

Sermon for Sunday, June 27, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"WHEN YOUR GIANTS AREN'T JOLLY AND GREEN"
I Samuel 17:38-51

Text: "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand...that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand." --I Samuel 17:47

They don't make giants like they used to. When I was a boy, giants were very big and mean and ugly. They said terrible things that sent chills down your spine, like: "Fe, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive or be he dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread." Nowadays, giants are different. Today giants are jolly and green. They live in pleasant, beautiful valleys. They grow vegetables and go "Ho, ho, ho." Yet, the fact of the matter is, there are still some giants around that aren't jolly and green, and this morning I want to talk about some of those giants and how to fight them.

When young David was a boy, giants were real. Sometimes the battle between opposing armies had some unusual features. For one thing, it was quite common for the champion fighter of one army opposing another to engage in personal combat with the champion of the other army. It was often the case that the battle was decided then and there. The sudden death of a favorite champion was a sign of disfavor with God and of impending doom. Such a sudden calamity sometimes caused an army simply to flee in disorganized terror.

But the Israelis had not found a champion to go out and fight against Goliath. That nine-foot-tall Philistine giant represented odds that were too great. So, the two armies stood poised on opposite hills, and in the valley below, Goliath stood with his shield bearer and he hurled taunts at the Israelis. The Bible said that when Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine they dismayed and greatly feared. 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 face some giant that isn't at all jolly and green and 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 and he isn't at all jolly and green.

For example, Dr. William Parker, a professor at the University of Redlands, tells us that at one time in his life he developed a very painful ulcer that made life simply miserable for him. 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 life that he cannot defeat or control. For all of us, to lesser or greater degrees, come up against giants in our lives that aren't at all jolly and green. It may be a resentment toward someone that turns our inner life into bitterness and gall. It may be an unusual sensitivity or feeling that keeps a person hurt and angry inside. It may be some secret vice, some secret sin that is corroding and destroying our soul from within. It may be some greed or some driving 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 wasn't jolly and green, but who struck fear and dismay into their hearts, spelling 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 this camp of the Israeli army. David cannot believe what his eyes see or his ears hear. "Who is this Philistine," he says in incredulous tones, "that he should defy the armies of the living God?" You remember, of course, the story that follows. David volunteered to fight Goliath on behalf of Israel and they took him to King Saul. In our scripture this morning we read how Saul put his own armour on David, but it was too heavy and unwieldy, so the young boy took 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 met, Goliath cursed David and promised to feed his body to the birds. He was angry that a mere slip of a boy has come out to fight him--the champion of Philistia. To his taunts, David made the reply that is our text for this morning. He said, "The Lord saves not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's. 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, professional 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 that aren't jolly and green.

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. I cannot handle it." We come to those moments when life is so filled with emotional conflicts or 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 lives. Ann Southern, the actress, tells 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 as physically well as medical science could make me, but fear, as I now know, 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 the Goliath in her own life--the giant of fear.

I would have you 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 Goliath stood in the valley, 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 I encounter. People try to ignore the giants in their lives. They pretend they don't exist. It is not until the giant has cut and slashed them up emotionally that they come for help. But often it is too late. They try to push these giants down into their unconscious minds and pretend that they don't exist. But in the darkness and in the 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. Take alcoholism, for example. Those of you who have had any contact with it know how devastating it can be to a person or to his family and his loved ones. But nothing can ever be done to help an alcoholic until he himself is ready to face this giant in his life. When he is able to confess, "Yes, I am an alcoholic." If any of you have been to an AA meeting, you know how they start. A person gets up and says, "My name is 'So-and-So' and I am an alcoholic." He has faced the giant.

The first step in doing battle with some personal giant is to meet it out in the open--head on. When David came to that point in his life, the Bible says David ran to the battle line. That is true. There may be strain and stress in your marriage. There may be some personal breakdown within you. There may be some conflict between you and a business associate or some other person. There may be some tragedy in your life, but you can never deal with it until you get it out in the open--until you face it honestly. Then, and only then, can you begin to deal with it.

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

Now, most of us run into trouble right here. When we meet giants in human experience that aren't jolly and green, so often we are caught in battle without any weapons. We go to battle with unproven armour and we are no match for the Goliaths in life. Let me illustrate what I mean. Sometime ago I visited a young woman in the hospital. We were talking and visiting and suddenly she burst into almost uncontrollable tears. "I need God," she said. "I need His help. I am so frightened. I am so alone. I don't even know how to pray." She had gone into battle unprepared. She faced the giant of surgery and the possible diagnosis 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 in her life, when she could have been laying the groundwork of faith, she had not done so. Now she had no weapons with which to fight this giant in her life.

What kind of weapons do you have for spiritual warfare at your disposal this morning? 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 we never had before. When calamity, or disaster or tragedy strikes at us, the only tools of war we will carry into battle are the tools we already have. I want to ask you, do you have the tools you want this morning if war should come for you? Lots of people think of God as a sort of panic button, a sort of spiritual rabbit's foot for when danger comes. But the fact of the matter is, it takes a lifetime of practicing the presence of God, a lifetime of prayer and communion to be prepared for the giants of human experience.

Dr. George McCloud, of the Iona Community in Scotland once used an illustration that demonstrates how this works. He told a story of a boy who was seen coming each day at lunch time into a certain church to pray. He would come to the front and kneel for just a moment and immediately leave the church. 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 by the time he got there he had to turn right around in order to be back on time. "But in such a short time," asked the minister, "what do you say?" "Well," said the boy, "I don't have much time, sir, so I just say, 'Jesus, it's Jimmy.'" Sometime later this minister was called to a sickroom and, as Dr. McCloud puts it, when he walked into the room he sensed a mighty presence there. The ill person was none other than little Jimmy, and the life of the critically ill lad was rapidly slipping away. Yet, the minister, deeply aware of God's presence in the room, said that he felt certain that as the lad slipped away, a voice said to him, "Jimmy--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 we will always hear his voice speaking to us, as the choir sang in the anthem this morning, "Peace! It is I!"

The third thing I would call to your attention about David's experience in meeting Goliath was his absolute confidence in God. David may have been only a boy, but I want you to know he wasn't a fool. He knew that in spite of how good he was with his sling, the odds were incredibly against him. Yet, in spite of the knowledge of his own limitations, he did not hesitate in offering to fight 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 has what I like to call an ultimate faith. Whatever happens, he believes he can trust God. From a human standpoint, it was foolishness to fight Goliath. Goliath had the size, he had the weapons, he had the experience, he had the expertise; but David knew these things were no obstacle to 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 inter-continental ballistic missiles. He knew that God stood against everything Goliath represented and he trusted God. He didn't trust he would win--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 hanging 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. Not because everything turns out the way we want it to but because we have faith in God's integrity. On the cross God passed judgment on all 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 and 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 shall never forget. As she said it, a sense of peace, a sense of victory and triumph was in her eyes. Her voice rang with confidence as she said, "Andy, I believe that I shall rise above this--not here on earth but in a place where life is far 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. She had met and had conquered, 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 that aren't jolly and green, until at last 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 and trust in God, then with David we can say "For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands."