

### **NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME**

“And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armoured with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, ‘Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not 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 be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.’ And the Philistine said, ‘Today I defy the ranks of Israel! 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.

“Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul’s sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, ‘I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.’ So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd’s bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

“When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.”  
**1 Samuel 17: 4-11, 38-40, 48-49**

“As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

‘At an acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.’

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!” **2 Corinthians 6:1-2**

The armies stand encamped – the Philistines on one mountain, the Israelites on another and a valley between them. It has been like this for forty days. Each day the Philistine Goliath strides into the valley and asks the question.

Why have you come out to draw up for battle? The first day the question must have rankled the Israelite army – it was the Philistines who drew up their armies for battle. The Israelites have simply encamped against them. But by the fortieth day the question is getting old and a little worrisome.

The Israelites are not making any progress against the Philistines: army against army, and they have no one who can meet the challenge of Goliath. The man can barely be called that – he is more behemoth than man. Standing upwards of nine feet tall, he has a spear, the head of which weighs around 145 pounds. No one even comes close and they cannot risk a smaller man for the challenge is absolute. If Goliath wins, the Israelites will be slaves once again.

The appearance of David on the scene is almost inconsequential. Here is a shepherd boy running errands for his father. He is sent to the scene only to check on his brothers. That the story shifts to focus on him seems at first merely a way to share more details – to provide a little human interest in the midst of a battle narrative.

There's something alarming though when David begins to get involved. At first it seems like innocent questioning: what's going on? Who's that giant? What's the reward for beating him? A little brother's nosy attempts to feel part of it all. But when the information has been gathered and David continues to ask questions, his brothers get involved. David, what does it matter? No one can fight him, he's huge. We've been through the ranks, no one is big enough, no one is strong enough or skilled enough. Why are you so interested? And what are you doing here anyway? Who is with the sheep?

But David's interest reaches beyond the control of his family to the ears of the king and David is brought before Saul.

A smarter man would have waited another forty days before sending in a teenager. A smarter man would have sent someone else: someone older, someone with a sword, someone bigger, someone with some experience, someone with something with which to fight this behemoth of a man. A smarter man would have stalled, come up with a different plan, done something a little more rational. A smarter man probably would not have sent the one person who could defeat Goliath and win the battle for the Israelites.

It's a story we all know. It's classic. We learned it in Sunday School and could tell it to a child on a felt board by heart if required. The little guy who beat the big guy. If we're little enough, or desperate enough, all of our hopes and longings get put on this black sheep of a character who seems to have no chance. All of our being is suffused with him and miracle of miracles, he beats the bigger guy. In one fallow swoop, one shot of the sling, all of our demons are defeated. In one victory, all of our hopes and longings triumph over the adversities facing us in this world. One slingshot and we have hope. It's bigger than just David and Goliath – it's the stuff of fairytales, the plot of movies and feel good novels. We know the plot, we've heard the outcome and we know the story is one for children, one we fall back on when the days are long and our dreams seem so far away, one we secretly desire, but not one we believe in.

We are rational people after all. We know better. David had no shot, literally. Despite our wishin' and a hopin', we're left wondering what this story has to do with us – has to do with today . . .

The thunderstorms are rolling in. From up here you can see them coming for hundreds of miles. I hadn't noticed the storm clouds forming to the south when I started my hike up the mesa, but there's no mistaking them now. I'm only about half way up, but I can see the lightening starting in the distance and headed this way. Another moment of decision – there have been so many this summer. I turn and keep heading up, back no longer feels like an option.

The desert doesn't feel as scary as I thought it would when I flew out in June. I didn't think I'd survive three months away from the comforts of home, in the dryness of the desert. But I've only seen one snake so far and the scorpions are little, and kind of cute. Besides, the space out here is intoxicating – I've never seen the sky so large, never heard the wind resonate so deeply in my core, never felt the sun so intensely. It's opened up possibilities I never imagined. And it is these I know, these possibilities, that I am hiking away from.

I left home twenty-two and engaged and now I'm twenty-three and the possibility of going home without a ring on my finger is looming large for reasons I can't even begin to understand. If the Philistines are on the opposite mountain than Goliath is the giant possibilities overwhelming me in the valley and I am the first Israelite to flee back to the safety of height and distance. Some decisions are simply too large to make.

As I hike further up the trail and feel the wind blowing harder at my back I can't help but think of my easy faith and wonder what it has to do with real life – this life. Jesus woke up and calmed the storm blowing the disciples to pieces; David shot Goliath dead with a single stone from his slingshot. But the wind is only getting stronger, I don't have a slingshot, and the stones here seem too large to lift. Perhaps faith really is a childhood prop that I simply need to shed and leave behind. Reason seems far more sensible.

But the pull of the desert feels irresistible and for the first time I have a sense of what people mean when they say 'called.' I just didn't think it would be something so hard. As I reach the top of the mesa, the first drops of rain are starting to drip around me. It won't be safe for me to stay up here too much longer. Yet, as I sit on the edge with my feet hanging over, the frenzy of the coming storm seems appropriate. Despite the decisions in front of me, despite the lightening heading toward me, all I can hear are the words 'be still and know that I am God.'

It occurs to me that perhaps it is not about the stories being true, not about the stories being rational, perhaps it is simply about letting the stories shape who we are. Maybe being faithful

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isn't so much about the right beliefs as it is about letting the stories of our faith, the ones passed down from generation to generation, mold who we are.

None of us will face a giant named Goliath; indeed our giants may be wonderful opportunities for change rather than large monsters that need killing, but we all face those moments in life when we can choose the rational option and live our lives as we know we ought to or we can choose the challenge, the dream, the leap of faith that will forever change who we are in the world.

Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, urged them not to have faith in vain, for now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. What is it God has been calling you to? And what are you waiting for?