

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

April 26, 2020

The Valley of the Giants

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In 1932, two brothers were playing basketball on their family farm in Hillsdale, Wyoming, the older brother 6' 5" younger brother 5' 7", a classic David vs Goliath matchup. Younger brother couldn't even get off his shot but it's not because he was vertically challenged. A hundred years ago, the game of basketball was played on the ground. The jump shot didn't even exist yet. The only shot was a set shot and it was shot with two hands from the chest. The older brother said to the younger brother Kenny, this is not the game for you, it's for a big man; it's for a tall man. Kenny could have quit but he dared to be different. He did something that had never been done before. Kenny Sailors jumped into the air, put his hand above his head, and shot the ball with one hand. I had no idea who Kenny Sailors was until one week ago. A friend of mine let me screen the documentary produced by Steph Curry called the Jump Shot. And I have a new hero. Listen, Kenny Sailor's may be the best basketball player no one has ever heard of.

In 1943 he led the Wyoming Cowboys to the NCAA championship at Madison Square Garden. He was the tournament MVP. I want to show you a photograph that changed the game of basketball forever. In January of 1946 Life magazine publishes this picture. I want you to take a good look Kenny Sailors is elevating above his defender. He's shooting his patented jump shot, and everyone else's feet are on the ground. That shot captured the imagination of the next generation. It gave them permission to play the game a different way.

Every breakthrough requires someone who is bold enough and brave enough to do what hasn't been done before and that goes way beyond basketball. You're brave is someone else's breakthrough. I want you to hold that thought.

Last week we prayed our way through. We worshiped our way out of the valley of crisis. This weekend we venture into the valley of giants, where a shepherd boy named David duels with a giant named Goliath. Now your giant probably has a different name. Right now for millions of people it's named COVID-19 - 26 million Americans unemployed. That is a huge giant of financial proportions. Listen, a giant is any situation emotional, relational, physical, financial, spiritual that overshadows us with anxiety or uncertainty or insecurity. What do you do when your problems are nine feet tall?

Well, if you have a Bible, I want you to meet me in the Valley of Elah you will find it in 1 Samuel 17. If you're at our online campus, check out that notes tab and you can follow along. Few phrases are more famous than David vs Goliath. It's the quintessential matchup, it's the classic underdog. The irony is that we read the story the wrong way. We think David is at a disadvantage. If you're engaging in hand to hand combat. Yes. No way David defeats Goliath in a cage match. But David's biggest disadvantage,

both in terms of size and in experience, actually, is his greatest advantage. You see, Goliath was infantry. All he had was a ground game. All he had was a set shot. David is artillery. He used the skill set that he had cultivated as a shepherd took a jump shot with his slingshot and Goliath didn't see it coming.

If you want to repeat history, just keep doing it the way it's always been done. If you want to make history if you want to get out of the valley of giants, you've got to change the game the way Kenny Sailors change the game of basketball with his jump shot. You have got to change history the way David changed it with his slingshot.

Malcolm Gladwell is one of my favorite authors, that's no secret. In his book, 'David and Goliath', he cites a fascinating study by Eitan Hirsch, a ballistics expert with the Israeli Defense Forces. According to Hirsch, in average size stone hurled by an expert slinger could travel the length of a football field in three seconds flat. At that velocity, its stopping power was the same as a 45 caliber handgun. Now listen, Goliath's sword is the size of a weavers beam. Scripture says that the tip of his spear was 600 shekels or 15 pounds. That is incredibly impressive. But Goliath, he brought a knife to a gunfight.

A couple of fun facts. First of all, the stones in the Valley of Elah are no ordinary stones. According to geologists, they are comprised of barium sulfate, which means they would be twice as dense as normal rocks. Now, I'm actually holding one in my hand. I picked this up in the Valley of Elah a few years ago. And I have to admit the agent was a little confused when I had all these rocks in my luggage, but I did make it through customs. Now, David's rock probably would have been a little bit larger than this, maybe even the size of a baseball, but whatever size it was it packed a punch.

Second fun fact. If medieval tapestries are accurate, then ancient slingshot shooters would actually hunt birds with their slingshot. How crazy is that? Experienced slingers like David would have been able to hit a target from 200 yards away. So we think David is the underdog. No, Goliath is a sitting duck, and he's a pretty big target.

Here's the bottom line. Goliath's strength was his weakness, and David's weakness was his strength. The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom. 1 Corinthians 1:25, "*The weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*" God chose the foolish things, the weak things, the lowly things, the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are. David's victory was not improbable it was inevitable. David looks a little foolish going to battle with a slingshot, but there is no way artillery loses to infantry if David simply shoots his jump shot.

I know giants are big. I know giants are scary. And the truth is you need giants in your life. Now I'm going to tell you why because it takes a Goliath to discover a David. The valley is where we discover who we are, where we discover who God is. Your problem may be bigger than you, but it's not bigger than God.

You know, it's interesting we sometimes think of miracles in categories, right; big, small, easy, difficult, possible, impossible. I want you to hear what I'm about to say. To the infinite all finites are equal. David says you come at me with sword and spear and javelin. It's almost like David's doing this little ancient finger wag and he says, I come at you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, in the God of Israel's army, the God thou hast defied. This is not David vs Goliath. This is Elohim vs Baal and it is no contest. David says the Lord saves not by sword or by spear for the battle belongs to the Lord. Do you know that today that the battle belongs to him?

Can I have a little bit of fun? I watched *The Last Dance* like anybody who grew up in Chicago while Michael Jordan was playing for the Bulls. In fact, I could hardly go to sleep Sunday night because of the adrenaline flowing through my bloodstream. One of my favorite Jordan moments, the Bulls are playing the Cleveland Cavaliers and Jordan drops 69 points on the Cleveland Cavaliers and then this role player Stacey King comes off the bench, one free throw scores one point. So after the game, the reporter is asking him, "Hey, how are you going to remember this epic game? And I love what Stacey King said. He said, "I will always remember this is the game that Michael Jordan and I combined for 70 points." Listen, we give David a lot of credit right here. But David wins this victory because God is on his side.

Now let me set the scene. Saul, son of Kish coordinated King of Israel around 1046 BC. I think his kingship is epitomized by two moments. 1 Samuel 14:35; It says, "Saul built in altar to the Lord." So far, so God. But one chapter later, 1 Samuel 15:12, it says that Saul built a monument to himself and this is the beginning of the end. The Lord sends the prophet Samuel to Jesse of Bethlehem to anoint the next king of Israel. Jesse lines up his seven sons and curiously Samuel doesn't pick any of them. And he has to ask, "Jesse, do you have any more sons?" And he says, "Oh yeah, I have my youngest son he's out tending sheep." Like, this has got to hurt, right? Talk about a father wound right here. Your dad doesn't even take you to the tryouts.

If you feel forgotten, if you feel left out, if you feel looked over, you're not alone. But you know what the Lord says? "Man looks on the outward appearance God looks at the heart." And David though very imperfect was a man after God's own heart. And so Samuel anoints David, the king of Israel. Most scholars believe he's somewhere between the age of 10 and 15 years old.

Now, let me fast forward a few years for some more back-story. At the end of his kingship, King Saul has all kinds of issues hard to pinpoint on the DSM five, but the only thing that would seem to alleviate his symptoms is hydroxychloroquine. I'm kidding. The only thing that would alleviate his symptoms is music therapy. Saul actually employs a personal musician to play the harp whenever he is sad or mad. The musician's name, we'll drum roll home right now, David, and the plot thickens.

Now, let me hit pause and get practical. When I find myself in a valley of crisis or a valley of giants, I do what Saul did. I do worship therapy. How? I put on my noise canceling headphones, and I put on

repeat the worship songs that stir my spirit. If you're at our online campus, I actually have a few songs in the notes tab at the top my chart and you can borrow a couple of those if you want to. But here's the challenge, would you make your own worship playlist? Would you put it on repeat? And you tell me if it doesn't begin to shift the external atmosphere and shift your internal reality?

Alright, we're going to venture into this valley of giants. Verse two, "*Saul and the men of Israel were encamped in the Valley of Elah drew up battle lines against the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one Hill and the Israelites, the other with a valley between them.*" For 40 days there is a standoff between these arch enemies and the question is why. Why would you not just fight? Well, I think part of the answer is topographical. Whichever army attacked first would be at a significant disadvantage because they would be fighting uphill. So they're kind of waiting for the other army to put themselves at a disadvantage but there is another reason. In ancient warfare it was not uncommon for armies to choose a champion to represent them in what was called single combat. So it was one on one, it was winner take all and that's what's happening right here.

Verse four, "*A champion went out of the camp of the Philistines named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span of almost 10 feet.*" Now the only thing bigger than his biceps is his mouth. He is taunting and scoffing and trash talking, the Israelites.

Verse 11, says, "*When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.*" Question. Who are you listening to? If you listen to the enemy, you're going to end up dismayed and afraid. Scripture calls him the accuser of the brethren, calls him the father of lies. If you listen to those accusations, if you listen to those lies, it is a losing battle. You've got to turn it off. You've got to turn it off and tune it out. And listen, you have to do the same thing with doubters, and haters, and naysayers. And while you're at it, want to do it with that inner critic who taunts you like Goliath inside as well. Who is the loudest voice in your life? It's got to be the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, if you're going to make it out of the valley of giants.

I already challenged you to make a worship playlist. Here's a second challenge, download a daily Bible reading plan. Now I use YouVersion on my phone every morning. I pop it open, and I work the plan. By the time I'm done this year, I will have gotten through the entire Bible. More importantly, the entire Bible will have gotten through me.

Now fun fact, David had a daily Bible reading plan. He didn't have a New Testament. But according to Deuteronomy 17, explicit instructions given for the kings of Israel, they were to do three things.

- One, make a copy of the Torah in their own handwriting

- Two, keep it on their person at all times. Now, he's not King yet, but it would not surprise me if David had a copy of his personal Torah on his person, as he went out into that battlefield with Goliath.
- And three, the king was commanded to read from it all the days of his life.

Now I'm not asking you to do one or two, you don't have to make your own personal copy. And you can just use YouVersion if you want. But would you download a daily Bible reading plan? If you're gonna defeat the giants in your life, you might want to do what David did. And this is where his confidence came from and it's not a self confidence, it's a holy confidence. It's a confidence that is anchored in the Word of God that is anchored in the promises of God that is anchored to God's character.

Now let me just say this over the last couple of weeks, we have rejoice with those who have raised a hand at our online campus. You've said, "Hey, I want to take a step of faith. I want to begin this spiritual journey and follow Jesus." If you're new to this thing the Bible is a pretty big book. In fact, it's 66 books written over 1,500 years by 40 different authors. But the question is, where do you start? And so normally, you'd start at the beginning, and that's fine. You can start in the book of Genesis, but I might recommend the Gospel of John, and I'll tell you why. It's a wonderful introduction to the miracles and the teachings of Jesus. And I think it's a great place to start your spiritual journey.

Goliath is intimidating the Israelites in the Elah Valley. Meanwhile, David 12 miles away in Bethlehem is tending sheep, but he has a side hustle. He drives Uber Eats. Verse 17, "*Take for your brothers and ephah of this parched grain and these 10 loaves and carry them quickly to your brothers at the camp. Also take these 10 cheeses to the commander of their thousands.*" And so David makes this delivery and overhears Goliath taunting the Israelites and he's not dismayed or afraid. He's flat out ticked off. Now, lots of subplots right here, but he is what I love. David doesn't see a nine foot problem he sees a nine foot opportunity.

Last week I shared a little bit about Joshua Chamberlain, on Little Round Top, yells charge. I've got to share one of my other favorite moments in American history. Bastogne, Belgium December 1944 American troops are surrounded by German troops. The German field commander demands immediate surrender. And so the American general Anthony McAuliffe calls his troops together and says, "Men, we are surrounded by the enemy. We have the greatest opportunity ever presented in army. We can attack in any direction." I love this. If you're looking for an excuse you will always find one if you're looking for an opportunity, you will always find one.

Can I tell you what a relationship with Christ means? It means all of our excuses are out the window. Why? Because "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." In Christ you are nobody's underdog. You are more than a conqueror.

Now, I love the way Frederick Douglass said this. He said, "One and God make a majority". You know what we aren't going out onto these battlefields in our own strength, our own wisdom, we are going in the name of the Lord of Hosts and that's where we find our identity, our authority, our security, and I might even say our super majority.

Long story short, David is the only one who volunteers to fight Goliath. I don't want to discount God given ability. But listen, every miracle every ministry starts with availability. Can I just shout out our volunteers? I know that we're taking a break from our seven campuses as we shelter at home, but so many of you have jumped in so many different ways. Can I just celebrate this? Our DC Dream Center, Ebenezer coffee house, we have now served more than 10,000 meals and we wouldn't be able to do it without you, without your availability. And so David volunteers and Saul says, "*There is no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You're only a boy, and he's been a man of war since his youth.*" Doesn't matter how young you are. Doesn't matter how old you are. Doesn't matter how rich. Doesn't matter how poor. Doesn't matter how strong. Doesn't matter how weak. God doesn't call the qualified God qualifies the called.

Can I give one more shout out? I love NCC youth, love NCC kids. Pastor Brooke leads NCC youth. Pastor Nina and Pastor Amber leading NCC kids. You know what I love? When we launched Is 40 day prayer challenge and it's not too late for you to get in on that game. You know what? I love the fact that our kids and our youth are a part of that mix. Listen, God is raising you up. God is calling you out. I want you to know you inspire me as David's and Daniel's and Esther's to keep on keeping on.

Let me close with two simple thoughts. One, don't try to be who you're not. I think one of the funniest scenes in this episode may be this moment that Saul offers David his armor. Now it's funny because Saul is head and shoulders taller than anybody else in Israel. And so can you imagine David going into the dressing room? Now, have you ever had one of these moments where you come out of a dressing room with something on and everyone laughs at you? Or is that just me? I can imagine David coming out of the dressing room. It does not fit it's not even close, like a tailor can't even fix this. Now, but I get it because listen, that armor would make him look bigger than what he really is. Are you tracking with me? And I get this because I wore a Zoot Suit in the 90s. But here's the deal. This isn't who David is. Saul had the best armor money could buy. And it's hard to say 'thanks, but no thanks' to the king of Israel. This is a defining moment for David. I think David decides to be David. He says, "I cannot go in these, for I have not tested them." It's the moment of truth and David takes them off. Don't try to be who you're not.

And two, remind yourself of who God is. The Lord verse 37, "*Who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw the bear he will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine.*" I love the way that David connects the dots between the bears and the lions and the giants. When you pass a test, it becomes part of your testimony. And testimony, listen to me testimony is prophecy. What do I mean? If God did it before he can do it again.

Remember what David said to Saul about his armor, he said, I have not tested them. In other words, Saul's armor was not David's testimony. David's testimony was a shepherd's sling. At some point, you've got to play to your strengths, even if it looks like a weakness. Faith is connecting the dots between God's faithfulness in the past and bringing it to bear on our present tense circumstances.

I want to invite our worship team to come and just share a couple of quick thoughts. Verse 48, "*David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.*" If you want to get out of the valley of giants you cannot run from you have to run to. David doesn't wait for the battle to come to him. David charges, the giant. I just think there has to come a moment where enough is enough. And today is the day where you stand on the promises of God. And that's what David does. This day. The Lord will deliver you into my hand. Right now wherever you are this day the Lord will deliver. He can do it. He's done it before he can do it again.

2 Corinthians 6:2, "*Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*" I've been praying for you. Right now you feel a stirring in your spirit that is the Holy Spirit at work in you that's what faith feels like. 2,000 years ago, Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." Some of you have been fighting giants, you are so exhausted. Jesus says, "Come to me." The journey of 1,000 miles begins with the first step. Today, would you take a step of faith? If you want to follow Jesus, on our online campus, would you just raise your hand today, we want to help you take that next step in your spiritual journey. You raise your hand, and we want to come alongside you. I think it's just a way for you to say, "I'm in, this is my moment. I'm believing that today is my day."

Now our worship team is going to lead us in one more song. And as they do, our prayer team is available. You can hit that live prayer link as we worship together.