upon his brother. He supposed that since he hungered for glory and riches and power, David did too.

But he was wrong there. David never asked for the prizes the troops told him had been offered to the one who defeated Goliath. And when he carried the giant's bloody head back up the hill to Saul, David did not demand the prize and never objected even though he received exactly nothing for daring to face and fight Philistia's champion.

Only one motive burned within David. He wanted to stand up for the God he loved. God's blessed name was shamed by Goliath's swaggering challenges and the soldiers' formless fears. And to David, that was intolerable.

...who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God? Verse 26

I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. Verse 45

More than that, David also wanted everyone to know that Israel's God was more than a myth or a forgotten name in old, outdated stories. The young shepherd wanted people to know his Lord was real and powerful and present. And he wanted them to see it in such an emphatic way that any doubt was impossible.

I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, Verse 46

Quite often, people who do not know our Savior see saints struggle along, defeated by doubts and difficulties. And they shake their heads sadly. How can their God be real?

It is up to us to prove them wrong. But to do so, we must be moved and motivated as David was. We cannot be clouded and confused by dreams of personal glory and still be champions for our God.

We must seek His glory, not ours.

Our Memories

David was not deterred by his brother's angry words. He continued to ask questions concerning the Philistine's challenge. And it was not long before someone told the king about it.

When the words which David spoke were heard, they told them to Saul, and he sent for him. David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Verses 31-32

Saul looked at the skinny shepherd boy before him. If it was not so sad and pitiful, it would have been funny.

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." Verse 33

Once again we see one of the threats David faced. From his brother, he faced intimidation. He was nothing but a small time shepherd.

Saul meant no harm. But his kind words were also a sort of intimidation, designed to send shivers of insecurity through the shepherd. How could David face the enormous enemy? He was just a youth.

It is important to note that never for a moment did David disagree with his detractors. They were right. He was just a youth. And all by himself. he was utterly unfit and unqualified to fight a giant.

But that was just the point. He was not by himself. He had no intention of doing battle with Philistia's champion alone.

Eliab sneered that David was just a shepherd. And once again, Jesse's youngest son agreed.

But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a 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 of this Philistine." Verses 34-37

Since the wonderful day when Samuel anointed him with oil, David had never battled alone. When lions and bears threatened his flock, he fought them with God's power, not his own.

God allowed David to face those dangers and difficulties for a definite purpose. The Lord was giving David a storehouse of memories.

So whether he was facing a lion or an enemy soldier, David had a powerful weapon against doubt. He could leaf through his memories of how God had been present and powerful within him before.

And when our own dangers and difficulties or troubles and trials seem insurmountable and unbeatable, we are to do the same thing.

I shall remember the deeds of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. Psalm 77:11

Our God was faithful in the past. He made us strong and steadfast when we faced troubles before. And He is a God who never changes. So we can be sure He will give us the inner strength and overpowering faith we need to be victorious once again.

Our Methods

Saul smiled sadly. He remembered when he felt the same way as David did. That was long ago, but he still recognized God's presence when he saw it. And he saw it in David.

And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you." Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor. Verses 37-38

It was a fine gesture. The king meant nothing but the best for David. More than anything, he wanted for the young shepherd to win.

When God sent Saul out to fight, the big man was in full armor. So he commanded servants to clothe David in his own armor.

David strapped Saul's sword around his armored waist. Then he took a few staggering steps. The armor was forged for much a taller man. It was too heavy for him to carry. And he was utterly inexperienced at fighting in full armor. He could hardly move.

So David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." And David took them off. Verse 39

Instead of a sword and spear, David picked up his shepherd's rod and his homemade sling. Then he made his way down the steep hillside to where a stream trickled through a little valley. In the riverbed there, he fished in the water to find smooth, round stones.

He 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; Verse 40

David was not Saul. And he knew it. God used Saul as a powerful warrior. And the Lord also used David to fight Israel's enemies. But not in the same way.

Peter and Paul were both preachers and apostles. They both proclaimed God's Word. But they did not do so in the very same way.

God does not stamp servants out of the same mold. Everyone who serves Jesus Christ is different. And our Lord not only knows it; He revels and rejoices in it.

That is why His Spirit always works within us in ways that are unique and individual. With one of us, He works wonders with hands. In another, He makes miracles with words.

Some specialize in speaking to crowds. Others are best at speaking to people one on one.

It is always a mistake to attempt to imitate how other people serve our Savior. God delights in diversity. He is infinitely creative. And He always works in different ways with different people.

God had always worked in David's life as he was shepherding sheep. Out in the open pastures, the Lord taught him how to sling a stone like bullet and always hit his mark.

Now a new enemy stood before David. But David did not change his methods merely because other people expected him too. Neither did he change because people around him looked down upon his lowly life as shepherd.

As a shepherd, David had trusted in God. He was not ashamed of his trade. And he was not about to abandon all His God had taught him just because a proud enemy ridiculed him.

Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field." Verses 41-44

David understood what we must learn. We must never be ashamed of the ways our God has chosen to use us.

Never forget. No service for Jesus Christ is inconsequential or unimportant. No calling is so small or insignificant that we need not trust in our Savior's Spirit to give us strength, insight and wisdom. No matter what we do for our Lord, we must trust in Him with all our heart.

Quite simply, David dared to be David, a young shepherd who had learned to trust in God. And we must also dare to be ourselves. We must work as our God has taught us, not as other people expect.

Jesse's youngest son knew he was not going into battle alone. So he had an answer for the giant's sneering challenges.

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. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands. Verses 45-47

David understood one thing which was and is vitally important. Our God needs neither the arms nor the assets of this world. He does not work through the wise but the foolish. He works through the weak, not the strong; through the poor, not the rich.

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

Once again, David knew what we must learn. Our weapons are not like those of this world. They are vastly more powerful, able to pull down Satan's strongholds and penetrate the hearts of men and women.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; 2 Corinthians 10:4 (KJV)

The actual battle was brief and anticlimactic. Loaded down with heavy armor, Goliath lumbered toward David. At the same time, the shepherd boy ran toward the giant.

Then he whirled his sling around his head and sent one stone hurtling toward Goliath. The stone found the giant's one unprotected spot: his forehead. Stunned, he fell to the ground. The battle was over.

It was foregone conclusion that David would win. He knew he was weak. So he depended utterly and absolutely upon his God.

And when we do that, we simply cannot lose.