

I don't know if he's around as much now as he was when I was a kid. I'm referring to the Jolly Green Giant which is the mascot for Green Giant – a brand of frozen and canned vegetables owned now by General Mills. You remember: “In the valley of the – ho-ho-ho – Green Giant,” don't you? I learned just this week that “the valley” in that song refers to the Minnesota River valley around Le Sueur, Minnesota – the original home of the Green Giant Company. I also learned that this handsome 55 foot statue of the Jolly Green Giant was erected in 1979 in a town called Blue Earth, Minnesota – at one end of the Minnesota River valley - and it receives 10,000 visitors every year. Maybe you should include visiting the Jolly Green Giant in your summer travel plans. The Green Giant is friendly, helpful, non-threatening and, well, just downright... jolly!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if all the giants in your life and mine were jolly and green? Unfortunately, most of them more closely resemble a giant described in the Bible by the name of Goliath rather than our happy green friend. Now, obviously, I'm not thinking of literal giants today. There are all kinds of giants in life, and the most formidable ones are spiritual giants. A spiritual giant is any outer life circumstance or inner heart condition that robs you of fullness of life in Jesus Christ. Christians face giants all the time. Just because you're a follower of Jesus today doesn't mean you will escape dealing with spiritual giants along life's journey. In fact, you might encounter more giants simply because you are trying to follow Jesus and go God's way.

Last week we started a message series on one of the great characters in the Bible: David. He's described as a man after God's own heart. But David also revealed himself as a man who could be against God's heart as well. Why learn about David? There are all sorts of insights into God and how to have a relationship with God by knowing the stories about David. Life lessons. Today we're looking at maybe David's finest moment – his encounter with a literal giant, Goliath, when David was little more than a teenager, when he was still tending his father's sheep, and long before he became the king of Israel. There are giants and then there are giants! Goliath was a terrifying sight, but you will face giants in your life that may be just as scary. A giant looks intimidating and invulnerable – unable to be defeated or overcome. But David's life illustrates – and the entire Bible proclaims – that you have an invisible weapon at your disposal called faith. First of all, however, think with me about...

THE INVULNERABLE GIANTS OF LIFE.

Talk about scary! Just the sight of Goliath intimidated the entire army of Israel. Our text tells us that he was some 9'9" in height. Scholars tell us that he was probably one of the last remaining members of a race of giants – genetic freaks – called the Anakim who lived in the land of Canaan. He was decked out in about 175-200 pounds of what we would call a coat of mail from his shoulders down to

his knees. In addition, he had a big bronze helmet to protect his head and bronze leggings to protect his shins and he carried a bronze spear on his back. The head of the spear alone weighed 20-25 pounds. Goliath was frightening enough just to look at, but what made it worse is that he could talk, too! And the way that he talked was as intimidating as the way that he looked. He fought for a group of people known as the Philistines who were bitter enemies of the Israelites and rivals for control of the Promised Land.

I want you to try and imagine this scene. The Philistine and Israelite armies faced each other in the Valley of Elah – a mile wide canyon. At the bottom of the canyon was a stream – probably where David got the stones for his sling – and on one side of the stream was a great slope of half a mile in width where the Philistines were encamped and on the other side of the stream was another great slope a half a mile in width where the Israelites were encamped. One day, Goliath comes out and makes an interesting proposal not uncommon in that day and age. Instead of these two armies fighting it out in hand to hand combat, each army would put forth a champion to fight to the death. If the Philistine champion won, the entire Israelite army would surrender. If the Israelite champion won, then the entire Philistine army would surrender. Guess who was the champion for the Philistines? So how long did this go on for? “For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.” (1 Sam. 17:16 NIV) Clearly, this was an offer the Israelites could refuse, but it evidently created a kind of stalemate. Goliath looked invulnerable and all King Saul, his leaders and the Israelite army could think to do was quake with fear.

Giants are good at scaring you to death. They seem invulnerable. We need to name some of those giants today. Some of you are facing a giant called Broken Relationships today. That giant might be right in your own home. Others might be looking at a giant called Financial Insecurity. Maybe your job is being threatened or there just always seems to be more month than money. The brother of Financial Insecurity is another giant named Debt. Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you will never face a giant named Addiction. You've become a slave to alcohol, to drugs, to pornography, or to gambling. Others of us today face a really scary giant by the name of Poor Health. You have chronic illness or you might even have been diagnosed with a terminal disease. That reveals yet another giant lurking around by the name of Fear – fear of death, but also fear of the future, fear of failure, fear of commitment. The loss of a loved one will introduce you to the giant named Death/Grief. If you've suffered a great loss or a great betrayal in life you might have met the giant named Resentment. If you've ever been involved in certain kinds of sinful activity, you might be looking in the face of a giant named Shame. How about the giant named Failure? Ever met him? How about the giant named Loneliness? Ever seen his face? How about the giant named Disappointment? Do you recognize him?

What name would you give the giant in your life today? What great Goliath – some outer life circumstance or some inner heart condition – stands before you

this morning speaking words of contempt, ridicule and discouragement into your heart just like Goliath did to the army of Israel? Scorning you. Mocking you. Filling you with anxiety. That giant says things like, “God doesn’t love you. God can’t forgive your sin. You’re a loser. You’re a failure. You’re not worth anything. God might help some people, but He isn’t going to help someone like you!” Those giants speak words of doom and gloom into your heart and mind day after day and like the Israelites you’re dismayed, discouraged and terrified.

When I read this story about David and Goliath, I’m reminded that all these giants gain strength from other voices that aid their efforts to defeat us. For instance there’s the voice of ridicule. Anytime you challenge a giant in your life, you’re going to face ridicule – either from yourself or someone else. In our story, Eliab is the voice of ridicule. He was David’s oldest brother. He got irritated by David’s “can do” attitude. Maybe he resented David because the Lord had anointed the youngest son rather than the oldest son in Jesse’s family to be the next king of Israel. Eliab ridicules David and tells him to get lost, “Who do you think you are, David? Go back home and watch some sheep, will ya?”

Then, there’s the voice of failure. When you challenge a giant, someone’s going to tell you that you can’t do it. Saul, the king, is the voice of failure in our story. Saul should have been the one to accept Goliath’s challenge. After all, the Bible says he was the biggest man physically in all of Israel at this particular time. But, more importantly, he was also the leader and he should have acted like a leader. He should have put his trust in God and gone out to face Goliath. But that was Saul’s problem. He could never really trust God for much of anything. That’s why he failed and why God eventually removed him as king. Saul tries his best to talk David out of taking on Goliath, but when he sees that David is absolutely determined to take on Goliath, Saul shrugs and says, “Well, if you’re going to commit suicide, at least, wear my armor, OK?” What an encouragement!

Every time you face a giant in life, you’re going to hear voices of doom and gloom. Some will come from other people; others will come from within your own heart and mind. Be ready for those voices. Expect them. Anticipate them. Don’t be surprised when they start to speak into your life. As you learn to dismiss those voices, God is going to give you victory over your giants. I was blessed to read the story of a man by the name of Annis Shorrosh, a Palestinian Arab, who was forced to flee his native city of Nazareth for the country of Jordan in 1948. His father and cousin were killed in a battle with Israeli forces. As a 15 year old, he says, “I hated the British because they exploited us and then abandoned us. I hated the Jordanians and the Syrians for not coming to help us. I hated the Jews most of all for what they done to my family. I thought if I could get a gun and get back across the border, I would kill as many Jews as I could before they killed me. That way my life would have some meaning.” After two years of deep despair and a failed suicide attempt, Annis surrendered his life to Jesus Christ and he went on to become a full time evangelist. On one trip back to Nazareth he was chatting with the Israeli tour guide on the bus. The Israeli happened to

mention that he'd been a captain in the tank force that took Nazareth. Annis Shorosh took a deep breath, before declaring, "I am from Nazareth. My father was killed in the battle. My family lost everything and had to flee. By all the traditions of my people, I should avenge my father's death. But because Jesus of Nazareth forgave my sins, I can forgive you. Let me tell you how He changed my life." What was the name of Annis Shorosh's giant? Resentment. Hatred. Unforgiveness. It seemed invulnerable. I'm sure he heard voices that strengthened the power of the giant he faced. "Annis, you have a right to your resentment. It's OK to hate." Only when he threw himself upon the grace of God did he discover in Jesus the power to defeat that awesome giant in his life. What he discovered is what we need to talk more about just now...

THE INVISIBLE WEAPON OF FAITH.

If you're tempted to dismiss the historicity of this story and write it off as some fable, you'd be mistaken. Did you know slings are incredibly accurate, powerful and deadly? Palestinian shepherd boys have learned how to send a stone whistling just past and in front of a stray goat's nose hazing him back to the flock. Sling-masters can put a stone more than an inch into the trunk of a tree from sixty yards away. Sure, Goliath could probably throw his spear a long way, but slings are lethal from a distance of well over 100 yards. But as impressive as a sling can be as a weapon, it wasn't David's true weapon when he took on Goliath. No, the true weapon was faith in a powerful, gracious God who was determined to bring glory to His Name. Goliath seemed invulnerable, but he fell before this mighty weapon the Bible calls faith.

First of all, the weapon of invisible faith gets demonstrated when you realize that it's not about self-reliance but God-reliance. David was shocked and stunned by what he observed. He wasn't a soldier. He was probably still too young to have been in the army of Israel. He was only there because Jesse, his father, wanted David to deliver some care packages to his brothers. David couldn't believe that no one in the entire army of Israel would take up Goliath's challenge. The issue was pretty clear and simple for David. Goliath had committed the unforgiveable sin. By challenging God's army, Goliath had defied God Himself! This was a matter of God's honor and glory. Wasn't anyone going to stand up for God? How could David be so confident? This was more than youthful optimism. This was biblical faith fully demonstrated and operational. Over in the New Testament it says, "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." (Phil 4:13 NLT) It's not courage based on anything that comes from you; it's courage from the Lord and courage in the Lord. Not self-reliance, but God-reliance.

Secondly, this invisible weapon of faith gets demonstrated when you remember past victories in the Lord which encourage present success. Somewhere along the way David had learned that God could be trusted. No doubt he had heard and taken in what God had said through Moses to the Jewish people centuries earlier, "When you go out to fight your enemies and you face horses and

chariots and an army greater than your own, do not be afraid. The LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, is with you!... “For the LORD your God is going with you! He will fight for you against your enemies, and he will give you victory!” (Deut 20:1, 4 NLT) That’s just one more reason to soak up the Bible. When you face your own giants in life – and you will – reading and absorbing God’s Word will remind you of how God’s people have faced and overcome all sorts of giants in their own walk with God. That strengthens your faith. If God did it then, He can still do it now.

But David had also experienced God’s power at a personal level in his life. He tells Saul how God had enabled him to kill wild predators like lions and bears when they came after the sheep he was protecting. He says to Saul, “The LORD who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!...” (1 Sam 17:37 NLT) When you remember past personal victories in the Lord, it will encourage present personal success. When you face some new giant, you can remind yourself of the giants God has already defeated in your life. That strengthens your faith. God’s faithfulness to you in the past gives you every reason to live life today and tomorrow with joy and courage. Charles Spurgeon, a godly pastor from the 1800s, put it like this: “Some saints have very short memories.... We write our benefits in dust and our injuries in marble, and it is equally true that we generally inscribe our afflictions upon brass, while the records of the deliverances of God are written in water. It ought not to be so.” In other words, you can forget what you ought to remember and you can remember what you ought to forget. You remember your defeats and forget your victories.

This invisible weapon of faith gets demonstrated; thirdly, whenever you realize that the battle is the Lord’s not yours. Can you picture that scene in the Valley of Elah in your imagination? A little stream separating, on one side, a huge 400-500 pound man dressed in heavy armor holding a great spear in one very large hand and, on the other side, a mere shepherd boy clothed in a simple tunic holding a sling and a bag with five small, smooth stones. There they faced each other. Goliath was insulted and enraged. Israel had sent out this... puny, little kid? He fussed, fumed and cursed everyone and everything. Then it was David’s turn. “... ‘You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the LORD will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone assembled here will know that the LORD rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the LORD’s battle, and he will give you to us!’” (1 Sam 17:45-47 NLT) I wonder if you could adapt David’s marvelous speech when you’re facing your own giants. Could you speak David’s words to your giant? Could you tell your giant, “This is the Lord’s battle”? What a wonderful philosophy of life! Is it yours?

As I close today, I think it's important to say something else about faith and the giants in your life. I don't want to promote misunderstanding. You might have listened to today's message and think "Oh, if I just exercise faith and pray a lot, God will give me instantaneous victory over every giant in my life just like He did for David." I've discovered in my own life and by observing the lives of others that God doesn't always remove every giant the moment we ask Him to do so. Some giants stick around for awhile. Having faith doesn't always immediately change those troublesome outer circumstances in your life or even the difficult inner condition of your own heart. But hang in there, keep fighting and keep exercising faith. Faith, in the hands of God, may not always change things immediately, but it will change you over time. God used David's faith to transform him from a mere shepherd into a mighty warrior for his God. And as you continue to exercise faith, God will indeed work a tremendous victory in you for His glory.

Pastor and author, John Ortberg, tells a story about what happened to him some years ago. He and two friends were walking along Newport Beach in Southern California. They walked past a bar where a fight had been going on inside. The fight spilled out into the street, just like in an old western. Several guys were beating up on another guy, and he was bleeding from the forehead. John and his friends knew they had to do something, so they went over to break up the fight. Their efforts didn't do much good. Then, all of a sudden, the guys who had been beating up on the one guy looked at John and his two friends with fear in their eyes. They stopped and started to slink away. John didn't know why until he turned and looked behind him. Out of the bar had come the biggest man John had ever seen. He was something like six feet, seven inches, maybe 300 pounds, maybe 2 percent body fat. Just *huge*. John called him "Bubba" (not to his face, but afterwards, when he and his friends talked about him).

Bubba didn't say a word. He just stood there and flexed. You could tell he was hoping those guys would try and have a go at him. All of a sudden John's attitude was transformed, and he said to those guys, "You better not let us catch you coming around here again!" John was a different person because he had great, big Bubba. He was ready to confront with resolve and firmness. He was released from anxiety and fear. He was filled with boldness and confidence. He was ready to help somebody that needed helping. He was ready to serve where serving was required. Why? Because he had great, big Bubba backing him up.

How big is your God? Again and again we're reminded that One who is far greater than Bubba has come, and you don't have to wonder whether or not He'll show up. He's always there. You don't have to be afraid. You don't have to live your life in hiding. You don't have to listen to the voices of ridicule or failure. You have a great, big God, and He's called you to do something. He's called you to stand up to and fight the giants in your life, so get on with it!