MONDAY, 4/29

Read 1 Samuel 17:1-7.

As God’s people entered the Promised Land, they faced many enemies. The most notable was the Philistines. They were known as the “Sea Peoples” because they occupied the coastline of Israel and were always looking to expand their territory inland, where the Israelites lived.

The Philistines would prove to be a formidable opponent for years to come. King Saul faced them several times, including here in chapter 17. Spoiler alert: later in 1 Samuel, King Saul will meet his end at the hands of the Philistines.

In verse 4, we are introduced to the Philistine champion Goliath. Champions were talented warriors used at times in individual battles against the champion of an opposing nation. If the leaders agreed, the outcome of the one-on-one battle would determine the outcome of the battle between the nations. This would prevent major loss of life for the armies.

We’re told that Goliath was big--like really big--over nine feet tall. His armor alone was heavier than the weight of some soldiers.

Some of the accounts of the land before God’s people entered it included stories of gigantic people in the land. There are even sources outside the Bible that share the same report. Perhaps Goliath came from that line.

Wherever he came from, he was a force to be reckoned with and represented another obstacle in the way of God’s people. First, it was the Red Sea; then, a flooded Jordan River. The question that looms this early in the chapter is this: will God’s people trust Him in the face of this obstacle, or will they fall prey to fear again?

While we might not have ever faced a literal giant in battle, we know what it is like to face down giants in our lives. We know what it is like to be challenged by seemingly insurmountable grief. We know what it is to stare down circumstances we can’t see beyond. We’ve been stuck with no way out. We’ve faced swelling debts and broken relationships that felt too big to overcome.

We’ve all faced giants in some sense of the word. Some of you are facing giants today. What is the giant in your life? I wonder if you trust that God is able to deliver victory over your giant.

Praying Together:

“Father, we recognize the anxiety in the pit in our stomach when we think of the giants we face in life. Remind us that You are bigger. We see in the stories of scripture and in our own story how You have overcome obstacles that seemed unmovable. Give us faith to trust You this time as well. Amen.”

TUESDAY, 4/30

Read 1 Samuel 17:8-16.

Try to imagine what it’s like to wake up and step out of your tent only to see an enemy army camped across the valley. You know the day might include a bloody battle. You know your enemies have a reputation as adept warriors. You’ve been in your share of fights, but this time you’re nervous.

The stillness of the morning is broken when a man steps out from the enemy camp and walks into the valley. He challenges someone to come and fight him with the outcome determining the results of war. You try to finish your breakfast, but the sounds of his insults echo throughout the camp. He screams insults just like he had done the day before and the day before that. You look around, and every fighter has that same scared look on his face. When no one steps up, he begins to taunt your army, your king, and even your God. Everyone in Saul’s army remains silent.

I can only imagine how demoralizing that must have been for God’s people--day after day, hearing Goliath challenge the army, yet no one daring step up. This went on for 40 days and nights. Morale must have been at an all-time low.

As the saying goes, “It’s all fair in love and war.” Any nation that had a champion like Goliath would use him to their advantage. Champion warfare would be their first choice, and if the other side didn’t agree to that, then he would play mind games with the opposing army by taunting them with his imposing size. It makes sense. When the armies finally chose to line up against each other, the Philistines would certainly have the upper hand.

As the army is trembling in the trenches, we see David enter the scene. He comes to the army encampment, not as a warrior but as a delivery boy. Jesse, David’s father, sent him to the frontlines in order to bring reports back regarding David’s three older brothers who served in Saul’s army. Verse 15 tells us that David didn’t belong on the frontlines of a battle, but in a field tending sheep.

By now, you are probably familiar with how the story ends, but to understand the significance of this story, we need to grasp the significance of verse 15. David was a shepherd, not a warrior. He would become a warrior, but only because of his faith in God. His trust in God gave him the courage and capacity to stand before and slay a giant.

We can struggle to believe that the same can be true for us if we trust God wholeheartedly. Let’s face it: it is easier to stay in the camp even while being morally beaten down than it is to step onto the battlefield. When we place our faith in God, He promises to supply grace and strength for whatever we are facing. God will give wisdom and courage. David didn’t have much to bring to the battle, but he had faith. That would be enough.

Praying Together:

“Lord, we know what it’s like to be beaten down by our fears, much like the Israelites in the camp. Sometimes that is the easiest place to be. As we face our own giants, let us look to You for courage and strength. You are greater than anything we face. Amen.”

WEDNESDAY, 5/1

Read 1 Samuel 17:17-24.

One day, David made a trip to visit his brothers during the campaign against the Philistines. His father Jesse had sent him to provide food for his three brothers who served in Saul’s army. It was common for family back home to make provisions for the men who were in battle.

David reached the army camp as the two armies came into position. In what had become a common occurrence in the past 40 days, Goliath steps out from the Philistine camp to cast his usual challenge and insults. For the first time in his trips to visit his brothers, young David hears Goliath’s taunts.

Verse 24 tells us that at the sight of Goliath, the army “fled in great fear”. Even after all this time, still the army couldn’t stand to look at him without being overcome by fear.

This is interesting given the unique beliefs the people had regarding champion combat. By that, I mean combat where a representative from each army fights to determine the outcome of the battle, the proposition which Goliath is proposing. The belief was that it was the gods of the warriors that determined the result of the fight more than even the strength of the warriors themselves. In a sense, it would be the gods of the Philistines versus Israel’s God. Clearly, the people have forgotten that. Goliath’s size had thrown them into a fearful frenzy, and they had lost sight of the One to whom they should be looking.

Some giants in our lives command that kind of fear over us. Fear is a strong emotion. It can take hold of our minds and paralyze us, rendering us inactive and ineffective. Fear can have that effect on us if we let it.

At this point in the story, Israel had fallen into a terrible pattern that only reinforced a negative outlook. They needed someone to see this situation with fresh eyes and an eager, faith-filled heart. They would get that in a young shepherd boy.

I wonder if you have ever been trapped in a negative pattern of thinking that has taken your eyes off the Lord. I wonder what it looks like to reset our focus, choosing to look to the Lord rather than the source of our fears.

Praying Together:

“Father, You know my heart and how feeble my faith has been at times. I can fall prey to fear just like the Israelites here. You are greater than whatever enemy or giant I face. Help me to overcome. Break negative patterns of thinking and set my mind and heart upon You. Amen.“

THURSDAY, 5/2

Read 1 Samuel 17: 25-30.

As king, Saul was a wealthy man. Kings were largely free to use resources at their disposal any way they liked. Over 40 days into a standoff that had turned into a standstill, Saul had offered up wealth and acclaim to anyone who had the courage to stand against Goliath.

When David inquires about the reward for the one who conquered Goliath, he is told to expect great wealth, Saul’s daughter in marriage, and no taxes for life. Saul is motivated to get past this giant.

This brings up an interesting point. The army clearly needed a champion to step up and onto the battlefield. The obvious choice would be a warrior who was larger than their ordinary soldier. Who in Israel fits this description? Saul did.

When we are introduced to Saul, we are told that he stood head and shoulders above the others; in fact, when the people cried out to God for a king, they asked for a king to “go before us and fight our battles”. They asked for a king to do the very thing they needed from Saul in this moment. As king, he wore the best armor and commanded respect. Who better to stand on the battlefield against Goliath than Saul? Apparently, Saul wasn’t interested. He would rather fork over a large bounty than summon the faith and courage to fight.

David’s inquiry into the reward to the victor shows us a spirit of defiance against their enemy. He shows the kind of faith that the army desperately needed. Who is this Philistine that he should “defy the armies of the living God?” David asked. David has not forgotten that they fight with the living God. David knew that God fights with and for His people.

Of course, David’s faith is mistaken as arrogance by his brother and is seen as an insult. I believe the brother’s heightened sensitivity is due to his own lack of courage. It is a humbling thing to have your passivity exposed by someone who is courageous. Perhaps, his brother would have been more comfortable with David’s displaying the same kind of fear everyone else in the camp felt.

This brings up a good point regarding the company we keep. We are often a reflection of the people with whom we surround ourselves. We see that with Israel’s army. When Saul became afraid, so did his army. It took an outsider to see something different. David came in with the faith that the army had lost along the way.

Part of being the church Jesus wants us to be is contributing to a culture that is bold in faith. It is adding to a group who says ‘yes’ in obedience to Jesus because we trust Him. It is praying bold prayers backed up with bold actions rather than seeking out comfort. This is the kind of church we want to be. We need to pursue this vision together, each doing our part to shape the community Jesus is calling us to be.

Praying together:

“Jesus, we are Your church. Fill us with Your Spirit and courage. We seek You and to be the church that says ‘yes’ to whatever You ask of us. We want to be bold in our trust in You. Amen.”

FRIDAY, 5/3

Read 1 Samuel 17:31-40.

King Saul gets wind of someone in the camp inquiring about the reward posted to defeat Goliath. This is probably the first positive news the king has received in 40 days. I can imagine he was a little disappointed when young David showed up.

David tells the king, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine. Your servant will go and fight him.” Saul was less than thrilled by David’s offer. Apparently, David’s heart was bigger than his biceps. Saul told him, “You are not able to go out against the Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” This reminds me of the 1 Samuel 16:7 when the Lord told Samuel that people look at outward appearances, “but the Lord looks at the heart.” All Saul can see is a scrawny kid who is no match for a gigantic warrior. God, however, saw something different in David. We begin to see here some of the potential that God recognizes in David.

David tells Saul about the kills for which he has been responsible. David has killed lions, tigers, and bears, oh my! (Well, at least he has killed lions and bears.) Excavations have uncovered the remains of lions and bears dating back to the days before Jesus. David has faced fearsome enemies before and prevailed. David believes that the same God who had protected him when he carried out his duties as a shepherd will protect him in a fight against Goliath.

Saul agrees and blesses David, saying, “Go, and the Lord be with you.” Personally, I would love to know the tone Saul used when he said that. Was it a confident blessing, or was an ominous prediction of his doomed fate?

Saul offers David his armor, the best Israel can produce. It doesn’t fit David and feels unnatural for him. David concludes that he will be better without it. Now it’s interesting to consider why Saul offered David his armor. Saul might have offered his armor to help protect David in the fight. He also might have given David the armor so that the Israelite army would see the king’s armor and believe that it was Saul. We cannot know for sure. Whatever the motivation was, David forgoes the armor and sets off to battle the giant.

Again, this portion of chapter 17 puts the spotlight on David’s faith. He displays confidence while the rest of the army trembles. He looks to God when the rest can’t see past Goliath’s size. David stands up on behalf of the army of the living God when the rest cower in fear. When the soldiers saw no way to win, David believed he couldn’t lose. That is faith.

Praying together:

“Almighty God, You call us to be a people of faith. You have set us apart and revealed Yourself to us so that we can know You and trust You. Give us the faith that we can stand against any challenge or threat to us. We look to You and know that when we seek after you, we cannot fail. Amen.”

SATURDAY, 5/4

Read 1 Samuel 17:41-49

David believes he can fight the giant Philistine Goliath with a few smooth stones and a slingshot. Mind you, he has already done his research. He has talked to the ones preparing to fight with Saul’s army. He has killed bears and lions as they attacked the sheep he was watching. In his mind and heart, he was ready.

David steps away from Saul’s soldiers and into the open space to face this giant. He was but a boy, a handsome one at that. The giant takes those details in consideration when he said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks? Come here and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals.”

David steps closer to the giant and delivers a grand threat in the name of God. I imagine young David spoke with a steady cadence and authoritative tone. He was speaking for God in that moment, saying things like, “This is the day that the Lord will deliver you into my hands.” Then he turns and addresses Saul’s army, declaring, “All of those gathered here will know that it is not by a sword or spear that God saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give all into our hands.” These are some tough words to say for such a youngster. The giant will find it hard to believe what David is saying is truth--and will underestimate him to his peril.

In one sling of a stone, David hits the nine-foot Goliath square in the forehead. And with a simple stone, Goliath falls dead before both armies. David was clear when he told the giant and the other Philistines that the Lord was the one who would deliver them to Israel. This was God’s win.

There is a message here that cannot be ignored. The giant represents anything we face that seems so much bigger than we are--something that grips us with fear, sadness, anger, or betrayal. God is big enough to overcome the tallest giant, to calm our deepest fear, to fight alongside us in our battle against injustice, and to heal a broken heart and a soul.

Praying Together:

“Lord, when we suffer, we know You walk with us. When the darkness settles into our world and we cannot see our way through, light our way. Share with us Your presence in new ways so that when we lose our way, we can always find it again. Thank You for Your presence in all things. Amen.”

SUNDAY, 5/5

Read 1 Samuel 17:50-58.

With a stone slung from one chosen by God to be the next king of Israel, the giant falls. David then takes a sword and chops off the giant’s head. He will be forever known as the one who slew the big bad giant, the Philistinians’ champion, with a young shepherd’s weapon. The Philistine army fled with the armies of Israel and Judah advancing after them. There are war stories about how the Israelites left a trail of bodies behind them. As the Israelites return home victorious, they plunder the enemy camp, taking supplies and weapons.

David carries the giant’s head into Jerusalem and stores the plunder for a later date. Everyone is talking about David and his incredible achievement. The irony is rich when you compare a young shepherd boy and his toy with the huge Philistinian hero wearing protective armor and carrying a javelin and sword known to strike fear into the hearts of men. This giant is what urban legends are made of, much like Big Foot, fire-breathing dragons, and the Loch Ness monster. You would have to see it to believe it possible!

Meanwhile, King Saul had witnessed David’s challenge of Goliath, while the rest of Saul’s experienced and well-trained army stayed put, quaking in fear. The king heard David speak to the giant before he killed him, declaring that all that will be done is done in the name of the Lord. The king listened closely and wondered if David would be an ally or a threat to all Saul has done and will do.

The king sends someone to look into this boy. Once found, David is brought before King Saul, with the head of the dead giant with him. When the king asks him who he was, David replied, “Son of your servant, Jesse in Bethlehem”. The end of the chapter leaves us with a mystery: what will the king do with David, the giant conqueror?

Praying Together:

“Lord, keep us humble. We know how powerful we can become when we are following Your will. At the same time, be patient with us. We have a lot to learn about how that power must be used for Your purposes. Thank You for Your presence in all things. Amen.”