

STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN March 2, 2008

(Exploring the meaning of the Intentional Interim)

1 1Sam. 17: 20-24,41-47; Psalm 121:1-8.

Stories such as the one of David and Goliath are often relegated to children's stories. The characters are heroic and larger than life. The experience is one that is made of the stuff of fables. Let me take you into the world of memory and find again the fresh truths of this Word of God for us.

David is a shepherd boy, a son of a second marriage, much younger than his 10 brothers, and obviously a bit protected by his aged father. His brothers are running the family sheep farm but have been called away to serve their country. David is a dreamer, the idealistic type that is so heavenly that he is hardly any earthly good, at least not to his very responsible older brothers.

The battle is a compelling one, the kind that has been going on for years, a border fight and rivalry that seems to get bigger with the years. This time, the Philistine neighbors have come to settle an old score, and their best tool since the inception of this animosity is a 7'9" giant native son named Goliath. *"If any man can whip me, we'll be his servant. But if I whip him, all of you will become our slaves!"* No small challenge for a shepherding land of peace lovers!

"Can't we just go home?" they must have asked each other. *"If we go home, maybe this big lug will just disappear."* *"Listen, we don't want a fight, nobody does, especially one that has such uneven odds."* Or, *"Maybe we can just wait him out! Big oaf! He's been shooting off his mouth like this since he was a boy in the hill country Little League."* *"Yeah! We can't start throwing rocks at every barking dog that we pass!"*

The story is the stuff of bedtime amazement for children. Nevertheless, there is great truth for us here today. We're

headlong into a battle for the future of this church. We can hear the call to take him head-on, but we can also feel the temptation to just wait it out. Maybe all this new noise will just go away, if we will just ignore it. Can we afford to?

The problem with ignoring your future is that we are really ignoring people, a whole new generation who long to know the truth as we have, to know and to be set free by it! All of us have family who are included in this age old debate to update and upgrade the church. They are our children, our neighbors, our coworkers, even our spouses, and they are asking if we have it all wrapped up, have all we need, or is there room in the church for them.

Here is the precise place that the **Intentional Interim** experience was created, one as a ministry for churches to make the most of the in-between time. It is a time as if we were at the railroad crossing, and the signs all say, "STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN!" As your Transition Team comes to be commissioned this Wednesday night, and I hope many of you will come for that, this is what we are going to be about.

We will **STOP**. This means we will halt the current pastoral search process while we give ourselves needed room to **LOOK** around at ourselves. We will look at how far we have come, what were the paths we can say God led us down, what are our current resources, obviously God-given gifts for accomplishing His will. Our gifted members, our facilities for ministry, our assets, our dreams and visions, our untapped resources of stewardship, our greatest abilities, and most of all, our most satisfying things we do well and enjoy most.

With all this looking, creating **VISION** for us, we will turn to the Word of the Lord and ask, "*What is it, O Lord, that you want us to be about in these next years of our church?*" Then begins the challenge always facing every church in every generation. A task so daunting that we tend to put it off until

we often claim to simply find it out of reach. We put it off until we no longer think it necessary, as impossible as it seems to be. It is the task, the privilege, the responsibility to **DISCERN** the will of God. We will **LISTEN TO GOD**.

STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN! We are at the crossroads of the sturdy everyday path this church has been on for the last number of years of ministry, and the new tracks of God's fresh calling. I find the story of David at the Philistine battle so relevant to our circumstances. Let's find its truths and apply them to our challenge.

First, We must find our SMOOTH STONES. And just as David did, we will discover that these are the everyday items closest at hand. These are our God given RESOURCES, the very things that we take for granted. These will be our best assets for claiming our future.

Here is an example of how you see it right now. Nearly 100 names surfaced as ones you considered available and devoted enough to be trusted with leading the church family during the transition, this Transition Team. Now look around you here this morning. How many are in worship this Sunday Morning? Perhaps 150 people? And 30-35 are youth and children and visitors? By your naming 100, you have said most of our regular members are ready to lead!

This indicates that this church family is loaded with God's gifts given to His people for the building up of His church. And I think the 50 other folks here are just as capable just committed in other areas, stretched too far, or too new to not be known well enough yet! It is a church full of ready resources, every one of you! This will be an exciting time in the life of the church.

Second, We must face our GIANTS. The ISSUES in our church life (and how we have faced them) have formed or deformed us. One of the most exciting elements of your church life is the new purchase of the doctor's office across the street. It is now dubbed 'The Rock House' by our youth. This purchase says that you want to provide well for the spiritual development of our teenagers! It is visionary.

When it came available, you didn't haggle, argue among yourselves, cry about the money, or try to finagle a gimme for God. You stepped out on faith and a little cash as the opportunity presented itself. This is a pattern for this church family. It is the same way you acquired the current fellowship hall some years ago. You are indeed alive with possibilities.

Third, We must go out in FAITH. Meaning we must ready ourselves for the future... FULL of HOPE! David quickly said that Goliath was barking up the wrong tree. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but my God is going to wear you down to a nub, then feed you to the ravens!"

Everywhere I go in the Tryon area I am told with excitement that people are ready for what God has in store for the next generation of the First Baptist Family!.....
So....**Fourthly,** we must claim God's FUTURE.

When William Carey felt the call to the unreached people of India, he addressed his fellow Baptists of England with excitement and a sense of plan. Rather than an excited embrace of his vision and his personal commitment, one fellow pastor stood to his feet and said, "Sit down, young man! When God wants to convert the heathen of India, He will get it done without your help!"

He was wrong! God wanted to have the gospel shared in India, but God was calling William Carey-and the whole of England, who had forged open trade routes to these foreign

peoples-to take the Gospel to them! One man heard the call to the future and claimed it! His motto became one well known among missionaries, *"Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God!"* We must Claim God's FUTURE!

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In Psalm 121, a poetry song of King David, he would reflect his praise and affirmation of what he discovered years later, as he stepped out **on faith** in the face of that terrifying giant. The future belongs to God, and our God is filling up His people with grace and truth in Jesus Christ, as well as all manner of gifts of grace to serve Him.

As we face and tackle the issues of our times, we will find that His Grace is truly sufficient in every way for every need, every need, big and small, intensely personal and globally significant, mine and yours, and all those of the nations of the world!

He has said He has given us the keys to the Kingdom, and that it was His pleasure to hear our prayers according to His eternal will, and to answer according to His will and purposes.

Will you **STOP** long enough to regain vision enough.....

Will you **LOOK** long enough to believe in God enough.....

Will you **LISTEN** well enough to gain dedication enough.....

to claim God's Future.....?

I trust you will not miss all that God is preparing for TFBC...

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