

“Five Smooth Stones”

I Samuel 17:38-44

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Reading the few verses before us today does not do justice to what is one of the most celebrated victories in the pages of the entire bible. All we know from these few verses is King Saul sent David to do battle with a Philistine warrior. David, representing the Israelites, rejects the armor offered him by King Saul, choosing instead to confront the Philistine warrior with a sling and five smooth stones. And his staff. David brings his staff. David was a shepherd. A shepherd goes up against the Philistine warrior, and the shepherd's only supplement to his staff is a sling and five smooth stones. Is it any wonder the Philistine warrior despised David when he saw him? Is it any wonder the Philistine warrior is offended...outraged...insulted...shocked, I say! Shocked...that Israel thought so little of him that they send a shepherd to do battle? “Am I dog, that you come at me with sticks?” The Philistine warrior cursed David. “Come here and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

Who was the Philistine warrior? Well, that is not fair. In the verses I read today, the name of the Philistine warrior is never mentioned. How could I expect you to know the warrior's name if I didn't read the name so that you would know the name. How in the world would you know the name of the Philistine warrior, who was offended, outraged, insulted...and shocked that Israel sent a shepherd as his opponent. Who was the Philistine warrior? His name...hmmm...I'm looking out at you hoping that maybe a few of you know the name of the Philistine warrior. Although I did not read the warrior's name today, his name is pretty well-known. In fact, I wonder if almost everyone here knows the name before I say the name. The Philistine warrior is named Goliath. And the reason

Goliath is insulted and offended that Israel sends a shepherd into battle against him is that Goliath is a giant!

Don't roll your eyes at me. Don't say I'm exaggerating. You tell me what you would call someone who stands nine feet and nine inches tall... whose spear shaft alone weighs fifteen pounds...who wears armor weighing 125 pounds like it is a polo shirt... and who strikes fear in the hearts of his enemies. I don't know about you, but I would call someone like that a giant. I would call Goliath a giant.

So would Israel. When we first meet Goliath in the early verses of I Samuel 17, when we read about his height and his helmet, his javelin and his armor, we read that Goliath would come out every morning...and then again, every evening. The Philistine troops were massed on one side of a valley, the Israelites on the opposite side. Every morning...every evening Goliath would come out and extend a challenge Send me an opponent. Let's go at it. Let's settle this thing. Let's see who is the mightiest. All Israel had to do was select one brave warrior to confront Goliath. But every morning...and every evening...when Goliath would extend his challenge, all the Israelites would turn and run, their hearts filled with fear. What were they afraid of? A giant. A giant I tell you. Goliath was a giant. And there was not one single warrior who had the courage to confront the giant.

That is who Goliath was. Goliath was a giant. Who was David? For starters, he is the youngest of eight brothers. He should not be anywhere near the battlefield. His job was tending the sheep. His three biggest brothers on the other hand, his three oldest brothers, they were there all dressed up for the battle. So how did David get to be in the position where he was representing Israel in battle. Well, have you heard of Uber Eats? Diner Dash? Grub Hub? Dominos? If you know about these food deliveries, then you know how David got to be anywhere near the battlefield. His dad

said, “David, your brothers are out representing the country as warriors. Now take them some food so they don’t starve. They need to be strong and healthy, so they can go to battle.” So David’s father Jesse makes a picnic basket with roasted grain, ten loaves of bread, ten cheeses, and sends David out as a pita delivery man. Or something like that.

When David gets to the battlefield, with the groceries he is dropping off for his brothers, as he is looking for his three big brothers, Goliath the giant makes his daily appearance, spewing his venom against the Israelites, challenging them to put forth a worthy warrior. David hears all this, and he is curious. He asks some of the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel?” It turns out a lot will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes the disgrace from Israel. The men tell David, “The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes.” What a trifecta...wealth, the king’s daughter, and no taxes. Just as David is about to be swept up in this intriguing situation, his older brother spots him and chides him for showing up on the battlefield. He ridicules him. “Shouldn’t you be back home watching the sheep?”

Despite the rebuke of his big brother, word gets to King Saul that someone is showing some interest in stepping into the ring with Goliath the giant. Brought before the king, David boldly says, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine. Your servant will go and fight him.” Bless his heart, King Saul finally has someone willing to stand toe to toe with the giant. But when King Saul takes stock of David, he quickly realizes David is nothing but a shepherd boy. Unable to mask his disappointment, the king says to David, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” Who was David? A shepherd boy. David was a

shepherd boy who worked part-time delivering food. He had big dreams, I'll fight that giant kind of dreams, but he was just a boy.

Relying on some brave endeavors he had as a shepherd, David convinces King Saul that he is ready to meet the giant. Although Saul agrees to send David into battle, he decides he had better dress David up in the best armor he has. Outfitting David with a coat of armor, a bronze helmet, and a sword fastened over his tunic, the description of David in the armor borders on the comic. Clunk. Clunk. Visor dropping over his eyes. Stumbling under the weight of the sword. Tripping in the armor. Finally, David says, "I cannot fight in these." If not armor, how will David prepare for battle? "He took his staff, chose five 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."

The build up to the battle is exciting and engaging, with twists and turns, the contrast between young David and the surly giant named Goliath, this is a fine drama, edge of your seat theater, hold your breath in anticipation, hope against hope that David doesn't go down in flames and get fed to the birds and the wild animals. The build up sets your heart racing, but the actual battle is over in an instant. "Reaching in his bag and taking out a stone, David slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine, the giant named Goliath, with a sling and a stone." There you have it. The giant gets crushed. The little guy wins. And countless people for literally thousands of years have stood face to face with their own giants and found inspiration from that one shepherd boy who stood against Goliath with a sling and five smooth stones.

David had five smooth stones, and he only had to use one to slay Goliath. That means he had four smooth stones left in his pouch.

Sometime in late 2019 or early 2020, a distant thunder started to get our attention. The footsteps of a giant softly and faintly began to cause the slightest of movements in our human consciousness. As January moved to February and then March of 2020, the footsteps drew nearer, their rumble more noticeable, and before we knew it there was a full-fledged giant on the scene, the Covid Giant, and he was breathing threats against humanity and causing all kinds of fear and panic. Just as the Israelites would flee when Goliath would shout out his daily call to battle, we all clamored inside our houses and hid, isolated, distanced ourselves, and began doing things to keep the giant at bay, washing our hands, scrubbing our surfaces, wearing masks, and cancelling most everything we could think of.

The story of David and Goliath is a testimony that the giant will fall. The giant will not endure forever. The giant will not cast that shadow of fear for endless days. The giant will not mock. The giant will not kill and destroy...forever. There is a season when the giant seems unbeatable. We are told that Goliath stomped around boasting and bragging and putting fear in the hearts of the Israelites for forty days. Forty days and nights. Giants have their time when they seem invincible. But giants fall. It's been more than forty days since the giant of Coronavirus crashed our party and caused such chaos and uncertainty. I don't know how long this giant will rattle our cage, but one day the giant will be gone. Giants fall.

What I would like us to think about today is what you do when the giant falls. David slung one stone at Goliath, the stone stuck in that mean old giant's forehead, and Goliath's reign of terror was ended. The giant was gone. Now what do you do?

Have you thought about what you will do when the virus is finally gone? There are some obvious things, like hug, go without

a mask, travel, eat in a restaurant, sing...in church...sing. But beyond that, what will you do? What will we do?

David conquered the giant. David slew Goliath. He left the battlefield with four smooth stones still in his pouch. What did David do? As far as we can tell he did not go in search of more giants. He did not look at those four remaining stones and say, “Well, Goliath was 9’9”...now I want to find a bigger giant, Goliath’s older brother, a ten or twelve foot giant, a giant with a 200 pound sword, a giant with two heads.” The giant was gone. Now it was time to move beyond the giant.

As we move toward conquering our giant and as we move toward a time when the Covid virus does not dominate every waking moment, it seems to me what David did after he slayed his giant might prove to be a helpful case study. We don’t know exactly what David did with those four remaining stones, but we do know from the bible some things David did do after he slayed the giant. Yes, he continued to be a warrior, and he fought plenty of battles. But David did more than fight battles. That is what I want to focus on.

- David made music. Apparently, he was a gifted musician with the harp and the lyre. His music was soothing.
- David wrote poetry. Some of the most enduring images in the bible are attributed to David. “The Lord is my shepherd...he leadeth me beside still waters.” “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars...what is man that Thou art mindful of him.” “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”
- David wrote prayers. His poems were prayers. His prayers were the psalms. He prayed with joy, he prayed with wonder,

he prayed with dismay, he prayed with disappointment and discouragement, he prayed in desperation, and he prayed with faith, with faith, with faith, that God was his refuge and strength.

- David spared Saul. Saul, the king, tried to put David to death numerous times. But when presented with opportunities to end Saul's life, David chose to preserve life.
- David listened to the wise counsel of others. Once when he was intent on putting a man named Nabal to death because he had refused to help David's men in a time of need, David heeded the intervention of Nabal's wife. He turned away from his wrath and bloodshed was averted. When a warrior refrains from violence, that is powerful.
- David looked after the little guys. One of my favorite stories about David as a leader is the day Israel was having a grand celebration, it was the day the Ark of the Lord was brought home, and as the celebration was in full swing David, "Gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd." It sounds small. It sounds simple. But here was a king making sure everyone had some part in the festivities. Everyone had a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins.
- David looked after the vulnerable, providing a place at his table for Mephibosheth, the disabled grandson of his enemy King Saul. David welcomed Mephibosheth into his house, telling him, "You will always eat at my table."
- And David confessed. And after David confessed, he repented. And after David repented, he asked for God's forgiveness. David failed and he failed in a mighty way. Can you say Bathsheba? And yet his greatest failure gives us the chance to witness a man who took his failures seriously and asked God to "Create within me a clean heart."
- My final thought about David...post-Goliath...after the giant fell...is a prayer David offered to God. "Teach me your way,

Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart.” Psalm 86:11, 12

What will we do when our giant is finally defeated? What will we do after the thundering footsteps of Covid fade into the background? Knowing that it is ultimately God who slays the giant, what will we do when God brings us to a new day, a post-Covid day?

The most formidable giant human beings have ever faced is the giant of death. With one stone...a stone God rolled away from the mouth of the tomb, that wicked giant of death was slain. When death had been defeated and Jesus had been raised from the dead and the Holy Spirit had filled those believers lives to overflowing, we read that they devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. What will we devote ourselves to when this Covid giant is finally put to rest?