

Called To Take a Stand

1 Samuel 17:32-37

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[Real Audio \(2 MB\)](#)

The world is a rocking boat, and if you are going to take a stand, you have to know where the center is.

After young David was anointed king by the old judge Samuel, it appeared that nothing had really changed. Samuel left Bethlehem and returned to Ramah. David returned to taking care of the sheep. Saul was still reigning as the only crowned king. And the Philistines were threatening to annihilate Israel as a nation. Just because God has anointed or called you to make a difference in this world, that doesn't mean that there aren't a few battles or giants in the way.

Today the story resumes as a great, decisive battle is about to begin in the Valley of Elah. The Philistine soldiers are on one mountainside. The Hebrew soldiers are facing them on the opposing mountain side. Down into the valley lumbers a huge man named Goliath. He is wearing a bronze helmet. His coat of bronze mail weighs 5,000 shekels. (I don't know how much that is, but it's a lot!) He has a huge sword at his side, a javelin on his back, and he spins an enormous spear like a school girl effortlessly twirls a baton. Goliath cries out to the Hebrews, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel. Give me a man that we may fight together." Then we are told, "When Saul and all of Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid."

Sooner or later all of us have to face a giant. Possibly you are facing one today. Maybe it is a giant tumor in your body that threatens your life, or a giant wound that remains in a broken heart. Maybe it is a giant amount of work that stands between you and your dreams, or a giant injustice you have to confront.

As a people who have committed ourselves to living out of a biblical way of life, we are facing the huge giants who shape our culture: Hollywood, teenage magazines, pop-psychology, postmodern ideologies. These giants threaten to annihilate the values we would teach our children by claiming there are no absolute values, just preferences. Like Goliath, they "defy" the church and all its talk about evil and righteousness, sin and obedience. "There is no evil or sin," they say, "except calling someone a sinner."

G.K. Chesterton once wrote that if a man finds joy in skinning a cat that is evil. Historically the only way to account for such a horror was to deny the existence of God, like atheists do, or to deny man's union with God, like the Bible does. But today it has become faddish to deny the cat. Our favorite explanation for sin is to say that is just doesn't exist. And that is a giant lie. We have only to look at our own hearts to see the hard truth that sin and evil is a reality.

You cannot respond to the call to live a biblical way of life without facing evil giants in our society. Homelessness is an evil plague on our society. So are crime and violence. So are religious legalism, racism, and materialism. All of them are rooted in the prevailing me-ism that has taken over today. There is no denying that. The question is how do you respond? Are you going to join Saul and his armies in being afraid? Are you going to give up the call to live as a person of faith and let Goliath take over? Or are you going to take a stand?

It is at this critical moment that David enters the narrative. Notice how his entrance is so subtle and ordinary. Goliath's introduction in the story is terrifying and extraordinary. David, who saves Israel, is introduced so quietly. He enters the story as an errand boy who was supposed to bring supplies to his brothers who were fighting in Israel's army.

When David saw that the king and all the army was terrified of one man, he couldn't believe his eyes. Was there no one who would take on the giant? Then, he may have heard again the words old Samuel whispered in his ear when he was anointed. "Thou art the one." Don't keep looking for someone else to

fulfill your calling. "Thou art the one." So David goes to King Saul and offers his service saying, "Let no one's heart fail because of Goliath; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul said, "But you are just a boy. He asked for a man to fight him. Who are you?"

It is bad enough that Goliath scoffs at your attempts to make a difference. The harder part is when you are belittled by the people who are supposed to be on your side. "Who are you to take on City Hall? Do you know anything about bureaucracy?" our friends ask. "Who are you to take on management? You're just a secretary here." "Who are you to challenge the culture? You don't even have a law degree."² David doesn't protest that he is qualified to do battle. All he says is that the same God who allowed him to pull a lamb out of the mouth of the lion and bear will deliver him again.

Then it gets even worse. Saul goes from ridiculing David to trying to help him. He places his armor on David: His helmet, coat of mail, his huge sword. When Saul is done trying to fortify David, the young shepherd literally can't move under the weight of all this protection. Once you decide the time has come to take a stand, after the warnings and teasing are over, the next thing you will get is a whole lot of advice on what you have to do to succeed. "You have to be political," they will say. They will tell you that you have to read Machiavelli, or Attila the Hun, or whatever management book is the rage now. But all this armor will paralyze you. What you have to do is to renew your faith in God.

I believe the only reason David wasn't afraid of Goliath like all the people wearing armor is he had spent most of his life up to this point taking care of sheep. He was out of the mainstream of culture. He hadn't been watching a lot of TV. He didn't take culture seriously enough to be afraid of its giants. All he knew was that as God had been faithful in the past, so would he be faithful in the crisis of the present. So David dumped all of the king's armor on the ground. He went down to the brook that ran through the valley. And he knelt down to pick up five smooth stones for his slingshot.

This image of David kneeling is, I believe, the center of the story. In this humble posture, David demonstrates his understanding of the center of the world. Everyone else was allowing Goliath to determine the center. They were all in reaction to the giant incarnation of their fears, while one young boy was about to change the history of Israel. But not until he first found a new center by getting on his knees.

If you are going to take a stand in this world, you have to start by getting on your knees. Because let's face facts: You and I look pretty foolish trying to make a difference. If anything is ever going to change, it will have to be God who makes the changes. Prayer, daily prayer, is the means by which you see God at work. That's why we sometimes say that prayer centers a life.

When Goliath got a look at David he scorned him, "Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?" But David said, "The Lord does not save by the sword and spear. The battle is the Lord's. He will give you into my hands." The greatest mistake people of faith make in going after giants is to think we have to look like giants to defeat them. Remember that Saul was also a big man, head and shoulders above the rest, which is why his armor didn't fit David. But to defeat a giant you don't have to be a giant, or even dress up like a giant wanna be. Neither do you have to use the weapons of a giant. You don't have to be angry or mean to take on angry, mean people. All you have to do is believe the battle really is the Lord's.

This is not really a story about David, and it certainly isn't a story about Goliath. It's a story about the faithfulness of God. The point of the story is to say that God is in the center of Israel, and your corner of the world. God is the deliverer, and it is God who will snatch the lamb out of the mouth of the lion.

David was so convinced of that truth that he ran toward the giant, slung a stone into his forehead, and the giant came crushing down on his face. Then David cut Goliath's head off with his own sword. The Philistines fled. The armies of Israel pursued them. And Israel was saved that day by a boy with a slingshot!

By way of epilogue to the story, I have always wondered why David picked up five stones. Apparently the first one did the trick. Clearly this young man was filled with faith in his God. So why five stones? We are not told why in the text, which I interpret as permission for me to speculate. My guess is that David picked up five stones, because it is good to have a back up plan. You know? Maybe all those years fighting lions

and bears taught him that sometimes it takes more than one stone.

If your first shot at a giant doesn't work, take a second, or even a fifth. Sometimes it takes more than one round of chemo to get rid of the cancer. Sometimes it takes more than one petition to make a change, more than one election to win the office, more than one vote at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to find a biblical ethic in the church.

One of the most important qualifications for becoming a giant-slayer is that you can't be discouraged. After Goliath, David had a lot of other huge obstacles to overcome in fulfilling his calling. So do you. But if you have spent time in prayer, kneeling by the water of life, finding your center, then you can take a stand. You'll be ready. Whatever it takes.

Bring us to our knees, faithful God, that we may become centered in your presence among us, and find courage to take a stand for your justice in a world plagued with evil giants. Amen.