

Sermon for Sunday, February 7, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"HOW TO BE A GIANT KILLER"  
I Samuel 17:38-51

Text: "...the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands." I Samuel 17:47

When young David was a boy, battle between opposing armies had some unusual features. For one thing, it was quite common for the champion fighters of opposing armies to engage in personal combat before the soldiers. It was often the case that the battle was decided then and there. The sudden death of a favored champion was a sign of disfavor with God and of impending doom. Such a sudden calamity sometimes caused an army to flee in disorganized terror. But the Israelites had not found a champion to go out to fight against Goliath. This nine foot tall Philistine Giant represented odds that were too great.

So the two armies stood poised for battle on opposite hills and in the valley below Goliath stood with his shield-bearer and hurled taunts at the Jews. The Bible said, "When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid." Goliath is a sort of prototype of human experience. He represents those insurmountable odds, those destructive forces that appear in the lives of all of us from time to time and which strike fear and dismay into our hearts. There come those times in the lives of all of us when we find ourselves face to face with some giant that seems too big for us. It may be unhappiness in marriage, it may be a business failure, it may be the death of a loved one, it may be some habit that has gained control over us and which has mastered us. But whatever it is there come times in our lives when we are confronted by some giant. For example, Dr. William Parker, a professor at the University of Redlands, tells us that at one time in his life he developed a painful ulcer that made life a burden. It developed that his ulcer had been caused by a disguised hostility that he held for another person. Within the very framework of his own emotional life he had come up against a giant that was destroying him. Or take again a person who has become addicted to a drug. His emotional and physical need for the drug becomes a giant in his experience that he cannot defeat or control.

All of us, to lesser or greater degree, come up against giants in our lives. It may be a resentment towards someone that turns life into bitterness and gall, it may be an unusual sensitivity of feelings that keeps a person hurt and angry, it may be some secret vice, some secret sin that is corroding and destroying our souls from within, it may be some greed or ambition that is smashing our ideals and breaking down our ethical standards. But whatever form it takes, all of us have giants of one sort or another in our experience.

On that ancient day so long ago between Israel and the victory it needed over its enemy stood Goliath--a giant who struck fear and dismay into their hearts and which spelled doom for their hopes and dreams. It was at this point that David, sent by his father to bring food to his soldier brothers, arrived at the camp of the Israel army. David cannot believe what his eyes see and his ears hear! "Who is this Philistine," he asks in incredulous tones, "That he should defy the armies of the living God?"

You remember, of course, the story that follows. David determines to fight Goliath on behalf of Israel and he is taken before King Saul. In our scripture this morning we read how Saul puts his own armor on David. But the armor is too heavy and unwieldy and the young boy takes it off. With only his shepherd's staff

and his sling, David goes forth to meet Goliath. On the way he chooses five stones from the brook and puts them in the little Shepherd's bag strapped to his waist. When Goliath and David meet, Goliath curses David and promises to feed his body to the birds. He is angry that a slip of a boy has come out to fight him. To the taunts David makes the reply that is our text for this morning, "...the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands." The story ends, of course, with David triumphing over the giant.

Now, the incredible thing about this whole story and the thing that makes it so precious to us is that David wins. A young shepherd boy goes up against a giant, against incredible odds, and wins. It is incredible that a mere boy who is not trained in the skills of war goes up against a champion fighter who is also a giant of a man and the boy wins. The idea occurs that in this incident we may learn a valuable lesson in how to kill giants! In our own lives we come up against giants--we come to those points when in despair and fear we say, "This is too much for me." We come to those moments when life is so filled with emotional conflicts and unhappiness that we simply say, "I can go no further." It is at this point in human experience that we need to know how to fight the Goliaths in our own experience. Ann Southern, the actress, tells us of recovering from a physical illness only to discover that she was emotionally broken. "For me there was no such thing as learning to live with fear," she wrote, "It was killing me. I was physically as well as medical science could make me; but fear, as I know now, has a definite effect on the body as well as the mind, and for this there was no medical prescription. I had to do something..." Here a famous actress had come up against a Goliath in her own life, the giant of fear.

Notice in the first place that David met the giant head on. He could not pretend the giant didn't exist. He couldn't ignore him--not when he stood there making vulgar gestures and laughing at the Jews. The only way to meet the giant was face to face. I do a great deal of counseling and this is one of the biggest problems we encounter. People have tried to ignore giants. They push them down into their unconscious minds and try to pretend they don't exist. But in the darkness and safety of the unconscious, those giants grow stronger and create emotional chaos. It is no good pretending something isn't true when it is or that it doesn't exist when it does. The first step in doing battle with some personal giant is to meet it out in the open, head on. As the Bible puts it, David ran to the battle line.

Note in the second place that David went into battle with a weapon he had already proved. Saul tried to put his own armor on David but David took it off and said, "I cannot go with these; for I am not used to them." But the sling was something else. As a shepherd boy tending his flocks he had spent weary hours perfecting his aim and gaining skill with the sling. When the moment of crisis came he had a weapon he could use, a weapon that had been put to the test.

Most of us run into trouble here. When we meet giants of human experience so often we are caught in the battle without any weapons. We go to battle with unproven armor and we are no match for the Goliaths of life. Let me illustrate what I mean. Some time ago I visited a young woman in the hospital. We talked for a moment and then she began to cry, "I need God," she said. "I need his help. I'm so frightened and alone, but I don't know how to pray." She had gone into battle unprepared. She faced the giant of surgery and possibly the bad news of cancer and her weapons of defense against this giant in her experience were rusty and unused, her resources were unproved. During those months and years of her life when she could have been practicing prayer, when she could have been perfecting her

communion with God, when she could have been developing an inner awareness of God's presence, she had not done so. Now she had no weapons with which to fight this giant in her life.

We ought not to have any illusions. When giants come into our lives--as they inevitably will--we will not suddenly develop spiritual skills and abilities of the soul that we never had before. When calamity or disaster or tragedy strikes at us, the only tools of war that we will carry into the battle are the tools we already have. Lots of people think of God as a sort of Holy Panic Button or a sort of Spiritual Rabbit's foot for times when danger comes. But the fact of the matter is, it takes a life-time of practicing the presence of God, a lifetime of prayer and communion to bring your life under the will of God to be prepared for giants of human experience. Dr. George MacLeod of the Iona Community in Scotland once used an illustration that demonstrates how this works. He told the story of a boy who was seen each day at lunch time entering the church to pray. He knelt for only a moment and always left immediately. The minister's curiosity was aroused and one day he stopped the young boy to ask him why he prayed for only a moment. The boy explained that he came on his lunch hour and the church was so far from where he worked that he just had time to get there before he had to turn around and immediately start back. "But in such a short time," asked the minister, "what do you say?" "Well," said the boy, "I just say, 'Jesus, It's Jimmie.'" Some time later the minister was called to a sickroom and, as Dr. MacLeod puts it, he sensed a greater presence there. The ill person was none other than Jimmie and the life of the critically ill boy was rapidly slipping away. Yet, the minister--deeply aware of a presence in the room--felt certain he heard a voice speak as the lad died. The voice said, "Jimmie, it's Jesus."

Do you see? When one has practiced the presence of Jesus, the giants of human experience hold no fear. When we go into battle prepared we will always hear his voice speaking to us, "Fear not, it is I."

The third thing I would call to our attention about David's experience in meeting Goliath was his absolute confidence in God. David may have been only a boy, but he was no fool. He knew that in spite of how good he was with the sling that the odds were against him. Yet, in spite of the knowledge of his own limitations, he did not hesitate in fighting Goliath. Why? Because, as he put it, "...the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands."

David had what I like to call an "ultimate faith." Whatever happened he believed he could trust God. From a human standpoint it was foolish to fight Goliath. He had the size, he had the weapons, he had the skills. But David knew that those things were no obstacle for God. He knew that the power of God was bigger than giants or swords or spears--or for that matter, atomic bombs and planes and ships and ICBM's. He knew that God stood against everything Goliath represented and he trusted God.

How much more should you and I have such an ultimate faith today. We can look at the cross of Jesus Christ and when we see him there we know how much God loves us and how much he hates evil. We can face the giants in our lives because we know that God loves us and cares about us and we can trust him. On the cross God has passed judgment on all of the evil giants in our lives and we can trust him. One of my former parishoners was dying of cancer. She, like David, had faced her giant out in the open and she had gone into battle with her weapons prepared by years of living in fellowship with God. She had this sort of ultimate faith that

David had. Near the end, when the suffering and pain was so great, she said something to me that I will never forget. As she said it, a sense of peace, a sense of victory was in her eyes. She said, "I believe that I shall rise above this. Not here on earth, but in a place where life is better." Yes, "The Lord will give you into our hands..." She had met in her life the biggest giant of all--the Goliath of death--and that giant held no fear for her. She knew that the battle is the Lord's and she was victorious.

Life will bring us many giants of human experience until at least we meet the greatest giant of all, the Goliath called death. But if we meet our giants head-on, if we meet them with weapons that grow out of a lifetime of fellowship with God, if we meet them with an ultimate faith in God, with David we can say, "for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands."