

“Facing Giants (2)”

1 Samuel 17:31-40

³¹ When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. ³² And David said to Saul, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” ³³ And Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth.” (ESV)

If this is your first time here, we’re in the second week of a series on the Book of Samuel, and the series started about three years ago because I only preach the Old Testament in the fall. We happened to start this time in the story of David and Goliath. I’ve told you before, the story of David and Goliath is easily the most famous of all stories in the Bible. Even for someone who has never read or heard the Bible, any time you’re watching TV and if there’s a story of someone small or an underdog who’s taking on a favorite or someone big, it’s always known as a David and Goliath story. One of my favorite books besides “Huckleberry Finn” is “Tom Sawyer.” Tom Sawyer sort of prided himself on not knowing the Bible. Mark Twain was very cynical about religion. But even Tom Sawyer knew the story of David and Goliath. We think the story of David and Goliath is well known but now as we look at it in depth, I hope you’re getting the rest of the story because to really understand the story of David and Goliath you have to understand the background of the whole book of Samuel.

If you remember, the background to the Book of Samuel is the Book of Judges. All you need to know about the Book of Judge is this: It makes the case that Israel needs a king. In fact, all the books that we as western American Christians call “historical books,” the Israelites would have called “prophetic books” because they’re all trying to persuade them of something. In the Book of Judges it’s trying to persuade Israel that they need a king. The Book of Samuel picks up on the Book of Judges. Samuel is the last judge and the purpose of the Book of Samuel is to show that, in fact, Israel does need a king, but they need a very specific kind of king. They need a king like David. So the whole Book of Samuel is making a case that you need a king like David. The story starts out, if you remember, with Samuel coming along. By chapter 8 of Samuel, Israel comes and asks for a king. They ask for a very specific king as well. They ask for a king like the other nations. God says, “Are you sure you want a king like the other nations, or do you want a king like I’m going to give you?” They said, “We want one like the other nations.” He said, “You want it, you got it!” So he gave them a king like the other nations in the person of Saul.

How was Saul like the kings of other nations? At least three ways that we know. Israel’s king was supposed to be the shepherd of Israel. What we know about Saul was that he was a horrible shepherd. In fact, Saul was tasked at one point in this book to find two of his father’s donkeys and he couldn’t find them. So here is guy who’s supposed to shepherd a whole nation and yet we’re told he can’t even find where two donkeys are. That’s the first thing. The second thing we know that Israel’s king is supposed to be very spiritually adept. He’s supposed to know the law and meditate on it and teach the law. Saul is dumber than a bag of hammers, frankly, when it comes to his relationship with God. He’s very spiritually dull. He doesn’t know God, I don’t think, because he just seems to go back and forth. He acts like he knows God. A lot of people are good at acting like they’re Christians or acting like they know God. But really, Saul’s behavior shows something quite different. He’s very spiritually dull. The last thing that’s important for this story is that Saul is very physically imposing – literally. The Bible says that Saul is a head taller than anyone else in Israel. So the king’s job is to protect and defend his people, and I guess it’s always a good thing if your king is the biggest guy in the camp, which would make sense when they’re getting ready to face the biggest guy they have ever seen. On the other hand, as the story unfolds and you learn about David, David was the exact opposite of Saul. On one hand David was an excellent shepherd. David was incredibly spiritually aware, and David was just a boy, at least when we meet him. He wasn’t physically imposing. So that’s the context in which we jump into the story of David and Goliath.

Last week we looked at the first part. I’m going to call it scene one. Today we’ll look at scene two. Next week we’ll look at scene three. In scene one we’re just introduced to the characters and the problem. The main characters that you begin with are Israel against the Philistines. The Philistines were basically the nemesis; they were the thorn on the side of Israel for their whole existence. The Philistines had come to one side of the valley of Elah, and the Israelites were on the other side of the valley. Israel is getting ready to fight and all of a sudden the Philistines send out their champion, a man named Goliath who just happened to be nine feet six inches tall. He wore armor that was 125 pounds. He wore a helmet of bronze. He had a

sword across his shoulder. He had a javelin that was as big as a weaver's beam with a fifteen-pound head on it. And on top of that he had a shield bearer. In other words he had a person whose job was to do nothing but carry his shield for him. He came down and said, "Send one person out to fight me." The Philistines were more into conquering and subjugating and taxing people rather than just raping and pillaging. So why would they kill all the able bodied men when they could just send one person out to fight on their behalf and whoever wins the fight takes everything?

That's sort of threw Israel for a loop because they were not used to that way of fighting although they should have been. If you look back through the history of the Bible, the Bible is full of pointers to places where one person represents everybody. Right at the very beginning Adam represented everybody. Abraham represented everybody. Moses represented Israel before God. So they should have known, or at least asked the question, "Is it possible that one person could represent us? That one person could face our enemies and deliver us from all our enemies? Just one?" The answer of course is, "Yes. The king could do it if it's the right king." We know that Saul wasn't the right king because the only thing we know about Saul if we jumped into the story right here is that he is a "fraidy cat." As soon as Goliath came down and challenged, if Saul's were any kind of king, he would have stepped forward and said, "No one talks to Israel like that. I'm the king. You'll fight me." Instead what we see is that Saul fled with everyone else because he was greatly afraid and dismayed. Then the very next words you hear are, "But David . . ." David on the other hand comes down. David hears this Philistine mocking Israel and just asks a question. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he would defy the armies of the living God? Who is he? He's a gnat compared to God. What are you guys doing here?" David asks the right questions. But in order for David to face Goliath he has to face at least two obstacles before he can actually get to the real fight. If you remember from last week the first obstacle is "church people." It always is. He says, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he would defy us?" By calling him "uncircumcised" he's basically saying he's outside the covenant people. "He's not part of us." Who are the people that try and stop David from confronting Goliath on the outside? It's people inside the covenant or what for them would have been church people. It's always been like that. Jesus came and said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness." Who are the people that stopped Him or tried to stop Him? The tax collectors, the sinners, and the Gentiles said, "I am in." It was the religious people that not only tried to stop Jesus but they crucified Jesus. And in the process they actually accomplished the very thing He had set out to do, and that was conquering our greatest giant, which was sin.

That leads us to the second scene of this story of David and Goliath. David has come and asked the question, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" His brother Eliab says, "You're just a shepherd. What good is that going to do anybody? Go back. You're just prideful and you wanted to see the fight." David keeps asking the question, and that's where we pick up.

We're going to look at two things this morning. We're going to look at David's offer and Saul's response. Then the next section is Saul's offer and David's response. Let's look first at David's offer.

³¹ *When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him.* ³² *And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."* (ESV)

The first thing I want you to notice is how desperate Saul is. Saul not only is supposed to be the one who's leading the fight, he is actually trying to hire somebody to fight so that he doesn't have to go out there. He'll give him his daughter, he'll give him a tax break, and he'll make him extremely wealthy. So now Saul hears there's someone who's asking questions about Goliath. Someone is being defiant of Goliath. Even though it's a boy, even though he's not a warrior, even though he's a shepherd, Saul's willing to at least hear him out. He's desperate now. Then you see David being extremely tactful. It's just David and Saul, and instead of David coming in and saying, "Saul, you just need to man up. Don't be afraid of this guy." Instead David uses the language in Hebrew that's more like the royal "we." "Let no one be afraid of this one. Saul, you shouldn't be afraid of him. In fact, I will go and fight this Philistine." Remember that the purpose of the book is to show you that you need a king like David. Who are you leaning toward right now? Saul or David? David at least has heart at this point. He says, "Let me go fight the Philistine." The way that Saul responds immediately is the response of a religious person. Notice I didn't say it's the response of a Christian or the response of faith. It is a response of a religious person because the way the religious person responds to a challenge is to ask himself, "Do I have the means to meet this challenge?" Notice what Saul says to David.

³³ And Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth.” (ESV)

Did Saul say anything wrong there? In some sense he didn't. What Saul said was common sense. “All things being equal, you're a youth and he's been fighting since he was a youth, plus or minus three feet or so. You can't go because common sense says you can't go.” But what Saul doesn't know and Saul doesn't ever apparently get is that all things aren't equal – at least for the person who trusts in the living God. The religious person is always asking himself, “Do we have the means to do this? Do we have the right thing to do this?” In other words, religious people make decisions by looking at a calculator and a spreadsheet and their own possessions and asking, “Can we do this?” Then the religious person stops there and says, “You know what, the calculator and the spreadsheet says we're not going to have enough so therefore we won't take any risk.” What's interesting is David's response to Saul. He looks backward and he looks forward, and by looking backward and forward his present is defined. What does David do? He recalls what God has done for him in the past.

³⁴ But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶ Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” (ESV)

What's the very thing that has prepared David for this challenge? The very thing for which his brother mocked him. He said, “You've been out there just taking care of those few sheep, wasting your time.” In David's perspective, from the eyes of faith, David says, “Here's how I know that I can take on Goliath, because when I was taking care of those few sheep the lion would come and the bear would come.” We actually see later that it was plural. He said, “When I confronted lions and bears, when the lion would come and the bear would come and they would take one of my sheep I would go after them. And if they didn't drop the sheep and they turned on me I would grab them by their beard and I would smite them.” That's a word we need to reintegrate back into our vocabulary. He smote them. He killed them. So David looks back, but what's interesting is that David took this responsibility, and notice how he defines it. He says, “I killed the lion and the bear, therefore this Philistine will be like one of them.” David is looking at what God has done in his past and is saying, “If he's done it in the past, he can do it in the future.” Notice the next thing he said.

³⁷ . . . “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

So David looked back and said, “The Lord delivered me from the lion and from the bear, and because of that I have full confidence that He can deliver me from Goliath.” In other words, “God's deliverance and His faithfulness to me in the past give me confidence in His faithfulness to me in the future.” The question is, “Why doesn't that happen with us either?” Has God ever been faithful to any of us in the past? Let me ask those of you who have been members of this church for more than twenty or thirty years. “Was God faithful to us in the past? Did God do amazing things here in the past?” The question is, “Is there any reason to believe He wouldn't do amazing things in the future?” That's a question of faith, isn't it? I read a sermon this week, the most convicting sermon I've ever read. It was extremely convicting for me at the age of 43. As I was reading through it I said, “Thank God I'm not 73 or 63 or 53.” Of course it was a sermon by Charles Spurgeon on this text. Charles Spurgeon said, “Woe unto you who have experienced more grace and more of God's faithfulness who do not as you move forward take more risks for the sake of the Gospel.” Spurgeon is saying the longer you have been in the faith, the crazier you ought to be. The longer you have been a Christian, the more apt toward taking risks you ought to be. The reason I bring it up now is because as we get older we tend to be more and more risk adverse, do we not? It would be interesting if you could see time lapse photography from 30 or 40 years ago. Some of us here in this room who were pushing to leave another denomination, to start off on our own, to build new buildings, to do these things are now looking at a spreadsheet and say, “We can't do it.” Why would you do that? Spurgeon would say, “Those of us who have experienced more grace and more faithfulness over more years should be the ones who are leading the charge and doing what God has called us to do.” I ask you a question, “If you are a person who has been in the faith for years, are you leading the charge in what God has called us to do or are you pulling the rest of the church back like Eliab or like Saul would?” Only you can answer that question. I can't. The great thing that you see with David is knowing that God's faithfulness in his past and God's promised faithfulness in the future enables him to take risks in the present. The other thing you have to notice about David is that you can never

experience God's faithfulness unless you take some action. It's a very Presbyterian thing to do to sit back and say, "Well, God promised He would be faithful. God is sovereign over all things and therefore I'm just going to sit here and watch it all pan out." You can never really understand God's faithfulness until you put it to the test. You can never say, "God was faithful to me in the past" unless you've actually been through some trials, unless you've taken some risk, unless you've stepped out in the past to enable Him to be faithful to you. The tension between human freedom and divine sovereignty really isn't tension at all. Are you going to step out and do something on behalf of the Gospel or not?

The Session and I have talked about BHAGs over the years. Do you know what a BHAG is? It's a Big Hairy Audacious Goal. A BHAG is basically something that you wouldn't imagine doing in and of yourself, it's just so big and so crazy. David—right here—this is a BHAG. David is saying, "You know what? I faced the lion and I faced the bear. This Philistine, he'll be like one of them." If you listen to the next line from Saul you would almost be tempted to think that Saul's starting to get it. It's amazing when you read commentaries. I don't know if they just need something to write. They'll say, "Here Saul shows that he finally has come around. He finally understands." Saul's response to David is what?

³⁷ . . . *And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!" (ESV)*

Is that really an act of faith on Saul's part? It could be, until you read the very next sentence. What does Saul do in the very next sentence? He does the thing that religious people do, the pragmatists do. Saul does the same thing my father-in-law did to me.

When Judy and I were in college and we'd been friends for a while, we decided we wanted to get married. I didn't tell her, by the way, that I was going to go talk to her parents. I worked and drove until 2:00 in the morning. I went the extra mile, to be honest with you. I drove from Tallahassee to Sarasota to talk to her father. My in-laws owned a real estate company that was pretty successful, and every time I had been around them (my father-in-law and Judy's brothers), they all talk about business and spreadsheets. So I knew that I had to have a plan when I went there, and I had one. I said, "Mr. Allen" (she had the same maiden name, which make things a lot easier). I said, "Mr. Allen, I'd like to marry your daughter and here's my plan. We have enough money to get through the last year of college (we were seniors then). We have enough money to get through the next three years of seminary, and after that I'll either go on to be a professor where I might make a pretty good living, or I might go on to be a missionary, in which case, I might not make that much at all." I shouldn't have said that last part. He said, "Well, what do you mean by that?" Being young I said, "We'll just have to trust God then." He said, "Tommy, all of that 'trust in God stuff' is good, but you need something else in your back pocket as well." I thought, "Okay." "So, is that a yes or a no?" Obviously I got a "yes." That's what Saul does to David here. He says, "Go, the Lord be with you. But, before you go, here's my armor." Now remember David is still a boy and Saul is at least the biggest guy in Israel. So Saul's not even an averaged size guy and he tells David what? "Here's my tunic, here's my breastplate. Here's all my stuff. Wear it."

³⁸ *Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, ³⁹ and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. (ESV)*

Do you know what this scene reminds me of? Have you ever seen the "Lord of the Rings" - the last one of the trilogy where Sam and Frodo basically put on the armor of Orcs to disguise themselves as they go in to the evil Mordor? As you watch the movie you think, "Come on! They're three feet tall and Orcs are like seven feet tall." They have this armor on and they can hardly move. That's what David looks like. He walks around and what's David's response?

³⁹ *Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these (or I cannot walk with these), for I have not tested them." So David put them off. (ESV)*

Remember when you're reading the Old Testament you need to listen to these editorial comments. Remember when Goliath was taunting Israel and David had come down to bring bread and cheese to his brothers? It said Goliath was taunting Israel and then all of a sudden you have this editorial comment, "and David heard." [Tommy makes sounds of the theme song from the movie "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly."] You have "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" music - "and David heard." So David tries on Saul's armor and he's walking around. He says, "I can't even walk with these things." [Tommy makes

sounds of the theme song from the movie “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.”] So David took them off. He’s a boy, but he’s not a boy to be messed with. David puts them off. What does the author want us to know about these? That David is not relying on common sense or the common conventions of the day. David is not relying on the armor of some other person, but David is relying on his faith in the living God. What’s the lesson in there for us? The question is, “What do you and I rely on?” God calls each and every one of us in this room, assuming you’re a Christian, into ministry. He calls you to face giants. He calls you into battle. The question is, “Does he call you into battle wearing the armor of someone else or does He call you into battle given who you are?” God has gifted each one of us in different ways. Some people never do anything really for the Gospel’s sake because they say, “You know, I don’t have armor like David. I don’t have armor like Tommy. I’m not dressed like this guy. I don’t have the tools that this person has.” The fact of the matter is, if the Gospel is true, then every person in this room has something that this church needs in order to move forward. You’ve got something.

What did David move forward with? People had to have thought that he was crazy because Saul had to say, “If you’re not going to wear the armor, what are you going to do? What are you going to take out there with you?” I can just imagine him pulling out of his pocket, “Got this thing.” [Tommy holds up a sling.] A sling. This is all David had. I made this sling this week just to see if it worked. I waited until all the cars were gone. So how can David walk out with just this? The answer is, “Because that’s what God had given him.” That’s the way God had gifted him. God calls you into battle with the tools that He has given you. David knew that. David thought, “I’m a shepherd. I know how to use a sling, and I know how to use this staff, and I know I’m supposed to face that giant. So it doesn’t make sense to try and do everything else. It doesn’t make sense to try and draw up all the great plans. It doesn’t make sense to go to all the Eeyores [a pessimistic Winnie the Pooh character] in the camp and ask them for their advice because they’re all going to say, ‘Oh no. You’re just going to get killed.’ None of that makes sense. What makes sense is that God has called me, a shepherd boy with this sling to face that giant, and I will never know if God is going to be faithful unless I step out and face him.” That’s the very next thing it says.

⁴⁰ . . . *His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.*

I was first ordained in a church called Intown Community Church in Atlanta. It was a church plant of a church called Perimeter Church and the pastor’s name was Randy Pope. When I got there they wanted me to memorize their motto, which I thought it was crazy at first. Thirty or forty years ago when Randy Pope got to Atlanta he started Perimeter Church in a store front like anything else. Their motto was, “Attempt something so great for God that it is doomed to fail unless God be in it.” If we made that our motto here, some people would have a heart attack and be gone. Imagine a church having a motto, “Attempt something so great for God that it is doomed to fail unless God be in it.” I can’t imagine sitting in one of our session meetings, “Okay, guys. Should we do this? I don’t know, is it doomed to fail? It looks like it’s doomed to fail to me. Then it’s all aboard. Let’s go.” Yet given that model and that faithfulness, thirty years later I think there are about thirty churches that Perimeter has started. Perimeter itself is about six or seven thousand members and continues to grow and has worldwide influence. Why? Because all the things that they’re doing were just too big. They were all Goliaths. They were all things that were just too big for them to think about doing themselves. Instead they relied on God. Let me give you an encouragement because a lot of us sit here and say, “Man, I haven’t done anything for years.” The thing that should give you hope and confidence going forward to face any giant, any thing, any challenge, any risk is just this: the true Son of David, Jesus, has already gone ahead of you and has slain the greatest of all giants. He has slain your sin. He has slain your guilt, and He has given you all the credit for the victory, and now you stand up and face anything a winner. You’ve already won, and the question is, “Are you going to live in that or are you not?” Think about that.