

“Facing Giants (1)”

1 Samuel 17:1-30

We'll be starting a new series today. It's actually an old series on 1 Samuel. The pattern that I tend to use when I preach is to do Old Testament in the fall, the Gospels right after Christmas through Easter, and then in the summer I do something in the New Testament Epistles. I think it was three years ago that I started this series on 1st Samuel. The first time we looked at 1st Samuel chapters 1-8. Last year we looked at chapters 8-16, and this year we'll be looking at chapters 17 to however far we get. The reason I say that is because I planned on doing one sermon on David and Goliath, and before Wednesday of this week I realized I need to do three on this passage. So, you all will have to deal with it I guess.

¹Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. ²And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. ³And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. ⁴And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

I'm starting this part of the 1st Samuel series with the story of David and Goliath, undoubtedly the most famous story in the whole Bible. In fact any time, whether it's in the church or the secular world or sports, when someone small or an underdog beats someone big or a favorite it's referred to as a “David and Goliath story.” I don't follow football but I opened the paper this morning and on the front page was “University of Washington - underdog David, beats USC - Goliath.” A few months ago when “America's Got Talent” started, the first night a chicken farmer from Kentucky played and I said, “He is going to win the whole thing.” I'm not saying that to be prideful, but he won the whole thing. David – Goliath. The story is famous. In fact, have you ever read “Tom Sawyer”? Tom Sawyer is notorious for not going to school, like another Tom I know. The only Bible story that he knew was the story of David and Goliath.

Before we jump into this story, though, since it's been a year since we looked at it, I feel like we have to get a bit of background for the whole book and then we're going to look at three things this morning. What's the background to the book? The book of Samuel actually includes I and II Samuel. So if you hear me say “Samuel” I mean both books usually. Also, Samuel was the last judge. The Book of Samuel actually picks up where the Book of Judges left off. That's important because in the Book of Judges the author is making a case that Israel needs a king. If you read the Book of Judges, one thing you realize is that judges aren't good enough to lead Israel, and by the last few chapters of the Book of Judges you hear one horrifying story after another. And the moral of every story is just this, “Now remember, Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” So you get to the Book of Samuel, and Samuel (the last judge) is going to be the judge that transitions from Israel being led by judges to Israel being led by kings.

The purpose of the Book of Samuel is like Judges, but it has an interesting twist. The Book of Samuel makes the case that in fact Israel does need a king but they need a very specific king. They need a king like David. The whole book is building up to this person that we now know of as David. Samuel becomes the last judge in Israel, and by chapter 8 of this book, Israel came to Samuel and said, “We want you to tell God that we want a king like the other nations.” It's important to get the last little part there, “like the other nations.” Part of back-story is that Israel's nemesis or villain at this point were the Philistines. And the Philistines were not the kind of people that would come in and just conquer and slaughter and leave; the Philistines were the kind of people who would come in and basically make you slaves or vassals and collect taxes from you for the rest of your life. Israel didn't want that. They wanted a king like the other nations who could lead them. A king like the other nations is important to know, because a king like the other nations would have been big and strong and powerful and brave, not necessarily the kind of king that God would want them to have. Samuel warned them, “If you want a king like the other nations, here's what you're going to get. You're going to get someone who will enslave your sons and daughters; he's going to take a tenth of your crops. He's basically going to make your lives miserable.” They

said, “That’s exactly what we want.” It’s a fact. He said, “You want it? You got it.” So he gave them a king named Saul.

If you remember from a year ago, there were three things that distinguished Saul in our eyes. First, he was incredibly big. He was a head taller than anyone in Israel. That’s important to keep in mind when we realize what the problem is here. If you’re going to fight a tall enemy whom should you send out to fight him? Maybe a tall king. He’s incredibly big, he’s physically imposing, on one hand. On the other hand, we know that he’s a very poor shepherd. The king of Israel was supposed to be the shepherd of Israel. Saul was a poor shepherd. We know that because his father lost two donkeys and he couldn’t even find them let alone a flock of sheep. Then the last thing we notice is that he was incredibly spiritually dull. He was so dull, in fact, that he made unlawful sacrifices and rash vows, and eventually God rejected him in favor of someone who was exactly the opposite of him. Saul was physically imposing and big and a warrior. But the person God would choose was a boy. Saul was a horrible shepherd. God would choose someone who had only known being a shepherd. Saul was spiritually dull and the person that God would choose to be their king would be someone who was very spiritually aware, very faithful. That person, of course, is David. So, God rejects Saul in chapter 15. In chapter 16 God tells Samuel to go to the house of Jesse where God will show him whom He will chose to be the next king of Israel. It’s important to know as well that in Israel and the Semitic world seven was the perfect number. If you had seven sons you had a perfect family. Anything after seven you just don’t count. Samuel went to Jesse and said, “God says a king’s going to come from your house.” Jesse does what any father would do. He gets his oldest son – the one who had a right to the job – and he says, “Here’s the one. He must be the one.” God says, “That’s not him.” Let me read to you exactly what God says in chapter 16:7.

⁷ *But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” (ESV)*

So Jesse proceeded to parade his other six sons before Samuel and God kept saying, “Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope.” Samuel asked, “Do you have another son?” He said, “Well, yeah, the youngest – number eight. He’s out herding the sheep.” Samuel said, “Bring him in here.” Then you know that God said, “He’s the one.” Samuel anointed him, and his brothers saw him anointed. Then the story shifts. That’s where it brings us to today. You sort of leap frog in the story and now all of a sudden we shift back to instead of looking at David being anointed, we look at Saul dealing with Goliath. Or maybe a better way to put that is Saul failing to deal with Goliath.

This morning we’re going to look at three things. We’re going to first look at Goliath’s challenge – what that would mean. The second we’re going to look at is David’s question. The third thing we’re going to look at is David’s first obstacle. It’s interesting because David is ultimately going to fight Goliath, but on the way to fighting Goliath he has to pass all these obstacles. You’d think it wouldn’t be that way, but it is.

Let’s look first at Goliath’s challenge. This is after it says his height was six cubits and a span.

⁵ *He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. ⁶ And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. ⁷ The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him.*

The description of Goliath is incredible here. Really. First it says his height was six cubits and a span. Depending on how you translate that he was either nine feet six inches tall or six feet nine inches tall. Either way, in the Ancient Near East (we’ve grown over the years) he would have been physically imposing. Most scholars believe that he was probably nine feet six inches. For one thing there is some documentation of other people being that big, but also the weight of the armor and things that he had to carry would have presented a need for him to be that big. First of all, Goliath is incredibly physically imposing. The second thing is that he is a technological marvel. He is the Ancient Near Eastern equivalent of a tank. The weight of the armor that he would have been wearing was at least 125 pounds. That’s a lot. The most I ever carried was about 80 pounds, and it almost killed me. For him it was nothing. It says the shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beam. That’s

probably not talking about its thickness. A weaver's beam has loops of rope around it. With javelins and spears back then, they would use loops of rope to be able to throw the spears further. And it had an iron head that weighed fifteen pounds. That's pretty heavy if you're trying to throw something. In the Ancient Near East the Philistines were at the top of the food chain, if you will, as far as technological advances. They were the ones who mastered the art of iron working. So not only is he huge and built like a tank and physically imposing and basically impervious, but he has the most advanced weaponry available to him, and on top of that he has a shield bearer assigned just to him. That would have been a person, I'm guessing, a shorter person. There were two kinds of shields – the round shields that you see if you've ever watched "300" [a movie released in 2007], or a shield that would have covered quite a bit of area - maybe the whole body of someone. He had a person whose only job was to walk in front of him with the shield. The only part of Goliath that was exposed would have been his face. What could you do to that? In Israel's mind, nothing. So you can see how Israel would have been afraid of this person. In Israel the only person who would have had armor would have been the king and maybe a few of his underlings, but the average Joe wouldn't have had armor. So here you have this physically imposing tank. What are they supposed to do? That would have been frightening enough. But I think what was even more frightening is how Goliath sort of stepped-up the game or the challenge. Listen to how he challenges them.

⁸ *He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. ⁹ 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."* ¹⁰ *And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together."* ¹¹ *When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. (ESV)*

What would have also disturbed Israel probably (it shouldn't have) is this whole idea of representative combat. The Philistines would have been very familiar with what Goliath proposed. Have you ever asked yourself why Goliath actually has to explain how it works? If Israel knew what it was, he could have said, "Let's do what we always do. Send out your champion." But Goliath has to explain in a very detailed fashion how this works. "I'm going to come out for us and you send one person out for you and whoever wins gets everything." For the Philistines that apparently was very common. It makes sense if their desire was to make people into vassals, basically servants, because if you wanted vassals you wouldn't do yourself much good by killing the whole army. Every guy that you preserve was a potential taxpayer so you didn't want to hurt them. On the other hand, from Israel's point of view, they didn't fight like that. They just sort of all ran out and fought, or they all didn't. Remember that Saul was spiritually dull, and I guarantee you that he's not sitting around asking himself this question. So Goliath says, "Send one person out to fight me and the winner will take all." If you're Saul and you had any spiritual sense at all, you'd sit back and say, "Now let me think. Is there any case, or anything I think of, or any place where God uses one person to represent all of us? Huh." If I'd had been there I would have whispered, "Adam." One person represents all of us. How about Moses? Remember he was a prophet. One person – he went into the tent and no one else was allowed to go. He represented you and he came out with what God said. One person represented you. How about Aaron, his brother the priest, who mediated before you. One person represents you. A king. Isn't that why you hired Saul in the first place? Didn't you hire him to represent you? The job of a king is to protect and defend his people from all his enemies and theirs. Saul the king should have been the one who wasn't afraid but would say, "Oh, they want one representative combat? I'm the king. I'm their representative of Israel. I'll step out. Besides that I'm almost as tall as him, give or take a foot or two." In other words the pattern of the Bible from the very first day is one person representing everybody against the greatest enemy they have. In this case the one person should be the king, and the king should be the one to step up and face off with their greatest enemy and defeat him on behalf of the people. Can you think of anywhere else where that happens? Is there another king who would stand and be one person who represents his people? The answer of course is, "Yes, and his name is Jesus." The one person, Jesus, represents all of us and he faces off against our greatest enemy of all, and that is sin. What does it mean to face your own giants? But really what this text is about is not so much principles, but it is pointing you to one who would represent you before your greatest enemy. The one who represents you before your greatest enemy and wins is the Lord Jesus. He is also the least likely person who would do it – an out of work carpenter. So Goliath challenges one person to represent them.

Goliath does one other thing before we move onto David's question. It informs David's question. Goliath says, "I defy you. I defy the armies of Israel to have anyone come out here." The other aspect to this representative combat, what would have been implicit, is that whoever won the combat, would also be making a statement of their god. If Israel sends out a man and the Philistines send out a man, and the Philistines win, then Dagon is the best. If Israel wins then Yahweh is the best. So there's an implicit god contest here as well. That leads to David's question. From this point on in the book you're going to see very stark contrasts between Saul and David. You'll hear something very negative about Saul and then in the very next breath you'll hear, "But David . . ." That's where you're going to hear something good. So notice what it says in verse 11

¹¹ When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. ¹² Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years. ¹³ The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. ¹⁴ David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵ but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. ¹⁶ For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening. ¹⁷ And Jesse said to David his son, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. ¹⁸ Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them."

The first thing we're introduced to is the context of Saul's fear - in the context of Saul who should be representing Israel, who should be stepping out and saying, "I'll take him on. I'm the king." Saul is afraid and dismayed, and we're introduced to David again. We're introduced to David's job. His job was to go back and forth between Saul and his father's sheep, caring for the sheep. The important part to notice there is, "For 40 days Goliath continued to come, morning and evening and make the challenge." For one thing, it seems like it would really be a drag to be there every single day. "Here he comes again." And Goliath every day like clockwork comes out. But what's also important is to notice how long this is dragging out. They're about 14 miles west of Bethlehem and about 8 miles east of Gath or the land of the Philistines. It would have been easier for the Philistines to supply their soldiers. That's why David is sent by his father because in Israel, families would have been responsible for supplying their own sons with food if they were close enough to do so. So Jesse says, "The war's dragging out. They don't have supplies. David, take this food to your brothers." And he also sends some food for the commanders. It's interesting in the last part where he says, "And bring some token from them." He's probably saying, "I'm going to give food also for the commanders, and I want you to bring back a promissory note or a token that I'm going to get some percentage of the booty back when they defeat the Philistines, if they do." In a sense it's an act of faith but really it serves to get David onto the scene in the providence of God. So David is sent to take care of his brothers. Let's look at what happens next.

¹⁹ Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. ²⁰ And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. ²¹ And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. ²² And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. ²³ As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

"So what? He's just a kid." The writer wants us to know that's a pretty big thing - that David is just coming down to see what's going on. He's coming down to take care of his brothers, to deliver these things. Israel and the Philistines have run out to face off with each other. Actually this is what Goliath complained about earlier on. He said, "Why do you keep coming out to the line?" If you've ever seen a dog with an invisible fence around the yard - they're yapping and as soon as they hit the invisible fence, they just "Yip." That's apparently what Israel would do. Every day they would come and start yapping. They'd run down to the lines and as soon as they got to the edge of battle they'd just stop. That's why Goliath says, "Why do you even come out to face off against me? Just send a guy out and let's get it over with." David sees them all running and he runs down too and hears the challenge. The text says, "And David heard it." What's the big deal if David heard it? David is not afraid to ask questions. David asks one of the greatest questions that you'll see in the whole Bible. Let's look at it.

²⁴ *All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid.* ²⁵ *And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And 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."* ²⁶ *And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall 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 defy the armies of the living God?"*

David's second question is just as interesting, if not moreso than the first question. The men are afraid and running around. You can imagine David seeing guys running around. He overhears someone saying what the king will do for the man who kills Goliath. He will enrich him greatly. He will give him his daughter and he'll make his family free of having to pay taxes to the king. Then David says, "What shall be done for the man who kills Goliath?" Why does he ask that? I think it's because he's incensed because it's Saul's responsibility. What David has just found out is that Saul who is responsible for confronting Goliath himself is trying to find someone who will do it for hire. Saul is trying to pay someone else to actually do his dirty work.

Then in that context David says, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" It's a great question, isn't it? It's a great question if you have faith. It's a horrible question if you don't. When he asks, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" the point there is not that Goliath is just sort of some rogue, just a horrible person. The point is to distinguish Goliath who is uncircumcised, that is, outside of covenant with God, from those who are inside covenant with God. The question that David's getting at is that those of us who are inside the covenant with God have His promises to us that He will never fail us or forsake us. He will give us victory in the land. He will give us victory over the Philistines. So, who is this person outside who's even willing to question that? How could he? Isn't that a good question? It's a great question.

Now the question I have is, "How come we never ask it?" How Do you ever have trouble in your life? Have you ever had trials? Do you ever have temptations? Do you have things you don't know how you are going to deal with? The first thing I do generally when things come my way, is not to say, "Who or what is this thing to get in my way given the fact that I'm a child of God? He's promised me. He would never fail or forsake me." The first thing I say is, "How am I going to deal with this? What am I going to do?" If the Gospel is true, if you're a Christian, what you believe is that Jesus has not only taken away all of your sin but He's also given you all of His righteousness. He's imputed it to your account. He's credited it to you. If you are as righteous as Jesus right now, let me ask you this question. "What can touch you? Is there anything at the end of the day that ultimately can separate you from God?" The apostle Paul said, "Absolutely not." In fact, Paul asked the question, "If God is for us who can be against us? Did not he who gave his only son, will he not freely give us all things?" This text is bigger than just, "What are the giants in my life?" The question is, "Do you really believe what God has said?" Some of you might not be Christians. I ask you to consider, "Would there be a God who would so deliver you from your sins that you wouldn't have to worry about the things that face you anymore. If you are a Christian I ask you the same thing because supposedly you and I believe that, yet our lives say something totally different.

David asks the question and it challenges me. I don't know about you. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" David is ready to go. He is ready to take on Goliath and that's where he runs into his first obstacle. What is David's first obstacle in fighting Goliath? The answer is going to surprise you. David's first obstacle in fighting Goliath is church people. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, the person outside the covenant who would challenge those of us inside the covenant?" Just as David asks that question, who challenges him but someone from inside the covenant? It would be our equivalent of church people. David is saying, "God promised He'll never fail us or forsake us. Let's go do it!" Those kinds of things happen all the time in church. We have a whole world we are supposed to be serving, a whole world we're supposed to be winning. The reason the church is so utterly ineffective, I think, is because we can't get past the Goliaths that are in the Narthex on our way out. I dread every year budget time. In budget time faith is the last thing we think about. "The God stuff – that's good to talk about and it's good to have faith. But at the end of the day if you don't have X amount of dollars in your bank account for next year you have failed." And you know what? That is just wrong. It's wrong because in the Gospel God has given us a task to take the promised land (that is the whole world) and will He not give us what we need to do it? Are we asking the question, "Will He

give it to us?” Or are we saying, “Who do you think you are to say you think you can even do this, that you think you can fight this?” David’s older brother completely tries to shut him down. Notice what he says.

²⁸ *Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, “Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.”* ²⁹ *And David said, (as I can imagine any youngest of eighth saying) “What have I done now? Was it not but a word?”* (Or, “Was I not just asking a question?”) ³⁰ *And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before. (ESV)*

How do you know from what Eliab says to David that he doesn’t understand the Gospel as they would have understood it? If Eliab really understood the promises of God to Israel, when David asked that question, instead of a rebuke he would have had repentance. Instead of rebuking David and saying, “You’re so selfish and presumptuous to come down here,” he would have said, “Phew. Guys, you know what? My little brother’s right. We’ve been here for forty days. I haven’t seen my wife, haven’t seen my kids, haven’t eaten anything but parched grain (whatever that is). This fight could have been over thirty-nine days ago if we had just asked the question that my little brother asked. Thank you, David.” Instead he rebukes David and calls him presumptuous. The interesting thing about presumption here coming from Eliab’s mouth is that Eliab knows that he was actually rejected as king. The fact the words that come out of his mouth affirms the decision that God made: that he shouldn’t be the king. He doesn’t have what it takes because he also doesn’t get it. The very thing of which he accuses David is the thing which has prepared David to actually be The Man. It’s sort of like, “If you’re faithful in small things I’ll make you faithful in great things.” He says, “Where were you out there taking care of those few little sheep?” That’s an accusation against David. Yet next week what we’re going to see that the very thing that he was accusing David of was the thing that prepared him to fight Goliath. The next obstacle he’s going to fight is another church person, Saul. Saul’s going to be saying, “You’re not big enough. How do you think you can fight this guy?” What does David say? “You know when I was a shepherd a bear attacked. The Lord delivered me from the bear. When I was a shepherd taking care of those few sheep a lion attacked and the Lord delivered me from the lion. If He can deliver me from the bear and He can deliver me from the lion then He can deliver me from that goon. Let’s go!” The interesting thing at the end of this is that David doesn’t shut up. His faith, I think, is evident. His older brother basically tries to shut him down in the last verse.

³⁰ *And he turned away from him (that’s his brother) toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before. (ESV)*

David’s not going to rest until he has an answer from someone to this question, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?” What David doesn’t know is that his life is not going to be the same forever after this.

When Judy and I started attending this church in 2002, it was one of the greatest times of our life. The reason for it was because no one knew us. No one knew who I was. I was just a member. I think the only people who knew me were the pastoral staff. They didn’t know that I’d been a church planter or that I’d written some articles. I was a sales rep for Eli Lilly and I sat in the front row with my family for two years and just enjoyed life. At some point Andy Wilson asked me to teach a Sunday school class. I said, “I guess I will.” As I was leaving the house the first morning of teaching the first Sunday school class as a lay person Judy asked me if I was nervous and I said, “You know, the only thing I’m nervous about is losing my anonymity. Because once you lose your anonymity, who knows what will happen?” It can change everything. That’s what’s happening here with David. As of this event David is going to lose his anonymity. No longer is he going to be just the guy asking the questions of faith, but it’s only going to get harder for him because he’s going to be attacked by Saul, he’s going to be attacked by people. Everything is going to get harder and harder and harder for David. I look forward to talking about it in the future. Think about these things today.