

Conquering Giants: 1 Samuel 17

Main Point: Our Messiah conquers the giants of sin, death and devil for us so we don't lose heart and are brave.

Aim: "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine..."

It was a David and Goliath battle. Most people in British culture know what that phrase means. Small, plucky and brave person taking on the big unbeatable force. Interestingly if you search for the phrase online the most common example is from China.

Photo taken in Tiananmen Square, group of protestors gathering to seek more democracy, as tanks sent in, one person stood in front of the tanks.

Amazing act of bravery – making his point about democracy, delaying the military reaching the protest site just a bit longer. Right thing to do. Morally good, and no one else had the goodness and morality to do it.

David and Goliath stories are about someone small of unusual bravery taking on someone they have no chance of beating.

David is me, Goliath is my problem – take on my problem and defeat it.

David and Goliath stories are a way to reflect my own inadequacies. Love to think if I had been in this situation I'd have stood in front of the tank. Of course I wouldn't. All sorts of giants in my own life that are a lot less scary to face than the Chinese government don't take on. Many things I am scared of, allow that fear to change my decisions to bad ones. Many habits, bad things, I am a victim and will never stop or get over that. Many people's opinions changing way that I behave. Smaller giants than this David was facing, not desire to take them on. He didn't win. Neither do I.

David and Goliath stories are stories just a way to be delusional about my bravery or defeated by my lack of it.

Read the real David and Goliath story it is about someone small taking on someone big. Not about their bravery, and if I have any part of the story it's not the part of David.

Cut in to the story half way through. The army of Israel lined up against army of their enemies. Fight for survival, Philistines wanted to wipe them out. Every day for 40 days Goliath came out and said – just one of you fight me, and whoever wins, their people win. Terrified.

Small chap David arrives on the scene – he's not even in the army, his big brothers are. Sent to bring them cheese, he is the cheese carrier. While he's there, delivering cheese, he hears Goliath make his challenge and he sees the whole Israelite army run away from him. Pick up the story.

Reading.

Saul

Language entered the way that we speak, you do not think how this story is going to go.

Start of story at least, David is incidental. Other people in the story, Goliath, Saul, the Israelites.

Really in the story, the drama isn't about a face off between David and Goliath, other guy Saul and Goliath.

Back story is this: nation had personal promising relationship with real God, who had rescued them, cared for them, somehow is very presence lived in the centre of their camp.

They decided they wanted a king like the nations around them. Why?

"A king to lead us and go out before us and fight our battles for us."

Got a king – a handsome, strong, tall looking king who would go out and fight their battles for them – better than "just" knowing God as King and Lord.

"On hearing the Philistine's words. Saul and all the other Israelites were dismayed and terrified."

A king, to fight our battles for us. How's that working out for you?

In fact, Saul isn't just a scaredy cat. Abusive leader. Wealth, tax relief, marrying his daughter.

What a guy. Best Israel could find.

Outclassed, outgunned. Iron point on his spear, Saul's bronze helmet.

Real story here, story that writer highlights before we get to David – another ruler that people have trusted, looked very impressive, actually treated them badly, couldn't help in the moment of real crisis.

One of the things people who aren't Christians say to me is something like "I wish I had your faith." Expressed as a compliment, usually not the meaning, the meaning is "I wish I could believe really unlikely things like you do." Be clear, what Christianity teaches much more likely to be true than alternatives other people putting forward.

Really need to say is "You do have my faith, you just don't have it in the same things as me." Things you are looking for in life. Human, looking for the same things as you – for, love, meaning. I just trust that Jesus is the giver of those things, but your faith in something to give that stuff.

We are all Like Israel, look around and think – what are the things I can give my life to that are likely to get me what I long for. Look best bet. Every person has faith like that in something.

Most of us do what Israel did. Who is the strongest ruler? Most impressive thing. Join in with that I will be safe.

OR what are people around me using to get security or approval or comfort. Choose that.

Most of our lives ruled by that thing in which we put our faith.

Safe, impressive job, like being a doctor, head of department, power over people. Rules you, every decision in your life is about that. Ruler. You have the faith I have in Jesus – just in that.

Normal thing, nations do – climb career, ladder, get a mortgage, good schools. If we do that we'll be safe. Huge changes, like moving where we live, so our kids education makes us safe and secure. You have the faith Christians asking you to have in Jesus, just in that.

Clever trick, not wrong to settle down with someone, nor to have a good career. Giant comes along – a wicked government, a terminal disease, a seemingly persistent mental health problem, relationship breakdown, those things that rule you can't fight the giant.

I do realise mentioning Jesus in relationship to those giants also seems ridiculous. Jesus is middle eastern religious figure. Escape route for religious maniacs. God – a few prayers that can't be a bad thing. Jesus, He is, in the battle against real giants, a cheese carrier. He might be a helper to some of those people who fighting giants, an inspiration to Gandhi, bring but he isn't a real fighter of the things I have to face.

Even many Christian feel that way. Goliath is real, Saul is impressive, coming to church and waving Jesus at me, doesn't make any real difference, except perhaps to carry cheese to Saul.

David

See what happens. David arrives and picks up this outrageous offer that Saul is making to try and get someone to head into the front line and do the job that he was set aside to do.

(Saul's appalling failure)

Notice second half of his comment though – who is this person defies armies of living God? You see his concern about the reward – not interested in it, he is wondering why it is necessary when all the Israelites are supposed to believe that the real God fights for them.

Barney with his brother. Eliab we have met before. Previous to this story, a king who will one day replace Saul has been chosen. Thought it might be Eliab because he looked good – tall, strong, capable like Saul. He's been at this battle for days and, like tall Saul has done diddly squat to fight the giant.

Has a go at David. David who is the youngest brother, smallest of all, who works as a shepherd the rest of the time, didn't even qualify for military service. David, who we know, has been marked out as the future king, small as he is.

Handsome strong Eliab is furious with David for making a fuss - you are just a shepherd and probably want to promote yourself. Brotherly argument.

Saul gets David in this young lad – Saul, remember set aside to this job lets David go and do the fighting.

Of course there is some discussion first – Saul says, you are too small.

David's reply – I was a shepherd and I have fought lions and bears. However, that is not him saying he is experienced enough to fight Goliath – no "The Lord rescued me..."

Try on Saul's armour, but that isn't going to work – too big, and anyway, bronze is no good against iron. No, he just gets some stones, from a stream, shepherd's bag and walks towards Goliath. His

bravery has not transformed him into a worthy warrior, he is still just a shepherd with some stones from a stream.

Goliath – great enemy of God’s people, he despises David. Tiny human, curses him, threatens to break his flesh and feed it to the animals.

David’s quite long speech – the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord.

David is not morally brilliant. He isn’t the brave protestor in front of the tank. His life is ruled by his concern for God’s honour, and by his trust that the real God will look after him. You have defied the real God, the real God will win this battle against you.

Speeches take a long time, the action really does not: David ran, slung the stone, Goliath fell, so David triumphed. Without a sword, but unlikely foolish looking shepherd’s weapon.

Weak looking shepherd king easily, simply, defeats the great enemy of God’s people. Cheese carrier is the giant slayer. All the false promises of mighty looking Saul can’t do anything against the giant, but a small weak looking figure, a shepherd, who wants God to be honoured, entrusts himself to God, knocks the giant flat. Like that.

War story is because it is a small picture of the big story.

The story of the Bible is the story of an evil giant, collection of giants that threaten, crush, and frighten us, giants which the rulers we can’t fight. Giant called sin – look at how I should live, I never do, I am defeated by all the things I get wrong. (More?) Giant called the world – made up of sinful people huge sinful systems that crush the poor and ruin the earth. Giant called the devil – evil spiritual force who uses death and the world to threaten us so we do what is wrong. Those giants have an army of helpers who attack us, anxiety, depression, cancer and grief. Attack our weak wills through pornography and materialism. Attack our marriages and our children through false promises of safety through dishonesty, adventure through selfishness. Old Testament is the story, mostly of how people who know God lose to those giants. Again and again their own sin draws them into disobeying God they love. Again and again pressure of the nations, the world, means they join in with what they think is wrong. Again and again that spiritual power that hates God, crushes them and God’s plans for them.

Until this one insignificant uneducated unattractive person. Small boy in an insignificant family. Armpit of a huge empire. Hope, at best, to be a cheese carrier to important people. Best thing to say about himself is that he is a good shepherd. No sword, armour or army or university, nothing to fight every social structure of the world which had become a tool of the evil giants, sin, world, devil. Take down most powerful empire world who had ever seen.

Man, Jesus, met the devil, personification of evil, giant who threatens us all. Non dramatic meeting, devil tries his best tricks, Jesus dismisses him with some words.

Satan says, you come here Jesus and I will give your flesh to the birds. Used all of his evil to do that, sinful people and the evil empire to have his body nailed to a cross.

Before that happened to Jesus, he submitted himself to God’s will, for his glory.

Taunts the weak shepherd, hanging his body up to eaten by the birds.

In that moment:

Colossians 2. No more accusing people of their sin any more, sin had been taken away. Satan says to you, you have sinned and failed and are worth nothing. Laugh at him. Nailed to the cross. Moment it looked like he was feeding Jesus to the birds, Jesus was removing his heaviest iron spear.

Story does not end, tools to force us to so what is right is death. Do what's right, what's human, honour God, you will waste your life. Do what's right, made to do, you or people you love will be killed. Three days later, Jesus came back to life. Satan's threat, to make people do what is wrong – gone. Threat of death, is, for those who trust in Christ, not something that he can use to force us.

As Christians have known the freedom from the accusation of sin, lost the threat of death telling them they need to be selfish do what's right for them, headed into the world, bringing down and undermining and rescuing people from evil systems the giant has created.

Corrie Ten Boom. "I know where my father is" – she is not David, Nazis not Goliath. Satan is Goliath, Nazism one of his systems, she knew Satan and his threat of death couldn't touch her or her father, weak sinful person knew God, she trusted the giantslayer.

Hero of the story is not me, bravely fighting my giant like amazing David. Hero is David, stepping into do for his people what their false rulers can never do: lifting the accusation of the law,

Where am I?

If I'm not David, am I in this story?

Honest, people I relate to in this story. People who made a bad choice about who to rule them, and end up defeated by the giant. The Israelites who see the giant and flee from him in great fear.

Thinking about this over the next couple of weeks, what real difference it makes to us – people, one thing said about them, and one thing they do.

"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." I know many of us know what it is to feel broken, defeated, done because of the giant and all of his helpers. So crushed by grief, so intimidated by being rejected, so tired of loneliness, so fed up life not being what it should be, so defeated by my own sin, penned in and messed up by what someone did to me. Somehow the giant's shadow is over your life.

Jesus has fought the giant so don't lose heart, don't give up. Gentle shepherd Jesus, standing saying, none of these precious people lose heart because of the giant and his army because I fight them for you.

Today, give up on life. Give up on Jesus. Give up on doing the things we know are right, being God's people. Give up loving that person, serving others, sharing the Gospel, because the giant's system just crushed us. In history, weak looking shepherd removed accusation of you not being good enough, shamed our enemy, defeated death that biggest threat – gentlest and most understanding way, giants servants are real and they hurt – come on, don't lose heart. Jesus fought the giant on

your behalf so that precious people like you won't lose heart and give up because of the things he's saying and doing. Don't lose heart. Our shepherd has fought the giant and won.

"The men of Israel and Judah surged forward"

When they see the giant is dead, see their little hero holding the head of the giant, they don't act out of fear any more. Surge forward, bravery. No actual bravery required now giant is dead, enemy is on the run, filled with joy in their victory they surge forward in his mission.

Wonder where you are scared of doing what would serve God when you don't really need to be. Scared if you become missionaries your kids education will suffer. Scared if you share the Gospel with a friend it will be embarrassing. Scared that if you stand up for what is right at work you will get fired.

Churches like ours, sensible churches, not demonstrative about our faith, cautious and safe. Say we are being wise. Good to be wise, also good to be brave. Jesus our David has dealt the fatal blow to Satan our enemy – we have only our moment in this already won cosmic war to surge forward in the wake of our victorious Jesus. No uncertainty, he's already done the hard bit, and for him it wasn't even hard.

Plenty of time to think about all of that – pause for a moment. Given Jesus great victory what brave move do you need to make to see God's kingdom go forward?

Satan tricky here – not pushing forward, law I have failed to keep, rubbish Christian. No no no, nailed the code to the cross, no guilt, no shame, nothing over you.

Rather, this. Come and enjoy the victory Jesus has already won. Step out, surge forward – the battle is won by Jesus.