

## The Giant from Gath

I Samuel 17

### Introduction

It amazes me what people are willing to risk their lives to do.

I recently read brief biographies of several individuals who attempted to go over Niagara Falls. Some of them survived – many did not.

Annie Taylor was actually the first person to try this feat. She was a sixty-three year old, retired school teacher who claimed she was only forty-three. I could say more on that point, but I will not!

The year was 1901. She devised a modified pickle barrel and compressed the air in the barrel with a bicycle tire pump. On her birthday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, cushioned with pillows and holding her cat, she went over the falls. She survived, but was quoted as saying, “No one ought ever do that again.”

However, in 1920, Charles Stevens risked his life. He spent his life savings on an eight foot tall Russian oak barrel and strapped an anvil to his feet for ballast, to make sure the barrel would land feet first. There were straps for his arms and he reluctantly agreed to take a small tank of oxygen. When the barrel hit the water at the base of the falls, the anvil broke through the bottom, pulling Charles with it. All that was recovered was his right arm, still strapped in the harness.

Undeterred by that outcome, George Stathakis got an even heavier barrel and ten years later, went over the falls with his pet turtle along for the ride. The turtle was the only one that survived.

In recent times, more people have tried. Jesse Sharp, in 1990, tried to go over the falls in his kayak. He was an expert kayaker and was convinced that Niagara Falls, considered a Class 6 rapids, could be

conquered. He was so confident that he even refused to wear a helmet – besides, he said, the helmet would obscure his face from the media footage taken by all the reporters who had come.

Only the kayak was found.

Finally, there was Robert Overacker, a professional stuntman and race car driver. He decided, in 1995, to go over Niagara Falls on a jet ski. His plan was actually simple – he would have a parachute strapped to his back. As soon as he went over the edge of the falls, he would open his parachute and float down to the water below. I happened to see an amazing photograph of Robert, taken just as he flew over the edge – the jet-ski dropping below him, one arm stretched into the air, like a rodeo rider who was just sent airborne by the bull. His other arm is pulling the rip chord . . . but Robert’s parachute did not open and he fell one hundred eighty feet to his death.

As I read these accounts, I could not help repeating, “Why? Why?!”

They would have said, “For the thrill of it!” or “So few have tried it and lived!”

They were obsessed with the idea of staring death in the face. Most of their friends and relatives reported that this was all they talked about; all they thought about. Some of them planned their stunt for years.

Whether it was in a wooden barrel stuffed with pillows or jumping from a jet ski with a parachute, they were willing to risk their lives for a cause such as that. What a tragic, trivial cause; what a wasted investment of life.

If there was ever a biblical account of someone who seemed to be throwing away his life in an

impossible stunt, even though it was for an eternal cause, it would have been young David. If there was ever someone staring death in the face, that you would never expect to survive, it was David in that classic encounter in which, armed with only a slingshot, he risked his life by taking on a giant who was armed to the teeth.

That encounter has actually become for us, an example of great faith – in the face of incredible odds. David was willing to die for a great cause.

I want to take you to that biblical scene today, because we also are facing a giant challenge. We are – after months of planning and debating and adapting, erasing and redrawing, praying and talking – at the moment of truth.

I have had a hard time sleeping this week. The moment our plans were finished and we had arrived at a place where the most optimistic among us said, “It has become impossible,” – that was the moment, we believed, that we were exactly where God wanted us. We have everything we need from God to carry out this mission. The question is, “Does God have everything He wants from us?”

I cannot wait to find out. Do not fool yourself, we are about to collectively communicate to our church and to our world, whether or not we really believe this cause, on this site, in and through this church, at this moment is worth the risk; worth the sacrifice; worth the effort.

## A Giant Challenge of Faith

Let me show to you a scene that never fails to inspire me. It is the courage and faith of a teenager who had a cause greater than life itself. Turn to I Samuel, chapter 17.

This event is familiar enough that we can immediately enter the scene and observe this incredible moment of faith. Look at I Samuel 17:2-3.

*Saul and the men of Israel were gathered and camped in the valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines. The Philistines stood on the mountain on one side while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them.*

I have learned that this valley was only one hundred yards wide and was bordered by rising cliffs. The armies could actually see one another’s facial expressions and hear one another speak. This stalemate in the valley would last almost two months. Continue to verse 4.

*Then a champion came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.*

Since none of us learned “cubits” in middle school, let me interpret the size of Goliath.

Most commentators and Bible scholars in the past, measured Goliath as being somewhere around 9 ½ feet tall – with a cubit measuring somewhere around 17 inches. Archaeologists have learned in recent years that a cubit is somewhat more flexible – extending as far as 22 inches. In fact, the cubit depended on the one doing the measuring, since a cubit was determined by the length between the person’s elbow and the tip of his middle finger.

Seventeen inches was considered the norm for the cubit. I, however, measured from my elbow to my middle fingertip and it came in around 20 inches. Archaeologists have found cubits measured at 22 inches.

The span is half a cubit. It measures from 8 inches to nearly a foot.

This means that Goliath was once considered to be around 9 ½ feet tall. Some of you probably heard me preach through I Samuel around nine years ago. At the time, I had a sketch of Goliath on a banner so I could show him to you.

Unfortunately, I do not have that banner anymore. Sometime in the past nine years, it was misplaced. So, I have a new banner that shows Goliath at this newly discovered size. With the cubit measuring somewhere around 20 to 22 inches, plus another 10 inches for the span, this makes Goliath about 12 feet tall! We drew him at 11 ½ feet, just to be conservative.

Thanks to Joe Casale and his brother-in-law, who is a professional illustrator, (they put a lot of work into this project as a gift to us), we have a new, correctly sized Goliath. And thanks to Dave Rockwell, a church member who owns an advertising company, this banner and every other banner you have seen, has been given to our church at the cost of the ink and vellum.

Would you like to take this Goliath on??

Verse 5 tells us that Goliath,

*. . . had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale-armor which weighed five thousand shekels of bronze.*

That is around 140 pounds! Can you imagine putting on a coat that weighed 140 pounds? Think of it – his coat of mail weighed more than David! And

Goliath put it on as easily as I put on my coat this morning! Recent estimates weigh Goliath in at around 500 pounds.

Look at verses 6 and 7.

***He also had bronze greaves [shin guards] on his legs and a bronze javelin slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear weighed six hundred shekels of iron [around 25 pounds]; his shield-carrier also walked before him.***

Now can you understand why no man among the soldiers of Israel dared to enter into hand to hand combat with this giant from Gath?

Later on, by the way, we will discover David taking the sword of Goliath as a trophy. The sword was a "kidon," which is a curved sword that would give Goliath the maximum ability to swing and, with one swing, sever the heads of his foes. I thought you might want to know that!

There was no hiding it in the Middle East – this was a weapon of mass destruction!

Look at I Samuel 17:8-10.

***He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, and said to them, "Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not the Philistine and you servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me.***

***"If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants and serve us."***

***Again the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together."***

***When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.***

They were terrified! Would you be?

Going against Goliath would be like plunging down Niagara Falls in a wooden bucket.

Now fast forward the tape – young David arrives with a care package from home. While he is there, Goliath appears for his twice daily blasphemy.

David says, in verse 26b,

***". . . who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?"***

Ladies and gentlemen, David strikes at the heart of their problem. Saul and the armies of Israel thought they had a military crisis. They did not. They had a theological crisis.

They had forgotten who they belonged to. They were not merely the servants of Saul, they were soldiers of God.

They thought their greatest problem was a lack of physical strength. It was not. Their greatest problem was a lack of spiritual insight.

As a result, they were blinded with fear by a giant. David would remind them of their living God.

Saul hears of David's brave words and sends for him. Skip to verses 32-33,

***David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth."***

Again – Saul looked at David and compared him to Goliath. David was looking at Goliath and comparing him to God.<sup>i</sup>

And God is bigger than Goliath!

Paul said,

***I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)***

That means even the weakest saint among us can do all things through Christ . . . there is nothing we cannot do if it is the will of God.<sup>ii</sup>

Cowardly Saul finally agrees to let David fight, but makes him try on his own armor first. Look at verse 38.

***Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor.***

This is as if to say to David, "Listen, Goliath has a helmet, so you need one too; he has a sword, so you need one too."

It is interesting that David actually puts on the armor before taking it off. Notice verse 39.

***David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." And David took them off.***

I agree with C. H. Mackintosh, who wrote more than a hundred years ago, that David's greatest test might not have been his actual encounter with Goliath, but the temptation to wear Saul's armor.<sup>iii</sup>

Had he – and he would have tried to use Saul's sword – he would never have swung his sling shot, nor could he have, wearing Saul's armor. It would have been a disaster if David had decided to fight like Saul, instead of who he was – a shepherd.

This is the test of faith – offering to God whatever we are and only that – and having Him infuse what little we have with everything He is. God is not calling you to do what someone else can do.

J. Vernon McGee used to say, "If God has called you to use a slingshot, don't try to use a sword."

God does not fight giants with giants. His weapons are people of faith – not many mighty, not many noble born, not many well connected.

"Lord, here's all I can do, as I risk everything for You – here's a slingshot and some river stones."

And God said, "That's more than enough!"

David eventually works his way into the ravine and picks up five smooth stones. Why did he pick up five stones? Because Goliath has relatives in the Philistine army. I Chronicles 20 informs us that there were perhaps as many as four other giants. Just in case, David was ready for them too.

Goliath is incensed at the sight of David. He rants and raves at David. Note verse 44.

*. . . "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field."*

Continue to verses 45-47.

*Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's . . ."*

Wow! What a sermon on the power and sovereignty of God this is! This is what provided inner strength and courage in David!

The Israelites looked at Goliath and said, "He's way too big to beat!"

David looked at Goliath and said, "He's way too big to miss!"

Let me read of this encounter from the pen of Phillip Keller, who wrote,

*With a rush, like a leopard leaping to the attack, David launched himself toward Goliath. The sling whistled as he whirled it over his head. Then the leather strip was released and the stone [which could travel more than 100 miles an hour] struck! The next instant the giant thundered face forward onto the valley floor, blood spurting from the skull shattered by the rock. It was as if he had been struck by a bullet. David rushed up to the fallen giant as Goliath's armor-bearer fled in panic. Picking up the giant's massive sword, he severed his head and held it up in triumph. The battle was over! The daring deed was done!<sup>iv</sup>*

Faith always honors God! God always honors faith!

There was no military maneuvering; no skill of generals; no powerful army attack – no, a stone from the brook, slung by a shepherd, filled with faith gained the victory.

Is that impossible? With man, yes, but with God, all things are possible.

## Conclusion

Today, our church is in the ravine, facing an impossible challenge. Unless there is heart change and life change throughout this body, and a stirring of sacrifice and risk, and faith in the leadership and providence of God, we will not come close.

We must think differently. As one man said to one of our staff members the other day, he had always thought of his 401k as his, and now, he has realized that it belongs to God.

For us to reach our goal, we will need a change of mind and heart. Our raises over the next three years would not be occasions for us to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving. This would be a revolutionary change of mind for the average believer. That commitment alone, based on the number of households in this church, would raise 15 million dollars – just by every household dedicating their raises to God. Who knows what kind of raises God will give those who commit in this way.

I have heard even more testimonies of life change in the past weeks.

One man said, “My life has been changed by this project and the teaching we have heard.”

A successful business man and his wife, who have been coming for about a year, said, “This campaign helped us understand money in an entirely new way . . . our lives have been changed.”

I have heard from the parents of a young lady with physical challenges. She went home this past Sunday and would not sleep until she had filled out her pledge card with her parents. She has committed to giving 5 dollars a month this year; 6 dollars a month next year, and – a real step of faith for her – 7 dollars a month the next year. We have no idea how great a sacrifice this is for her. But to her, the cause is worth it.

An elderly couple contacted me with news of unexpected retirement funds. They are giving it all to this challenge!

There is a retired pastor, who is in the GreenHouse membership class, who told me how excited he is about the way we are handling this campaign – with the focus on people and ministry and the expansive potential of new buildings. Interestingly, the last campaign he was involved in at his church before retiring was for 15 million dollars. I do not know if that is why he retired, but he did say they reached their goal. He also said that he and his wife were so glad they came to this church in time to not miss being a part of this campaign.

Some people are willing to give their lives to go over Niagara falls in a barrel. Oh that we would be people of God, willing to sacrifice who we are and what we have to the true Owner, our Master, and Sovereign Lord.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/30/2005 by Stephen Davey.

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<sup>i</sup> C. H. Mackintosh, Miscellaneous Writings: Volume 6 (Loizeaux Brothers, 1898), p. 52.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>iv</sup> Phillip Keller, David: The Time of Saul's Tyranny (Word Books, 1985), p. 92.