

Overcoming the 'Giants' in our Lives: David & Goliath –

1 Samuel chapter 17.

On a boiling hot day in the Summer of 2019, we had a family trip to Hatfield House, the home of the Marquess of Salisbury. As we wandered through the stately home, we eventually entered the cool of the Chapel to be faced with the wonderful stained glass East window. This window, dating from 1610, depicts 12 scenes from the Old Testament.

As we had two of our grandchildren with us, aged 6 and 4 at the time, I was keen to point out to them some of the Biblical stories depicted in the multi-coloured glasswork.

In one picture we could see the cute baby Moses in his 'Moses' basket; in another, there was Naaman the Syrian being healed from his leprosy in the river Jordan; and in another, there was Elijah dramatically departing heavenwards in his chariot of fire. But then, shock horror... it was a case of having to avert the children's eyes and quickly move them on! For there was the young David, holding aloft Goliath's decapitated head which he had impaled on the Philistine's own sword!

A stark reminder that not all of the Bible is suitable for Sunday school teaching!

However, if we, as adults, similarly avert our gaze and move on too quickly from this account in 1 Samuel chapter 17, I believe we will miss out on the precious lessons God wants to teach us about how to overcome the 'giants' in our lives. Jesus does, after all, tell us that as his disciples, we will face our own 'giants' and, like David, he calls us to be overcomers.

What then is a 'giant'?

A 'giant' is anything, a person or a situation, that appears to threaten us or even wipe us out completely. Something, or someone, that seems to mock our faith in God because it is too powerful and frightening for us to handle.

It might be a bully at school or an intimidating boss at work. It may be some illness which is threatening us. It may be some bereavement we have suffered and the loss is overwhelming us. It may be that we are facing redundancy. It may be a situation in our marriage or our family that is much too big and complex for us to resolve.

It may be a particular fear that we have or a powerful temptation we face; it may be the 'giant' of doubt which suddenly arises and causes us to question our faith in God. And of course, in the past 18 months, who could fail to see the 'Covid-19 giant'.

So how can we overcome these 'giants' which appear from time to time in our lives and seem to mock our faith in God?

First lesson: Know where the 'giant' appears and where your battles are being fought. It's about location...location.... location

Are they being fought at school, college, or university; are they being fought at home, in your workplace, or even in your church? Are there particular places where you are more vulnerable to the giants?

Notice how this chapter starts with the land, the location.

The Land and the Location (vs.1-3)

The Philistines and the Israelites were gathering for battle. And in all battles one of the key things is the topography of the land where the battle is to be fought; how to use the hills and valleys and natural features of the terrain to try and get the upper hand.

My Dad was at the battle of El Alamein in 1942 which took place in the desert sands of N. Africa. The German General, Rommel, was known as the 'Desert Fox' but he was outmanoeuvred by Auchinleck, Montgomery and the allied troops.

Desert warfare is very different from jungle warfare which is very different from urban warfare. We have to know where our battles are being fought and how to deploy different tactics.

The Philistines controlled the coastal plain but in order to conquer Israel, they had to march from West to East and get up into the mountains where the important cities were, Jerusalem, Hebron etc.

So we read that the Philistines pitched their camp at Ephes Dammim between Socoh and Azekah on one of the hills, and the Israelites camped on another hill opposite them, with the Valley of Elah down below both armies.

And that's where the two armies stayed, eyeing each other, but with nothing happening. There was an impasse, a stalemate.

This is something we can experience in facing our ‘giants’. Nothing seems to be being resolved; the challenge continues day after day, week after week, month after month. We pray year after year maybe, but the situation doesn’t seem to change.

We are continually faced with this ‘giant’ which doesn’t go away and which troubles and taunts us and seems to mock our faith on a regular basis.

But the first lesson is: Know where your battles are being fought?

Second lesson: Acknowledge the reality of the ‘giant’ you are facing. Don’t pretend that the ‘giant’ isn’t there.

The Israelites had to face up to the reality of Goliath. You couldn’t miss him! He was 9’ 6” tall (about 3 metres), loud-mouthed, and was dressed in his matching bronze helmet, bronze scale armour, bronze shin guards and he carried the very latest piece of technology, a bronze spear tipped with **iron**. Iron was the new metal. Iron is harder than bronze, it can do more damage. And the iron tip of his spear alone weighed 15 pounds (about 7 kilograms).

We are just moving here from the Bronze age to the Iron age and Goliath was the complete ‘Metal Man’! You couldn’t miss him; you couldn’t pretend he wasn’t there!

Similarly, we can’t pretend that the ‘Covid-19’ virus isn’t there or that it doesn’t present an existential threat to us. The ‘Covid-19 giant’ does indeed have the potential to kill us; along with many other viruses, diseases etc.

Goliath also was a real existential threat to the people of God; he could kill you. In fact he said to David, “Come here and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.” (vs. 44)

In the same way that the Covid-19 ‘giant’ has been around in the news every day for months on end, from morning to evening, with the death toll mounting every day, so Goliath was in the face of the Israelites day after day.

We read, “For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand” (vs. 16). Forty is the number for testing in the Bible. The Israelites were tested for 40 years in the wilderness; Moses was 40 days and nights on Mt. Sinai; the Israelites were delivered into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years before Samson came along; Jonah said to the Ninevites, “40 days and you will be destroyed”. Jesus was tested for 40 days and nights in the wilderness. And here, Goliath tested the Israelite army for 40 days.

There is no doubt that God will allow ‘giants’ to test us.

In an ancient warfare situation like this, where there was a stalemate, they didn’t just say, “Well, let’s call it a 0-0 draw and all go home!” No, the way they resolved the stand-off was by each side choosing someone to represent their army and engage in single combat, and whoever won, their side would be the victors, and whoever lost, their side would become subjects and slaves of the winners.

Hence Goliath, the Philistine Champion, bellows across the valley: “Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us. Give me a man and let us fight each other.” (vs.8-10)

The second lesson then, is: Acknowledge the reality of the ‘giant’ you are facing. Name the ‘giant’. Don’t pretend it isn’t there.

Third lesson: Be aware of what are you feeling about the ‘giant’, its presence and the threat it poses to you?

Verse 11 tells us how King Saul and all the Israelites felt about Goliath: they were ‘dismayed, terrified, and they lost all hope’.

How are we feeling about the ‘giants’ we face? Resigned, fed up, worn down, disgusted, guilty, ashamed, powerless?

The main way, I believe, in which our ‘giants’ threaten us, is by instilling fear. That’s the greatest weapon our enemy uses against us – fear.

There are lots of fears around: a fear of falling asleep, a fear of heights, of spiders, of water, of hypodermic syringes, of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth, a fear of men with beards, and then there is coulrophobia...a fear of clowns. The list is never ending.

Actually, the fear of clowns is more common than we may think. I heard of a woman who lived in a town and she was OK until a circus was due to arrive. The circus people put up posters all over the town advertising their shows and on these posters was a massive picture of a grinning clown.



This really scared the woman who got in touch with the circus people and said: "I've got to go to work every morning and walk past these clown posters, please could you take them down?"

The circus people were very understanding and said to her, "Well, how about coming to meet our clown and getting to know him in his ordinary clothes." She said, "OK, I will." It proved to be great therapy and she was able to get to know the clown and even to be with him as he put on his clown outfit and did his make-up! A fear of clowns is often to do with not knowing what is behind the mask, and once that fear had been removed, this woman was greatly helped.

But all fears can often be traced back to one or more of these 5 underlying fears: a fear of looking foolish in public, a fear of losing someone's love and respect, a fear of failure, a fear of making someone angry or upset, and a fear of physical pain & death.

God knows how prone we are to fears, so He repeatedly says to us throughout the whole Bible: 'Do not be afraid', 'Fear not' e.g. Gen. 15:1; Deut. 20:3; 31:6; Is. 35:4; 41:10; Mt. 10:26-31; Lk. 12:32; Rev. 1:17; 2:10.

But positively, the Bible always encourages us to have a healthy fear of God. The more we have a healthy fear of God, the more He will deliver us from unhealthy fears. 'I sought the Lord and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.'

We now introduce King Saul into the situation. He has some goodies to distribute to the person who can overcome Goliath. He promises them two things: Loads of money (including tax exemption for life) and his daughter's hand in marriage! (vs. 25) Two wonderful inducements!

But the Fourth lesson we learn here is this: No amount of money, or change in marital status will be sufficient, in and of itself, to overcome our 'giants'.

Of course, it might be nice to have a bit more cash or someone to share our bed, but these are never going to be the deciding factors in overcoming the 'giants' in our lives. These inducements from Saul were never going to solve the problem of Goliath. It would be ridiculous to think that they could.

Sometimes folks have got married thinking that that will solve all their personal problems, but then they find that their personal 'giants' have followed them into their marriage. Being single or being married or whatever our family situation may be, is not going to be the main factor in helping us overcome our personal 'giants'.

Sometimes people decide to have cosmetic surgery in an attempt to improve their external appearance and overcome their 'giants'. A new nose, breast implants, getting rid of wrinkles, a nip here, a tuck there. But after all that, they discover that they are still the same person on the inside and still have to confront the same old 'giant'.

God is much more interested in the heart and character of a person than He is in their external appearance.

Fifth Lesson: If we want to do great things for God and overcome our 'giants', it may be important for us NOT to listen to other well-meaning folk who want to dress us up in what they think is right for us.

The well-meaning Saul said to David, "Go and the Lord be with you." Nice valedictory words, but then Saul makes a mistake (vs. 38 & 39); he tries to dress David up in his own PPE, his own personal protection equipment!

David puts on Saul's coat of armour, Saul's bronze helmet, Saul's sword and tries to walk around with them on. No good! Too heavy! Too cumbersome! Wrong size! Too restrictive!

We may need to take off what others have dressed us in.

Of course, sometimes it is right to seek the counsel and guidance of others, to ask for feedback from them, to listen to what they say, to learn from them. But when all is said and done, we must only take and use what fits us in God's service and what we feel comfortable wearing.

So, use the strengths and gifts God has given you; use what is familiar to you. Each of us is unique and uniquely prepared and gifted by the Lord. Don't try and be like someone else. Whatever your age, whatever your colour, whatever your gender, whatever your background, **be who you are**, in Christ.

And remember, there are times when it is important for us **not** to listen to what others say about us!

"It is dangerous for me to be concerned with what others think of me, but if I trust in the Lord, I am safe." (Prov. 29:25 GNB, personalised)

Moving on: David, the shepherd boy, offers to eradicate this metal scourge, Goliath, once and for all, but the only problem is that he has a decidedly dodgy C.V.:

‘Young, ruddy faced lad, no military experience whatsoever, currently employed as a pizza delivery boy taking bread and sweetcorn to his 3 brothers on the frontline with an extra cheese topping for their commanding officer!’ (vs. 17&18). What’s more, according to his eldest brother Eliab, David is character deficient i.e. conceited and with a wicked heart (vs 28). No point asking him for a reference then!

But when God is calling us to do something special for him, we can’t afford the luxury of allowing other people’s opinions to dissuade us from doing what we believe God wants us to do and what He is calling us to do. Especially, as in David’s case here, if it is other family members who are the blockage.

David the Slinger!



In O.T. Biblical warfare there were 3 types of soldiers: Cavalry men, who rode on horseback or were pulled along in chariots; Heavy infantry, who were foot-soldiers with swords, shields, armour etc. (Goliath was from this division and was an expert at close hand to hand fighting); Artillery men, who were archers and slingers. (The best slingers could bring down birds in flight they were so accurate).

In the battle against this giant, David uses what he is familiar with ~ his sling. We read, ‘he chose 5 smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.’ (vs. 40).

You can go to the valley of Elah today and there’s a stream that runs through it, and there is something special about the stones in the stream. They are made, mainly, from a mineral called Barite (Barium Sulphate) which has a high specific gravity (4.2 - 4.35 g/cm³). They are heavy and therefore much more dangerous when they hit you at high speed. They are nearly twice as heavy as Quartz, Granite and Sandstone.

Although David, at this stage had never been in a battle before, he had used his sling to ward off dangerous animals when he was guarding his sheep.

So lesson 5 in overcoming 'giants' is to be who you are in Christ, use what God has gifted you for, don't allow others to dress you up in what doesn't fit you and in order to follow God's call, you may need to NOT listen to others' opinions.

Sixth Lesson: Every situation we are in, is a preparation for what is to come next in God's plan and purpose for us.

Often, we can't see the relevance of our present circumstances to what is going to follow. But God knows what he is doing. Who would have thought that being a lonely shepherd lad in the back of beyond would be such good training for David to confront Goliath in this public showdown.

The lessons God is teaching us now will prepare us for what is to come next and the 'giants' that we may need to confront in the future.

Seventh Lesson is this: Remember that 'giants' are not as powerful or frightening as they appear to be.

In 1933 they made a film called 'King Kong'. 'King Kong' was a giant ape who terrorised the people of New York; with his big hands he could pluck aeroplanes out of the sky and he even appeared to be taller than the Empire State Building.



Well, the Empire State Building is 1,454 feet tall, but in reality, 'King Kong' was only a model 22 inches high and was made of metal covered in cotton, rubber, liquid latex and rabbit's fur! The metal part of it was sold at auction in 2009 for \$200,000, the rest of it having wasted away!

The fear and anxiety that we can experience when faced with a 'giant' are usually much greater than the 'giant' itself. Our fears are often exaggerated.

Goliath wasn't as strong as he thought he was. He had weaknesses and vulnerabilities. At 9' 6" tall he was most likely suffering from a disease called acromegaly. It's caused by a benign tumour on your pituitary gland which results in an overproduction of human growth hormone. Folks with acromegaly have poor eyesight (myopia, short-sightedness) and they can be clumsy in their movements.

Notice how Goliath needed his shield-bearer to walk in front of him and lead him and he needed to get close to David in order to see him clearly (vs. 41).

According to the Guinness book of records, the world's tallest man was an American guy called Robert Wadlow. He was 8' 11" tall and had this acromegaly disease. He was short-sighted, wore thick spectacles, and had to walk with a stick. He was 22 years old when he died.

Whatever the 'giant' is in your life, remember that that person or situation is not as threatening or powerful as you think it is. Your fears are exaggerated.

David, meanwhile, was much quicker on his feet and had much better eyesight than Goliath.

Eighth Lesson: We overcome the 'giants' in our lives by exercising faith and trust in the Living God.

David said to Goliath. "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel." (vs. 45)

This is always the critical factor in all OT warfare ~ the motivations of those taking part and their relationship with God. This is what makes all the difference to the outcome of every battle.

The Lord is with David who exercises complete faith and trust in the Living God, whereas Goliath is trusting in himself, his metal, his weaponry, his appearance, his size, his own gods (chief of whom was Dagon). And what's more, he was actually defying the armies of the Living God. All this proves fatal, not only for Goliath, but also for the whole Philistine army.

So the question we have to ask ourselves is this, 'How big are our 'giants' compared with God?'

Recently, I was out for a country walk with our family including 3 of our grandsons. The youngest one had brought his binoculars. Suddenly he called out to me, 'Grandad, you look very small and you are very far away.' He was looking through his binoculars the wrong way round!

This is what we tend to do with God. In looking at Him, we are using the binoculars the wrong way round and God seems too small and too far away.

We need to turn the binoculars around...and then God becomes greater and the 'giants' become smaller.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord.' To magnify means to enlarge, to get a bigger view of. As we get a bigger view of God, so our 'giants' will decrease in size. It's all about perspective.

Remember when Moses sent 12 spies into the land of Canaan to see whether taking the land was doable; 10 of the spies said the people who lived in the land were like 'giants' and compared to them 'we were like grasshoppers' (Nu.13:26-33). Only Joshua and Caleb of the 12 leaders had sufficient faith in the Living God to believe that they could take the land.

But if God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness or danger or sword, or 'virus' or any other 'giant'? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (See Rms. 8:31– 39)

And what about the biggest 'giant' we all ultimately face – death itself?

I was reminded recently, as I watched the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral service with all its grandeur, pomp and pageantry, of these words from James Shelley's (1596-1666) poem 'Death the leveller':

'Death lays his icy hand on kings:
Sceptre and crown must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked, scythe and spade.'

Jesus left the magnificence of heaven and he 'shared in our humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is – the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death' (Heb. 2:14&15).

'Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory over all 'giants' including death, through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 15: 55-57). Amen.

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