



The Trinity Pulpit



A Giant Obstacle

I Samuel 17

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Here we are in Raleigh, N.C., the very epicenter of the David and Goliath story. It was 1983 and everyone was ready to crown Houston the NCAA champs. The Houston Cougars, known as Phi Slamma Jamma had two players who would go on to be Hall of Fame NBA players. Hakeem Olajuwon and Clyde Drexler led the high-flying, high-scoring, and exhilarating Cougars. No one was surprised when they arrived at the championship game, but the team that would tip it off with them was a complete surprise. Known now as the Cardiac Pack, the Wolfpack of N.C. State had made an unexpected and unbelievable run through the tournament. They were essentially a team of no names; their coach was more popular than any one on the team. They had arrived by winning 7 of the last 9 games in the last minute of play. Now, they faced the team who was only 40 minutes away from claiming what was rightfully theirs and which everyone thought would only be a formality. Yet, the Wolfpack did not follow the script. In that last second desperation shot that became the best alley oop in NCAA Championship history when Charles Lorenzo dunked the 30-foot arching pass/shot from Derek Whittenberg. Yes, it was hard to believe. N.C. State had defeated the larger, more talented and gifted Houston Cougars. Everyone was in disbelief. That game still goes down in the history of the NCAA as the moment that “David defeated Goliath.”

That term – David and Goliath – is one of those terms that we often use in sports commentary. It describes the moment an unknown or under talented team or individual defeats the known or expected champion. So, for most of us the story of David and Goliath is a story of a surprise victory. For others of us, it is a good story about helping our children know not to be afraid of what they might face. Both of those are true, but let us look at this familiar story and see what else might become evident to us as we think about facing our own giant obstacles.

The army of the Israelites, led by Saul, had come to a showdown with the Philistine army in the Valley

of Elah. There they drew their battle lines. Each army occupied a hill and the valley was between them. Now this valley was not a ravine but a wide canyon approximately a mile wide. Picture the scene: one army on one side and one on the other side and this vast space between. We are told that everyday Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, would come out into this vast canyon and begin his taunting of the Israelites. Goliath is described in incredible terms: he was over 9 feet tall (some suggest he was 9 ft. 9 inches tall) and he was covered in armor. Most men who fought did so with just regular clothes and with maybe a shield and a sword; yet, here was this giant who was covered in armor from his shoulders to his feet. On his head he wore a helmet of bronze. He carried with him a javelin that weighed 15 pounds with an iron point; and as if that was not enough, he had a shield bearer with him who would be carrying a shield that was a full body shield.

What an imposing sight. He was a champion. This is what he did. He would fight on behalf of his whole army and if he won, the opposing nation would become the servants of the Philistines. Goliath, we are told, would come out every day and taunt and defy the army of Israel. The word “defy” literally means “I heap shame” on the army of Israel. We don’t know all that he said, but we can assume he called them all kinds of names to indicate their cowardliness. By his very presence, he heaped shame day after day for forty days upon the army of Israel. One more item we are told by David in the chapter is that Goliath was coming up. That indicates that day after day Goliath was advancing. He was more confident everyday that he could get closer to the army of Israel and farther from his army without fear or concern; he, individually, was advancing on the army of Israel. The reaction of the army of Israel is that as soon as Goliath would come into the canyon and begin to advance, they would turn and retreat in fear. Can you believe it? One man against an army and they would turn and run away.

Goliath is the picture of the great giant obstacle. His appearance, intensity and boldness created a giant obstacle that the army of Israel refused to face. They would rather live in shame than face this giant.

This is what giants do. The giant obstacles in our lives produce the same shame and fear. Just like the Israelites, our lives are filled with giant obstacles. It might be a disease that keeps advancing. It might be a temptation and a sin that we can't seem to overcome. We say "I am going to never do that again," and then we find ourselves, in our shame, wondering "How did I let myself get into that situation again?" It might be what seems like an insurmountable financial situation: our debt is out of hand, we are going farther in the hole every month, and there is no way out, or so it seems.

Our obstacle might be something more in line with a learning disability which requires hard work to overcome. It might be a physical disability which requires real effort just to function. Our giant obstacle might be unknown to everyone but us. It is the pain of a dysfunctional family. It is the secret sin, it is the family secrets we never utter, it is the shame of a bad decision, the pain of a poor choice, and the hopelessness of grief and loss. We have our own giant obstacles.

They are much like the description of Goliath. They seem insurmountable. Just like it seemed that Goliath had no weaknesses, so our giants seem to be without weakness. No matter how we try to view our situation, the giants in our lives seem to have an answer for every possible option we might think of to overcome them. There does not seem to be any way out, over or through.

Not only do they seem insurmountable, they also taunt us. Goliath taunted the army of God for 40 days. In other words, this was something they had heard before and had accepted as a part of their lives. It also seems that Goliath's taunt on day 40 was just as effective as it had been on day 1. Every time they heard him they trembled in fear.

In his commentary on this passage Chuck Swindoll writes:

That is the way it is with the giants of fear and worry for example. They don't just come once; they come morning and evening, day after day, relentlessly trying to intimidate. They come in the form of a person, a pressure or a worry. Some fear ham-

mers on your heart every morning and every night, day in and day out, yelling across the ravine in your own personal valley. Few things are more persistent and intimidating than our fears and our worries.¹

Not only do our giants taunt us continually, they also keep advancing. If we ignore them they do not simply go away. They keep coming and they become more and more a part of our lives until we live in constant fear, shame and frustration with our giants.

Giants are real. There was a reason for Goliath to be feared, but Israel's greatest enemy in the Valley of Elah was not Goliath but their own fear, shame and frustration.


Stanley Pinto was a professional wrestler who successfully faced a number of tough opponents - but during a match in Providence, Rhode Island, he lost to his most formidable opponent.

The bell rang, the opening minutes began ticking off, and Pinto found himself slightly entangled in the ropes. Eager to free himself, he began struggling wildly. Before he could stop himself, he had pinned his own shoulders to the mat. His shoulders stayed pinned, despite his efforts to free himself. While his opponent - who hadn't laid a hand on him - watched, the referee began the countdown. And Pinto was counted

out.²

We all face giants in our lives; however, our biggest enemy is not the giants but ourselves. It is our lack of confidence and our lack of faith that keeps us running, frightened and frustrated.

Yet, David approached the situation completely differently. We are told that David was still a boy. He was probably a teenager at this point; one had to be 20 to be in the army so David was probably in his late teens. While his older brothers were fighting with Saul, David had been tending to the family business of sheep herding. Jesse called David to himself and told him to go to the front and check on his brothers. David took with him rations for his brothers and for their commander, for it was the responsibility of the family to provide for the army. He was to bring back an assurance. Now that can be read that Jesse was concerned for his sons, as I am sure he was now that they had been away for at least 40 days at this battle. That word also means to bring back



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some sort of example of the spoils of war as a way of proving the sons were alive. When David arrives he gets his first experience with Goliath. Goliath comes out for his daily taunting of the Israelites, and as usual, the Israelites all ran from Goliath in great fear. Yet, David's response is different. He is not filled with fear. Instead he responded "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the army of the living God?"

Now notice David's response. It is a new perspective. It is not based on 40 days of taunting. We all know that giants get larger with each passing day. David comes with a new perspective. His perspective is not to look at the size or the armor of the giant. Instead David sees the giant for who he is. He is uncircumcised. That is, he is not part of God's covenant. This giant is not a follower of God nor does he honor God, and David wants no part of that which will not honor God. Secondly, he taunts the army of the living God. That is a reminder to the soldiers. They had forgotten who they were. They were not just another army. They were the army of the living God. They were the chosen of God. They were the descendants of those who had been freed from Egypt, sustained in the wilderness and given the land of the promise. They served a God who had delivered before. Why were they living in fear?

Although his oldest brother tried to dissuade him, David volunteers for the one-on-one, man-to-man battle. It was going to be the first ultimate fight night. Saul tries to prepare David by giving him his own armor. He said "If you are going to do this at least wear some armor and have a fighting chance." Yet, when David tried on the tunic and sword they were simply a hindrance instead of a help. Instead, David picks up his staff and five smooth stones and puts them in his pouch and with his sling in his hand approached the Philistine.

David does not go as anyone else. He goes as himself and with what he has and he approaches the Philistine. Notice the difference. Everyone else has been running away but David advances toward the giant. Now the giant does not run away just because of David's confidence. Giants usually do not go away that easily. David advances and Goliath advances. When Goliath sees David he begins a personal taunt. He makes fun of his weapon or at least the one he can see the staff. He calls it a stick used to beat a dog. He curses David by his gods. To curse a son of Abraham was to mock God because such a curse was to curse God. He promises to kill David and dishonor his corpse.

But that would be his last recorded words. For David is not deterred. Listen to what David says in I Samuel 17:45-47.

After speaking, David rushes toward the giant and the giant advances toward David. David however is armed with something the giant has not seen. It is his slingshot so somewhere in the running to the battle David stops and takes one of the five smooth stones and with deadly accuracy sends that stone into the air and the stone strikes the giant in the forehead and it sinks into his forehead. David rushes to the fallen giant to complete the task. David takes Goliath's own sword and beheads him. David, the unknown and the unlikely one, has defeated the great champion.

What do we learn from David about facing our own giants? Let me just mention four things David teaches us about fighting the giant obstacles in our lives.

First, God had prepared David for this moment against Goliath. When Saul asks David how he can face the giant, David says that he has already killed a bear and a lion when they attacked his sheep. David did not just fight them off but chased them as they were carrying off a sheep, caught it, pried the sheep from their mouths, grabbed them by the hair, and killed both the lion and the bear. David's conclusion: this Philistine will be like one of those. In addition, David was prepared for the battle. The weapon he possessed did not appear to be much, but it was exactly what he needed. He could not have fought the giant in close combat. But his slingshot that he had used over and over again became the weapon that would defeat the giant.

I don't know what giant you are facing, but let me suggest that God has prepared you for this moment. Look back on your life and discover the experiences that have given you confidence. Look back on your life and think about the times God has intervened and given you strength. Look honestly at your life and discover the gifts and talents that you have which will allow you to face this giant. You might not think it is so, but I want you to know that God has prepared you for this moment.

Second, look at your giant through the eyes of faith instead of fear. The Israelites had become so used to fearing Goliath that they lost complete perspective on the battle. If we live in fear long enough, then fear is the only way we can face our obstacles. David's perspective on Goliath was putting the giant into the proper perspective. David concludes "This giant is not blessed by God and is not of God so I am not going to fear it but face it." David, over and over again, reminds us that we face our giants not by our own power but by the power of God in our lives. David had confidence in what God had done and what God would do when he faced the giant.

God has not only prepared you but God is with you. It

is time to stop looking at our obstacles with fear and trembling and begin to put them into the perspective that God brings to any situation.


Is it a physical giant? God has promised to give us strength and we also need to be reminded we are more than our bodies. Is it financial? God has promised that when we are obedient to his plan for us financially that he will bless us and sustain us. We remember that all the earth and everything in it belongs to God. God is not deterred by an economic downturn. Is it a sin and the temptation is overwhelming? The Apostle Paul reminds us that there is no temptation so great that God will not provide a way out and through it. All we have to do is desire God's answer to the temptation. Look at this giant with faith and not fear.

Third, fight it. Throughout the text, David advances toward the giant. I don't know if the Israelites were praying Goliath would get tired and leave but he does not. In fact, the more they run and the more they ignore him the stronger and bolder he gets. Our obstacles will not simply go away. We have to face them. We have to face them ourselves. There will be those like David's brother who will try to tell us we cannot do it. We will surely be defeated. We will be doubted like Saul doubted David's ability. There will be those who will try to give us good advice. But ultimately we have to face our own giants alone and with God. No one is able to do this for us. We have to fight our own fight with God's help.

Lastly, remember that obstacles have the purpose of bringing God glory. David declares that this victory

will remind everyone that there is a God in Israel. Everyone would know that God exists and is more powerful than the weapons of the enemy.

Whatever our giants might be, as a Christian we want to see them as an opportunity to bring glory to God. My friends, the greatest ever obstacle was the cross. It represented death and God-forsakenness. It was not seen as the place of victory or redemption. It was the ultimate defeat and humiliation. Yet, Jesus faced his greatest obstacle just like David faced Goliath. He was prepared. He had walked with the Father so he knew he could face this obstacle as well. He had confidence in the power of God. Jesus released himself to death and pain because he knew that God would be faithful. He could face the cross not as a place of death but a place of the possibility of God. He faced it alone and with God. No one could die on our behalf except Jesus. Jesus alone could be the sacrifice for our sin. Others tried to dissuade him. Others had other plans but Jesus faced his giant with faith, alone and with God. The cross is transformed by Jesus. It is no longer seen as the place of death but the place where we can find life.



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My friends, I don't know what your giant obstacle is, but I do not know what mine look like. It is time for us to stop ignoring them, fearing them, and running from them. It is time to fight them with the confidence that God has prepared us, God is able, God will be with us, and ultimately, God will be glorified.

Run to the fight with confidence and faith so that all will know today that God lives. 

¹Charles Swindoll, *David* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997), 38.

²Ross and Kathryn Petras, *The 176 Stupidest Things Ever Done* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 190.

