

**Sermon Text 1 Samuel 17:42–49**

**42** When the Philistine looked and saw David, he was contemptuous of him; for he was only a youth, and reddish, with a handsome appearance.

**43** So the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

**44** The Philistine also said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the wild animals.”

**45** But David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a saber, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of armies, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

**46** This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I will strike you and remove your head from you. Then I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,

**47** and that this entire assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord’s, and He will hand you over to us!”

**48** Then it happened, when the Philistine came closer to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.

**49** And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone penetrated his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground.

**Facing Giants** **Daniel Cote**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Congregational Church 8/18/24**

**Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 17:26; 31–41**

**Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 17:42–49**

How many of you know who Kim Phuc is? Please raise your hand. I see a hand or two. I would venture a guess that most of you actually do know who Kim Phuc is. You have probably seen her photo a hundred times if you are over 40. How many of you remember the iconic Vietnam War Pulitzer Prize-winning photo of children fleeing a napalm attack with a naked little girl screaming in pain and agony at the center of the group? Raise your hand if you remember that photo. The little girl in the center of that photo was Kim Phuc. You can read her story in the April 20, 2018, issue of Christianity Today, but I will share it with you today. Kim says about that photo:

I am nine years old, running along a puddled roadway in front of an expressionless soldier, arms outstretched, naked, shrieking in pain and fear, the dark contour of a napalm cloud billowing in the distance.

Kim writes:

My own people, the South Vietnamese, had been bombing trade routes used by the Viet Cong rebels. I had not been targeted, of course. I had simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Those bombs have brought me immeasurable pain. Even now, some 40 years later, I am still receiving treatment for burns that cover my arms, back, and neck. The emotional and spiritual pain was even harder to endure. And yet, looking back at the past five decades, I realize that those same bombs that brought so much suffering also brought great healing. Those bombs led me to Christ.

Kim grew up in the Cao Dai religion with many gods and, as with other Eastern religions, Cao Dai affirms the mantra, You are God, and God is you. She says, “We were equal opportunity worshippers, giving every god a shot.” After the event captured in that famous photo taken on

June 8, 1972, in the village of Trang Bang, South Vietnam, Kim was a mountain of rage. She writes,

For years, I prayed to the gods of Cao Dai for healing and peace. But as one prayer after another went unanswered, it became clear that either they were nonexistent or they did not care to lend a hand. And so I continued to bear the crippling weight of anger, bitterness, and resentment toward those who caused my suffering—the searing fire that penetrated my body; the ensuing burn baths; the dry and itchy skin; the inability to sweat, which turned my flesh into an oven in Vietnam’s sweltering heat. I craved relief that never would come. And yet, despite every last external circumstance that threatened to overtake me—mind, body, and soul—the most agonizing pain I suffered during that season of life dwelled in my heart.

Kim relates that she was toxic, and everyone around her knew it. She had no friends, and when she did interact with people, she caused them pain. “Wise people stayed away from me,” she says.

Years after the photo was taken in 1982, at the age of 29, Kim was facing the giants of physical and mental pain, scars covering her body, and open wounds of physical trauma. Who could help her defeat these giants? Let’s turn to our Scriptures, and we will close with the remainder of Kim’s story.

### **David Facing a Giant**

Our Scripture Reading and Sermon Text recounts the story of David as he faced Goliath. Earlier in the Book of 1 Samuel 17, we learn the nature of the challenge that David faced in his battle with Goliath. Goliath was a man who stood about 9 feet tall. He wore armor weighing about 150 pounds, and he carried a spear with a spearhead that weighed about 18 pounds, a little more than a men’s Olympic shotput. In addition, Goliath had a bronze saber slung between his shoulders, and a shield bearer walked in front of him, carrying his shield.

Moreover, it appears he was skilled in battle because he had been a warrior since his youth. From the reaction of Saul, the King of Israel at the time, it is obvious that the people of Israel were terrified of Goliath. Goliath was a Philistine, and every day, he would come out on the field between where the armies of the Philistines and the Israelites were encamped. Goliath persisted for 40 days, taunting the Israelites to send out a champion to fight with him in a winner-take-all duel. No champion from Israel was willing to go out on the field to fight Goliath, except David, a teenage shepherd boy from Bethlehem.

Bible critics scoff at the true story of David and Goliath. They see Goliath as a mythical giant character, and the idea that he could be killed by a boy with a sling as fanciful. This is an amazing inspirational Bible story, but there is nothing in it that is implausible. Hypertrophy of the pituitary gland often results in people attaining great height. Robert Pershing Wadlow lived in the early 1900s and was 8 feet 11 inches tall. The current tallest man is a Turkish farmer who is 8 feet 3 inches tall. He stopped growing only because of the treatment he received at the University of Virginia Medical Center. Modern shot putters routinely throw over 60 feet. Furthermore, numerous ancient authors affirm the range and accuracy of the sling as a weapon, indicating that human targets could be hit at 200 yards, and at closer range, much smaller targets. The ancient Roman historian Livy indicates that skilled slingers could not only target the head but specific parts of the face.<sup>i</sup> So, nothing in the true story of David and Goliath is unbelievable.

It is likely that David was about 15 when he faced Goliath, a mere shepherd boy who could not take Goliath on in his own strength. David faced a giant and defeated him, and we can learn several important lessons applicable to our Christian life and walk with the Lord.

Almost everyone is familiar with the story of David and Goliath, but there is more there than meets the eye.

You see, we all face giants of different sorts in our lives, and with the help and power of God, we can overcome them. What are the giants in your life? People face many types of giants, and I would venture to guess that almost everyone, if not everyone, faces something that causes fear, anxiety, or worry in their lives. You are not alone. There are the physical giants of sickness, chronic pain, substance and food addictions, and life-threatening illness. There are the emotional giants of depression, anxiety, and mental health issues. Other giants include family conflict, loss of loved ones, discouragement, loss of a job, marital unfaithfulness, bitterness, an unforgiving spirit, loneliness, lust, anger, debt, low self-esteem, and abuse of a physical or verbal nature. Where are we to go, and what are we to do when we face giants that can paralyze us, destroy flourishing in our lives, and rob our peace?

Let's consider our Scripture readings and how David faced and overcame his giant. The reason that David was at the Israeli army camp was to bring provisions for his three older brothers who were serving in the army. When David arrived, the Israeli army was going out in battle formation. The Philistines were in Israel's territory on one side of a mountain valley, and Israel was on the other side.

David overheard Goliath as he came out to challenge Israel, saying in 1 Samuel 17:8-10:

Why do you come out to draw up in battle formation?... Choose a man as your representative and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight 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." <sup>10</sup> Then the Philistine said, "I have defied the ranks of Israel this day! Give me a man, so that we may fight together."

The text tells us that upon hearing this, King Saul and all of Israel were dismayed and very fearful. Goliath had been at this for 40 days, and none of the Israelites, even the king, were willing to step forward to defeat this enemy. When David heard this, he said to the men standing nearby, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and rids Israel of the disgrace? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he has *dared to* defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26)

### **David Loved God and His People**

Righteous anger was rising in David. The people of Israel were God's chosen people, and as their leader, King Saul should have remembered the promise of God in Deuteronomy 20:3-4 as Israel prepared for battle with its enemies after the Exodus. There, God says through Moses:

... Hear, Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or be terrified by them, <sup>4</sup> for the Lord your God is the One who is going with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

The Israelites had nothing to fear from the Philistines, but King Saul's faith was weak. David loved God and trusted Him and was eager to take on the trash-talking Goliath, who was making Israel's God look weak. David says in verse 26 of our Scripture reading, "...who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he has *dared to* defy the armies of the living God?" Unlike the Jews, Goliath was uncircumcised, and the Philistines worshipped pagan gods, which meant that he was not one of God's chosen people and, therefore, not in a position to challenge God's Chosen people who were protected by God.

Saul was told of David's comments and sent for him. Immediately, David volunteered to fight Goliath. Saul discouraged him, saying that he couldn't fight Goliath since he was only a youth, while Goliath had been a warrior since his youth. Here, David wants to defend the name of God and defend his people, and Saul tries to stop him. David had faith and believed God

would help him, unlike Saul, the king of Israel. Here is one thing I have learned in my Christian ministry. Whenever I am genuinely doing something for the glory of God, Satan puts roadblocks and stumbling blocks in my way. Satan used Saul in an attempt to put a roadblock in David's way.

### **David Had Faith in God**

But David was a true man of God and would not be easily dissuaded. David explains that he had taken on lions and bears with his bare hands. A shepherd in the wild had to be prepared to protect his sheep, or soon his flock would dwindle. And no doubt, David would have been capable of handling a sling and a knife, the weapons available to a shepherd. But David knows who really saved him from the wild beast; he says in verse 37 of our Scripture reading, "The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, He will save me from the hand of this Philistine." David believed that God had saved him from the lion and the bear, so he had faith that God would protect him from Goliath.

With David's proclamation of his faith in God, Saul could say none other than, "Go, and may the Lord be with you." But Saul wasn't done "helping" David. Saul dressed David in his own armor, putting the armor of a grown man on a teenage boy. Indeed, David would have been killed by Goliath in that outfit. He could barely walk in it. David explained to Saul that he couldn't go to battle in the armor of a man because he had not trained in it.

### **David's Actions Testified to the Power and Glory of God**

David removed the armor, picked up his staff, and chose five smooth stones from a nearby brook. He then departed from King Saul and went to engage Goliath in battle. David had experienced the power of God in privately tending his sheep, and now he would be a conduit of God's power and glory in a very public setting. David had a relationship with God, and God would use him and bless him before all of Israel. David trusted and glorified God in all he did. David had faith in God, and when God gives victory, it is in response to faith. Bible scholar William MacDonald wrote, "Victory in Christian life is not in the absence of conflict but in the presence and protection of God in the midst of conflict."

There was a great testimony of faith that came out of the Olympics reported in the Religion News Service:

Immediately after Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone became the first woman ever to become a two-time Olympic champion in the women's 400-meter hurdles, [she praised God](#) for her record win, saying, "Honestly, praise God. [I] Was not expecting that, but he can do anything, anything is possible in Christ," ... The US evangelical track star won the gold medal in Paris with a time of 50.37 seconds. The [Associated Press](#) reported that she prays before every race with her coach, trainer, and husband. "I credit all that I do to God. He's given me a gift. He's given me a drive to just want to continue to improve myself," she said at a [press conference](#). "I have a platform, and I want to use it to glorify Him, and so whenever I step on the track, it's always the prayer of 'God let me be the vessel in which you're glorified' ..."

What a spectacular testimony to the power and glory of God. McLaughlin uses her platform to share her faith and glorify God. You know, we all have a platform of some sort. We aren't on the world stage, but we all have an audience of some sort and people who care about what we think. How are you using your platform to glorify God? David was a mere shepherd boy. He didn't have much of a platform, but he used it to its best advantage to bring glory to God. We can do the same.

### **David Trusted God and Had Confidence in Him**

As we come to the climax of our sermon text, I want you to notice the confidence and trust that David had in God as he stepped onto the battlefield. Goliath was contemptuous of

David, seeing him as a mere youth armed with a shepherd's staff. He underestimated David, and that was a big mistake. Goliath cursed David with his pagan gods and taunted him, saying that he would feed the birds and wild animals with David's flesh. Goliath had his weapons of war, but David entered the battle in the name of the true God of Israel, whom Goliath had defied. David has complete trust and confidence in God, and he knows there is nothing to fear. David boldly tells Goliath that that very day, he will cut off his head and feed the bodies of the Philistine dead to the birds and the wild beasts.

What David says next shows his love for God and zeal for His glory. Why is David on the battlefield against Goliath? David says to all who would hear him, "...so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup> and that this entire assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will hand you over to us!" David had God on his side, and any giant trying to kill him was inconsequential. It just didn't matter! That day on that battlefield, the existence and power of God were proven as God used a young teenager with a shepherd's sling to defeat a great warrior.

So, in this story of David and Goliath, we find how to deal with our giants. David loved God and his people. David had strong, unquestioning faith in God. David's actions testified to the power and glory of God. Finally, David trusted God and had confidence in Him. God was on David's side! You see, David had an authentic relationship with God, allowing him to face a situation that struck fear in and paralyzed others. You can grow in your relationship with God to have the kind of relationship that David had with God. It will come by studying God's words, worshipping, serving, praising Him, calling upon Him in prayer, and trusting Him for all your needs.

When facing giants on the battlefield of our lives, we need to be of good cheer because, as Jesus says in John 16:33, "I have overcome the world." No matter what happens to us in this life, we are victorious in Christ, with a victory that will last for eternity.

### **Kim's Testimony**

So now we know how David defeated his giant. Let's return to the story of Kim Phuc to see how she defeated her giants. In 1982, Kim found herself in Saigon's central library, pulling books on religion off the shelves into a stack. She had books on Bahá'í, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Cao Dai, and even found a copy of the New Testament. She began to pick through the New Testament and noticed two themes. First, unlike many religions she was familiar with, which had many gods and many paths to holiness, Jesus claimed to be the only way to God. Second, Jesus suffered in defense of His claim.

Kim writes,

I had never been exposed to this side of Jesus—the wounded one, the one who bore scars. I turned over this new information in my mind as a gem in my hand, relishing the light that was cast from all sides. The more I read, the more I came to believe that he really was who he said he was, that he really had done what he said he had done, and that—most important to me—he really would do all that he had promised in his Word. Perhaps he could help me make sense of my pain and at last come to terms with my scars.

She continues describing her salvation experience on Christmas Eve, 1982:

...I was attending a special worship service at a small church in Saigon. The pastor spoke about how Christmas is not about the gifts we give to each other, so much as it is about one gift in particular: the gift of Jesus Christ. As I listened to this message, I knew that something was shifting inside me. How desperately I needed peace. How ready I was for love and joy. I had so much hatred in my heart—so much bitterness. I wanted to let go of all my pain. I wanted to pursue life instead of holding fast to fantasies of death. I wanted this

Jesus. So when the pastor finished speaking, I stood up, stepped out into the aisle, and made my way to the front of the sanctuary to say yes to Jesus Christ. And there, in a small church in Vietnam, mere miles from the street where my journey had begun amid the chaos of war—on the night before the world would celebrate the birth of the Messiah—I invited Jesus into my heart. When I woke up that Christmas morning, I experienced the kind of healing that can only come from God. I was finally at peace.

Today, Kim is a changed person and a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. Reflecting on the past, she writes:

Nearly half a century has passed since I found myself running—frightened, naked, and in pain—down that road in Vietnam. I will never forget the horrors of that day—the bombs, the fire, the shrieks, the fear. Nor will I forget the years of trial and torment that followed. But when I think about how far I have come—the freedom and peace that comes from faith in Jesus—I realize there is nothing greater or more powerful than the love of our blessed Savior.

She continues,

My faith in Jesus has enabled me to forgive those who have hurt and scarred me. It has enabled me to pray for my enemies rather than curse them. And it has enabled me not just to tolerate them but truly to love them.

I will forever bear the scars of that day, and that picture will always serve as a reminder of the unspeakable evil of which humanity is capable. That picture defined my life. In the end, it gave me a mission, a ministry, a cause. Today, I thank God for that picture. Today, I thank God for everything—even for that road...

The kind of peace and victory Kim experienced facing her giants can only come through Jesus because He is the Great Physician. I know the giants that some of you are facing, but I don't know all of them. Physical, emotional, and spiritual troubles are part of the fallen world we live in and the sinful nature within us. When you face giants in your lives, remember David's approach to the giants he faced.

So, too, remember how Jesus healed and brought peace to a woman who had suffered years of emotional and physical torment. As I have noted many times, as we read in Romans 8:28, God is working all things for your good. He uses the giants you face to shape your character and to draw you to Him. When you truly apprehend and believe that, you will fully trust God and your Savior and be able to say to God, no matter what giants you face, "Thy will be done." That is an excellent place to be as a disciple of Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/taking-a-sling/>

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<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.christiancentury.org/news/five-faith-moments-paris-olympics>