

Mount Zion Primitive Baptist Church



Study in the Book of Judges

Chapters 6-7

Lesson VII



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Lesson VII

The Message of Judges: Chapter Six

Gideon and the Power of Weakness (Part 1)

1 Cor 1:27-29 God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Introduction

Intro: As we move through the book of Judges, a clear pattern has emerged. The children of Israel would serve the Lord as long as they had a strong leader. When that leader passed from the scene, they fell back into their sins.

When they sinned, God used the pagan nations living around them to chastise Israel. He allowed their enemies to afflict and oppress Israel to show them the high price of low living.

In **chapter 6** we are introduced to a man named Gideon. His name means “*he who cuts down*”. When Gideon appears, he is an unlikely choice to be a deliverer. He is hiding out of fear for Israel’s enemies, **v. 11**. Gideon was guilty of fear and faithless, but he was God’s choice to be the next judge of Israel, and God used him in a wonderful way.

Just before we look into the life of Gideon, we are going to consider the text that lies before us today. These verses set the stage for the ministry of Gideon in Israel. They also hold some powerful lessons for our lives as well.

These verses serve as a parable that speaks about *The High Cost Of Low Living*. They teach us the truth that disobedience to

the will of the Lord in our lives carries a price higher than we would ever want to pay. Let's notice the *lessons* that can be gleaned from these verses, and how they can be applied to our daily lives, as I preach on the subject, *The High Cost Of Low Living*.

God loves to do the Gideon. 'The Gideon' is where God takes weak, humble, sometimes fearful people and uses them to do wonderful things. The story of Gideon has been repeated (in each persons own way) through the lives of millions throughout history.

This study will be on Judges Chapter 6 where we are introduced to our hero Gideon, and learn a little about this man that God chose to deliver Israel. The second study will be on Chapter 7, the defeat of Midian, and its strikingly accurate portrayal of New Testament truth.

Enter the Midianites!

Judges 6:1-5 Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it.

v. 1a THE SIN THEY EMBRACED

- The Bible simply says that “*the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.*” We do not know what their sin was, but we can assume that it was the same sin they had been guilty of

in the past, **Judges 2:19; 3:5-7**. They were prone to walking the same foolish pathway. They were guilty of falling into the same trap.

Israel was surrounded by pagan nations who worshiped false gods. They were surrounded by people who were continually trying to draw Israel away from, God and into their own wicked way of life. As long as Israel had strong leadership, they were able to live clean. When that leadership failed, they wandered away from the Lord. Israel was a weak, vacillating people who had trouble staying on course with the Lord.

- Let's not be too hard on them. I am preaching to a group of people who have the same problem. Everyone of us deals with certain areas of weakness. There are areas in our lives where we seem to be in a constant struggle for righteousness. The book of Hebrews refers to these areas as "*the sin which doth so easily beset us*", **Heb. 12:1**.

The words "*easily beset*" mean "*to skillfully surround*". Our flesh loves sin. Our enemy, Satan, is a shrewd enemy. He knows our weaknesses. He knows who to entice us and draw us away into evil, Ill. **2 Tim. 2:25-26**. Satan lays the trap for us because he knows what makes us tick, **James 1:12-16**.

- Every person here has those areas of life that cause you trouble. There are areas where you are weak. Some have problems with their language. Some have problems with stubbornness and submission. Some have problems with gossip. Some have issues with sexual sin. Some have a pull toward alcohol and drugs. People struggles in many different areas.

You know the areas where you are weak. You know, that given the right circumstances, you will have trouble overcoming temptation.

If you want to succeed in the fight with sin, there are a few definite steps you can take.

- Do not play near the trap. If you know there is an area of danger in your life, stay away from that danger. (Ill. Joseph – **Gen. 39:12; 2 Tim. 2:22; Eph. 4:27.**) Satan is out to get you, so keep your distance, **1 Pet. 5:8.**
 - Look for the avenue of escape, **1 Cor. 10:13.** God will make a way out of our temptations, but it is up to us to use it!
 - Learn to consider yourself dead to sin and its influences, **Rom. 6:11; Col. 3:3-5.**
 - Determine in your heart to serve God and Him only, **Rom. 6:13; 1 Cor. 6:19-20.**
- Sin is a constant problem for every saint, but it does not have to dominate and control our lives. We can have victory through our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, **Rom. 6:7, 14.**

How low can you go! The NASB says ‘so Israel was brought very low because of Midian.’ The lowest they had ever been I would say. Instead of the ‘land flowing with milk and honey’ they lived in the caves and clefts in the rocks, too scared to face their enemy. What they did get to plant was destroyed by the enemy^{1[1]}. And I don’t want to even mention what happened to their livestock. This is as bad as it ever gets! Now the name **Midian**^{2[2]} means ‘**Strife**’ and they were certainly being true to their name in their actions with God’s people Israel! Midian speaks to us of the strife and trouble that comes to Christians while living in this world. Sometimes the strife is caused by the desires of our sinful nature; sometimes it is the strife and troubles that occur from simply living

in a fallen world. Whatever the source of our strife, God uses all circumstances to teach us truth, and, as we shall soon see, the best victories often come when we are weakest.

Judges 6:6-10 When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”

v. 1b-6 THE SUFFERING THEY ENDURED

(III. These verses chronicle the terrible price Israel paid for their foolishness in sinning against God. What they suffered serves to remind us that we do not get away with sin! We might think we can hide it. We might think no one will find out. The truth is, God knows, and in His time, He will expose it for what it is, **Num. 32:23; Luke 12:1-3**. Let’s examine what Israel endured because of their sins. As we do, let us remember that the same judgment, or worse might be upon our lives, if we fail to live for the Lord.)

A. v. 1b-2a **They Suffered Invasion** – Israel was oppressed by the Midianites. The Midianites were the descendants of Abraham just like the Israelites were. They descended from a man named Midian. Midian was the son of Abraham and Keturah, **Gen. 25:1-6**. Abraham married Keturah after Sarah died.

The Midianites appear from time to time in the Bible. Moses married a Midianite woman named Zipporah after he fled from Egypt, **Ex. 2:21**. In Numbers, the Midianites were counseled by Balaam to seduce the Israelite men and turn their hearts toward idols. It worked and over 24,000 Israelites died as a result, **Num 25**.

The word “*Midian*” means “*strife*”. The Midianites are a clear picture of the conflict the world around us has with the truth of God we are to believe and obey. They are a picture of a corrupt world and its desire to draw the people of God away from God.

The only reason the Midianites had power of the people of God was because the people of God were unfaithful to the Lord. Their sin lowered the wall of separation between them and the world. Israel got into trouble because they refused to walk with the Lord.

Example: When we refuse to stay close to the Lord and live according to His Word, we also open the door of affliction in our lives. Often, our troubles arise directly from our foolish decisions. Our sinful translates into weakness. Our weakness invites the enemies of righteousness to attack us. Our weakness often results in our being invaded by, attacked by and overrun by the world.)

- B. v. 2 **They Suffered Imprisonment** – The oppression of Israel by the Midianites resulted in Israel losing its will to fight. They ran away and hid in the mountains while the enemy overran their land. Their sin made them weak. It caused them to lose their will to fight. It left them utterly defeated!

(III. When we allow sin to reign in our lives, we will find the same thing is true. Sin robs us of our character. It leaves us unwilling and unable to fight. When we allow sin to rule in our hearts, we become listless, lifeless and lethargic in our Christian life. Sin causes us to hide in fear while the enemy takes everything we value!

There are people in this room who have been imprisoned by your sins. You have allowed certain actions and ways of living dominate you so long that you have lost your will and ability to fight against them. You are a prisoner in your own life and you hide in fear from actions you think you cannot control.

The fact is, Jesus has the power to set you free, **John 8:36**. But, you cannot hide in fear of your sin and enjoy the Lord's freedom! If you would be free, you must deal with your sin! You must confess it, **Pro. 28:13; 1 John 1:9**. You must repent of it, **Luke 13:5**. You must forsake it. You can be free, but you must be proactive. It will not simply happen by itself.)

v. 3-6 They Suffered Impoverishment – Verse 6 tells us that Israel was “*impoverished*”. This word means “*to make slack or feeble*”. It comes from a root word that was used to speak of “*a bucket dangling from the end of a rope.*” It is a picture of helplessness and hopeless. It is a picture of a people at the very end of themselves.

Israel was everything they love taken away from them. They planted their fields, **v. 3**, and their enemies came and took away their crops. They saw all of the livestock taken away, **v. 4**. They were left with “*no sustenance*”. They were literally made “*weak*”. They were literally “*at the end of their rope*”. Everything they valued was taken from them. Everything they needed to sustain life was gone. They were left with nothing!

Example: That's what sin does! It strips us of everything we value and everything we live for. It leaves us slack, weak, at the very end of our rope. If you choose to live your life under the control of sin, do not be surprised when you look around and see the things you value taken from you.

Some people have chosen sin over a spouse and their marriage is gone. Some people raise their children to be the best, have the best and do the best, but they fail to raise teach them to love the Lord. Often, those parents see their children walk away from the Lord. Some people live for material things, forgetting that this material world is transient. When they end this life, they have nothing! Some people are caught up in getting their own way all the time. They forget that they must step on the feelings and needs of others to get there. There may come a time when people like that will look around and find that they are all alone!

I don't know what you are investing in today, but I do know that investing in anything but Jesus pays dividends you do not want to reap, **Gal. 6:7-8**. I do know that investing in Jesus pays off in dividends that are eternal, **Matt. 6:19-21**. Where are you investing?)

v. 7-10 THEY SECURITY THEY EVADED

(When the oppression of Israel become too great, they called on the Lord again. God heard their cry. By the way, isn't God gracious to us? No matter how many times we fail Him; no matter how many times we turn away into sin, He is always there to forgive, receive us and restore us, when we repent and turn back to Him in faith. That is His promise to His people, **1 John 1:9**. Thank God for His grace, faithfulness and mercy!

God heard their cry, but He did not give them a deliverer immediately. God sent them an unnamed prophet instead. He sent them a man of God with a word from Heaven.

This prophet's message was designed to remind them of who they were. It was a message designed to confront their failure in light of God's faithfulness.

The prophet's message was designed to remind them of how good the Lord had been to them. It was designed to remind them

how they should have been living because of their relationship with the Lord. Let's examine that message for a few moments.)

v. 8b-9a They Are Reminded Of God's Deliverance – God had moved in supernatural power to deliver Israel from their bondage in Egypt. God gave them a deliverer named Moses. God demonstrated His power of the Egyptian gods through the plagues that fell on the land. God brought them out in great power, parting the Red Sea, and allowing them to walk over on dry ground. If for nothing else, they should have been faithful to God because of His grace and salvation in their lives.

(Ill. God's grace has been even more real in your life and mine! He has never parted a sea for me. He has never sent plagues for me. But, He did give His Son on a cross for me! He did put me in His plan before the world began. He did love me in spite of my sin. He did save me when I wasn't even looking for Him. He did change my life just because I called on Him by faith. For that reason alone, He deserves my faithfulness, my love and my devotion.

I should not have to be coddled to get me to come to church. I should not be upset when I don't get my way all the time. I should not whine, gripe and complain about my lot in life. I should not have to be begged to get me to serve the Lord. I was on my way to Hell when He saved me by grace! He should have my absolute, undivided attention!

Think back to how the Lord saved your soul! Does the fact that He saved you mean anything to you? It should mean everything!)

v. 9b They Are Reminded OF God's Deeds – Not only did God deliver them from Egypt, God went with them every step of the way. He drove out their enemies. He led them. He fed them. He never failed them, even when they failed Him. He gave them a

good land and blessed them far beyond what they deserved. They should have been faithful to Him because of His blessings on their lives!

Example: Look around! Look back! Look up! Look within! All around we can see the evidence of God's blessings on our lives. He has been good to us! He has blessed us materially, physically, financially, and best of all, spiritually. He has been faithful to us and He has given us the best! I believe that we ought to be faithful to Him out of gratitude for all the things He has done for us! I wouldn't have anything if it wasn't for the Lord! Every good thing in my life has come to me through His hand, **James 1:16-17**.

Look at your blessings. Name them one by one! Hasn't the Lord been good to you? Doesn't He deserve your best in return? What if He took it all away today? I would still have to say that I am blessed. He has been good to me!)

v. 10 They Are Reminded Of God's Demands – God reminds them that He, not the gods of the pagans, is their God. His words here remind us that He is a “*jealous*” God, **Ex. 20:5; 34:14**, Who will not allow those He has redeemed to go after other gods. Israel is made to see that they are suffering because they failed to keep God in first place. They have allowed other things to come ahead of Him and they are paying a high price for their low living.

Example: God has not changed! He is still a jealous God. If He has chosen you in Jesus, saved you by grace and entered into a saving relationship with you, He expects you to live for Him alone. He does not expect that you will live for yourself. He does not expect that you will live for your things. He expects that you will walk with Him, love Him and live according to

His will. When you do, He will bless you greatly. When you don't there is a price to pay. If you belong to the Lord, you can expect to pay a high price when you live below His standards, **Rev. 3:19; Heb. 12:6-12.**

Look at your life right now. Who is first in your life? If it is anyone other than Him, you are headed for trouble!

What will your disobedience cost you if it continues? What price are you willing to pay for your sin? Whatever it is, your sin is not worth what it will cost you in the long run!

If the Lord has spoken to your heart about any area of life, bring it to Him right now. Are you saved? Are you living close and clean? Are you faithful to Him? Are you reaping the whirlwind in your life? Come to Him right now and deal with the areas of your life that He has spoken to today!

So Israel comes to the point of crying out to the Lord. About time too - only took seven years! Now In the past when Israel has cried out to the Lord, God has raised up a judge to deliver them... but not this time! This time He sends them a prophet to do two things – Firstly to convict them some more of their sins and their need of Him; and secondly, to show them where they have gone wrong. God knows that He can and will deliver them, but He is firstly interested that they see what the root cause of their bondage is so that they don't have to keep this cycle of sin and repentance going. Same goes for our lives. If we keep falling into the same trap then God will work so that we see the source of our problem^{3[3]}. It's not always just a matter of 'forgive me Lord' and then carrying on... God would like us to take the time to think over why we keep failing in a particular area. For Israel it was simple – they had again forgotten God. It wasn't so much a case of the Lord not being number one in their life anymore... it was a more a case of the Lord not being allowed to play any part in their life at all!

Why ‘strife’ if the Lord is with us?

*Judges 6:11-13 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. **When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.” “But sir,” Gideon replied, “if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.”***

Gideon was called to be a judge during a time of intense trouble in Israel. The nation was suffering under the grip of Midianite oppression. They watched helplessly as their land was stripped, their homes and villages were destroyed, and their lives endangered. Their condition is summed up in **verse 6** where the Bible says they were “*impoverished*”. This word literally means that they were at the “*end of their rope*”. The people of Israel felt as though their nation was destroyed and their lives were over.

Israel’s main problem was that they counted God out. They cried out to Him, but they probably did not believe that He was listening, or that He was able to do anything to help them. But, God always has a message. In **vv. 7-10**, God sent them a prophet to remind them of the Lord’s grace in their lives and to call them to a place of repentance.

Not only does God have a message, He always has a man as well. In the passage before us, we will meet the man God chose to save Israel. We will meet a man called Gideon, his name means, “*He who cuts down*”. While Gideon does not look like he has much to offer at the time he was called, in the end, he would be responsible for cutting down the enemies of God’s people.

Let’s take some time to meet this man God chose to be deliver His people. In Gideon, I see a little bit of myself. Perhaps you will

see yourself in this passage as well. Let's examine *The Call Of Gideon* together today. I want to share a few *insights* from the text as we begin to study a man called Gideon.

v. 11 GIDEON'S CIRCUMSTANCES

(III. This verse reveals even more on the conditions in Israel at that time.)

- A. **It Was A Time Of Poverty** – We know that Israel did not have a lot during these dark, desperate days. **Verses 4-6** make that clear. Evidently, Gideon and his family had been able to hide away a small amount of wheat, and he was threshing that wheat behind a wine press to hide it from the Midianites.

Wheat was usually laid out on a special piece of ground prepared for just that purpose. The ground was very hard and usually circular in shape. The threshing floors were located on top of hills where there would be more wind. The grain would be poured out on the ground and oxen pulling a threshing sled called a “*noreg*” would walk over the grain. It consisted of three stone rollers embedded with pieces of iron that would break and cut the grain. After this process, which broke the hard shell around the kernel, men would take winnowing fans and toss the grain into the air. The lighter husk would be blown away by the wind, while the heavier grain would fall back to the earth.

The fact that Gideon is threshing grain by hand indicates that he had very little grain to work with. It was a time of poverty.

- B. **It Was A Time Of Persecution** – Gideon was hiding while he threshed because he knew the Midianites would take the small amount of grain he had if they knew about it. Gideon and his people were suffering under the lash of intense persecution.

- C. **It Was A Time Of Powerlessness** – This is seen in the fact that Gideon is hiding from the enemy. He is just as defeated and just as frightened as the rest of the nation. It was a difficult time for God’s people.

(III. Let me just encourage you today. Like Israel, we are also living in difficult times. We are living in days when economic uncertainty has many people fearing that they will be forced into poverty. We are living in days when the government, and society in general, are growing increasingly hostile to the things of the Lord. We are living in days when it seems that there is little spiritual power among God’s people. In some ways, we are living through times that strongly resemble those that Gideon and Israel faced in their day.)

Gideon’s Circumstances

v. 12 **GIDEON’S COMMISSION**

(III. While Gideon was hiding from the enemy, the Lord knew exactly where Gideon was. This verse says, “*The angel of the Lord appeared unto him*”. This was no ordinary angel! In **verse 13**, the angel is called “*Lord*”.

When the Lord speaks to Gideon, He comes with words of hope and assurance.)

- A. **God’s Promise** – The “*angel of the Lord*” appears to Gideon and says, “*The Lord is with thee*”. What we have here is a “*Theophany*”. It is an appearance of God in a visible form to man. Literally, what you have here is a “*Christophany*”. This is one of many occasions in the Old Testament when Jesus appeared to individuals before He was born in Bethlehem.

Here is a brief list of some of those Old Testament appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ:

- To Adam in Eden – **Gen. 3:8**
- To Abraham at his tent door – **Gen. 18**
- To Hagar in the wilderness – **Gen. 16**
- He appeared to Jacob at the River Jabbok – **Gen. 32**
- To Moses in the burning bush – **Ex. 3**
- To Balaam – **Num. 22**
- To Joshua at Jericho – **Josh. 5:13-15**
- To the parents of Samson – **Judges 13**

The Midianites did not know where Gideon was hiding, but the Lord did! He had His eye on Gideon the whole time. Even when Gideon was unaware of it, God was with Him, watching him and planning for his future.

That truth should comfort our hearts as well. We have the same promise, **Heb. 13:5; Matt. 28:20**. We have an even better promise, **John 14:17-18**. Friend, the Lord is with you, in every situation, through every valley, across every mountain.

By the way, when the Lord says, “*The Lord is with thee*”, it literally means, “*His power is on you.*” Gideon could not see it, nor could he sense it, and it sure didn’t look like it, but he was about to be used of the Lord in a powerful way!

The same is true in our lives. If we ever grasp the truth that we are indwelt by the Spirit of God and that His limitless

power is available to use, it would change our walk and it would change our lives!

B. **God's Perception** – Then the Lord says something that is truly amazing. He looks at Gideon and calls him “*a mighty man of valor*”. Here is a man who is so afraid of the enemy that he is hiding behind a winepress threshing wheat. He is full of fear, but the Lord saw what Gideon would be when he got through with him. God intended to take Gideon and use him in a great way. The phrase the Lord used literally refers to “*a man who is charging right into the face of the enemy.*” It doesn't make sense, but that is who the Lord saw when he looked at Gideon.

Did you know that the Lord knows you? He knows you far better than you even know yourself, **Psa. 139; Heb. 4:13**. If you are like me, you often look at your life and see mistakes, failures and problems. You see a person who consistently fails to live up to God's high calling on your life. You see a person who loses far more than he wins. You see a person who, from all appearances, is always coming up short.

What does God see? When Jesse looked at David, he saw his youngest son. He saw a mere boy who was not worthy to be called to a family meeting with Samuel. When God looked at David, He saw a king, **1 Sam. 16:12**. When Gideon's family looked at him, they saw a weakling. When the Lord looked at him, God saw a warrior.

You see, the Lord looks at the heart, **1 Sam. 16:7**. He knows what we will be when He gets through with us. The best thing you can ever do is to take your life, with all its problems, its failures and its shortcomings and place all that in the hand of the Lord. He is able to take us like we are and transform us into something powerful and amazing by His power! (*Ill. Saul of Tarsus; Ill. Simon Peter; Ill. You and me!*)

Example: When Gideon hears the words of the Lord, he is amazed by what he hears. He cannot see how the Lord can possibly be

talking to him. So, he reacts to what the Lord says by questioning the Lord's word.)

v. 13a He Questions God's Presence – Gideon wants to know where the proof of God's presence can be found. If God was really with His people, shouldn't they be experiencing victory instead of defeat?

v. 13b He Questions God's Performance – Gideon wants to know where all the miracles have gone. It had been 250 years since God delivered Israel from Egypt through ten devastating plagues. It had been 200 years since Jordan parted and Israel crossed over on dry ground into the Promised Land. Gideon wants to know where the God Who performed all those miracles has gone.

Gideon's Commission

After the prophet had convicted Israel, God begins the deliverance. The angel of the Lord (not just an angel but the Lord Himself) comes and picks the vessel He will use to deliver Israel. It's that mighty warrior Gideon! (Not that Gideon himself knows anything of the sort!) The first thing we see from Gideon is that he is a man that doesn't give up easily, even in the midst of Midian's 'strife'. He is threshing wheat in a winepress so that the food won't be destroyed. Determined this man!

But he asks a good question – 'If the Lord is with Israel, how come all this bad stuff has happened?' The obvious is that Israel left their God... It was their sin which led to this difficulty. But the question is even more valid for the lives of those today that face incredible strife and difficulty while living good, obedient, Christian lives^{4[4]}. The answer is what the 'Gideon principle' is all about and I will try to explain this in the study on Judges Chapter 7.

Attention all weaklings - God may choose you!

Judges 6:14-16 The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” “But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” The LORD answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.”

GIDEON’S CONFUSION

v. 14-15 He Questions God’s Perception – When the Lord hears Gideon’s questions, he responds by telling him that he will indeed save Israel. God has sent him and he will be successful in his quest to defeat the enemies of Israel.

Gideon’s response is to question the Lord’s omniscience. He tells the Lord that He can’t be right. He tells the Lord that he can’t be a deliverer because, 1.) ***His father’s house is poor, thus no one will; follow him***, and 2.) ***No one in his father’s house respects him***. We will learn in a future message that Gideon’s father was an idolater, **v. 25**. It may be that Gideon was an outcast within his own family because he refused to worship their false God’s with them.

Example: A lot of us are just like Gideon. We know the Lord wants us to serve Him; we might even understand that He wants to use us for His glory, but we are so filled with fear and a sense of our own inability that refuse to trust Him.

Gideon did exactly what Moses did when the Lord called him from the burning bush. Both these men came up with excuses as to why they could not do what the Lord said they could do! Both men felt like the job was over their heads. Both felt like they were inadequate to the task at hand.

We do the same things don't we? The real problem with both Gideon and Moses, and with us as well, is that we tend to focus on what we are and not on Who He is! Without the Lord, we are weak, frail failures. With Him, we are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. (Ill. **Psa. 127:1; John 15:5; Phil. 4:13; 2 Cor. 13:5.**) We need to learn to be God-conscious! I know that I can do nothing in my self, but I must believe that He can use me. If I can come to the place where I understand that He is able, even if I am not, I can be used of the Lord!

Gideon isn't there yet, so he makes excuses for why he can't do what the Lord is calling him to do. Gideon's excuses are two-fold. He tells the Lord that he did not have *Fortune* or *Fame*. He tells him that he cannot afford to do the Lord's work, and he tells him that nobody knows him.

God specializes in using those who can't to accomplish His work in the world, **1 Cor. 1:26-29**. Look at the evidence:

- He used Abraham a pagan from Ur of the Chaldeans to be the father of the faithful.
- He used Jacob a liar to be the father of the nation of Israel.
- He used Joseph a slave to save the world.
- He used Moses, a shepherd and a murderer to deliver His people.
- He used Jephtah, the sons of a prostitute, to deliver Israel.
- He used an unnamed servant girl to tell Namaan about God.
- He used Esther, a slave to deliver Israel.

- He used Matthew, a tax collector to write about Jesus, the King of the Jews.
- He used Saul of Tarsus to write over one-half the New Testament.
- Israel was crying out for a deliverer, v. 7. God’s answer was Gideon!
- God used all these people, and countless others down through the years, because they were available to Him for His use.
- I challenge you to stop making excuses about why you can’t do what the Lord wants you to do, and just get about doing it. There are some here who should be preaching, get at it! Some should be teaching Sunday School, get at it! Some should be singing in the choir, get at it! Some should be serving in the church, get at it! Others should be telling the world about Jesus, get at it!)

The first thing to notice in the passage above is that the Lord doesn’t answer Gideon’s question about why these things have happened. Maybe because it was obvious in Israel’s case as God had already pointed out through the prophet He sent. But for us, if it is not our own desires and sinful tendencies that have lead us into ‘strife’, then the question of where the trouble comes from is often unanswered as it was with Job.^{5[5]} In these cases, we should learn to leave these things with God and by faith, look for the good that will be worked out of it.

Now Gideon doesn’t exactly feel like the ‘valiant warrior’ that the Lord calls him. And as for him delivering Israel by himself...

crazy talk! In fact Gideon feels more like a weakling than a warrior or someone valiant. ‘You know the entire Manasseh^{6[6]} tribe?’ he says to God... ‘Well my family is bottom of the barrel. Dead last! And in the most insignificant family in Manasseh, yep, I’m the youngest and weakest! You may have bet on the wrong horse I’m afraid!’ Ever felt like that? That you really don’t have anything much to offer God and probably can’t be used?^{7[7]} Well if you have, welcome to the Gideon factor! It just well may be, (if you can get your eyes off yourself^{8[8]}) the very thing which propels you into being a likely candidate!

One God plus one weakling is always a majority in any fight. ‘I will be with you’ God tells Gideon, and that is all that we should ever need to know. (And it is what we should remind ourselves with!) Thankfully, this was enough for Gideon to know and his focus on his own inadequacies was not so deep rooted that it stopped him being obedient. But he certainly wanted this one thing confirmed (quite a few times actually!)

The request for a sign...

Judges 6:17-24 Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me... The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And Gideon did so. With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, “Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!” But the LORD said to him, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.”

So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

v. 16-24 GIDEON'S CONFIRMATION

(Ill. In **verse 16**, the Lord reaffirms His call of Gideon. He tells Gideon that he will be able to destroy the Midianites as if they were just a single man. In other words, the Lord is going to use Gideon in a powerful, wonderful, amazing fashion. All he has to do go with God.

Gideon is still not ready to simply follow the Lord. He wants some proof that it is really God Who is talking with him. Gideon asks for a sign. This will not be the last time he does so!

Thank God we serve a patient Lord. Gideon should have just done what the Lord told him to do. Of course, so should we! God graciously gave Gideon the sign he requested. The following verses talk about it!)

v. 18-21 He Is Confirmed By A Presentation – Gideon wants to make an offering the Lord, which is what the word “*present*” means. The Lord promises to wait until Gideon returns. So, prepares a goat, cakes made from 35 pounds of flour, and a pot of broth. This was a sacrificial offering from a man whose family lived in poverty.

It is amazing to see this transformation in Gideon. When the angel of the Lord found him, he was hiding, trying to protect a small amount of grain, now he willingly gives away a huge meal! Gideon has at least reached a place where he is willing to yield the things he cherishes.

When Gideon presents his offering, he is instructed to place it on a rock. He does so, and when he does, the Lord touches

the offering with the end of His staff. When he does, fire rises out of the rock and consumes the sacrifice.

In receiving the sacrifice as He did, the Lord was teaching Gideon that everything was going to be all right. The Lord used a staff to work this miracle. The staff was an instrument used by a shepherd. He staff was used to comfort, control, protect and lead the sheep. The Lord is telling Gideon that He will be with him to comfort, control, protect and lead him as well. It was a way of teaching Gideon that he need not fear where the Lord would lead him. For where God guides, God provides!

This was also a sign that the Lord had accepted Gideon. God had come to Gideon, called him, commissioned him and accepted his sacrifice. All of this was the Lord's way of telling Gideon that he was going to use him in a great way!

Example: If you want to be used of the Lord, just present yourself to Him and He will use you. His will is that we make an offering like Gideon did. God is not interested in our goats, our cakes and our broth. God is interested in us. He wants us to place everything we are on the altar. He wants us to yield ourselves totally to His will. When we do that, He will use us in ways we can only imagine, **Rom. 12:1-2**. Those verses teach us that by completely yielding ourselves to the Lord, we will be able to recognize His will, which is good, acceptable and perfect.

In other words, knowing the will of the Lord for our lives is as simple as yielding our lives to the Lord. As we give up and we have and all we are, and as we walk with Him, He guides us into His perfect will day by day, just like a shepherd leads his sheep.)

v. **22-24** **He Is Confirmed By A Promise** – Gideon now recognizes just Who he is dealing with. When he does, he is filled with fear and he cries out to the Lord. God responds by speaking peace to Gideon’s heart. He promises Gideon that he will not die! Gideon then builds an altar and worships the Lord. He calls that altar “*Jehovah-Shalom*”, or “*The Lord Our Peace*”.

(III. Gideon found peace in submission and worship. When he submitted to the Lord’s will for his life and when he fell before the Lord in humble worship, Gideon found a place of comfort.

That will still work today! If you want turmoil in your soul, just walk a different path than the one God has planned for your life. If you want sleepless nights and dreary days, just refuse to do what He wants you to do. But, if you want peace, joy and true happiness, you will only find it in surrounding your life to the will of God. Until you do what the Lord wants you to do, you will never know true peace and you will never experience genuine worship. You might as well do what He is telling you to do; He isn’t going to change His mind, **Rom. 11:28.**)

Example: Just looking from the outside, it doesn’t look like Gideon will amount to much in the Lord’s work. He is fearful. He is timid. He is filled with self-doubt. He has more questions than he has answers. However, Gideon is being brought to a place of service. The Lord is willing to take Gideon just like he is and shape him into what He wants him to be. As we will see over the next few weeks that is just what the Lord will do.

What about you? Are you doing what the Lord wants you to do? Have you found that place of service that He saved you to fill, Eph. 2:10? Are you content to stand back while others do all the

work and you watch? Are you fearful? Has He been calling you to do something, but you hold back, making your excuses as to why you can't do what He wants? Is today the day when you will throw up the white flag of surrender and trust the Lord to do His perfect will in your life?

Are you even saved? Today would be a good day to come to Jesus if you are not!

If He is drawing you, on any level, I invite you to be obedient to His voice. Come and let the Lord have his way in your life! Gideon asked for a sign that it really was God that was sending him. Probably fair enough too if you put yourself in his shoes... he was being asked to fight against and defeat the entire Midian army! You sure would want to be sure wouldn't you? Gideon will ask again for a sign before the chapter is out, and again God will graciously respond. We always need to remember that Gideon is not some extraordinary man. He was an ordinary man from an ordinary family in an ordinary tribe. Quite like you and me actually. He was weak enough to cause God to choose him, and obedient enough to follow God's call even amidst doubt and uncertainty. With the divine fire of acceptance falling upon Gideon's offering, it suddenly dawns upon Gideon that He is speaking, face to face, with God! The appearing of the angel of the Lord is not just any old angel but is the pre-incarnate 'goings forth' of the Lord Jesus Himself!^{9[9]} The angel however tells Gideon that he can be at peace and should not fear. And God would say the same thing to you today if you have faith in Jesus and take the time to ask! (And listen of course...)

Judges 6:25-27 That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God

on the top of this height... So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

Before saving the entire nation from the clutches of the enemy (it's starting to sound like a superhero comic!) God has one small priority for young weak Gideon... put your family's house in order! Give that Baal the chop and establish the Lord God of Israel as Lord over this home! It will prove to be the very first step in some extremely quick lessons in obedience. Now, again we see the weak and fearful side of our hero in that being afraid of what might happen, he secretly cuts down the Baal altar at night, under the cover of darkness! Does God scold Gideon for his fear and lack of faith? Not at all! God knows Gideon and you for that matter, better than you know yourself. He knows we are weak and fearful creatures at times and doesn't expect perfection. The lesson and challenge for us however from this passage (especially if you are quite a fearful person) is to not allow your fear to prevent you from being obedient. Easily said I know. But God takes us and teaches us step by step if we will trust Him. Gideon, being weak like us, was fearful, but he still obeyed God's command. You would do well to ask God about this.

When the Lord comes to Gideon, He tells him that he is to be the deliver of Israel. Gideon, like most people, immediately tells God why He is wrong. After losing the argument with Deity, Gideon finds himself worshipping the Lord and waiting for his orders.

As we continue to look at the story of Gideon, we will watch as the Lord prepares him for the mission that lies ahead. God brings Gideon along in a series of small, specific steps that will lead to Gideon achieving big things for the glory of God.

In this passage we will watch Gideon take his first step of faith. We will watch him take a stand against false the false religion that held his village and his family in spiritual bondage.

As we consider how God develops Gideon, we need to take a moment to consider our own lives. The Lord is in the business of developing us as well. In fact, the Lord's intention in our lives is to transform us from lost sinners into the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is what the Bible teaches us about that truth.

- **Ephesians 4:13**, *“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”*
- **Romans 8:29**, *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”*

Let's join Gideon as he enters boot camp. What we learn from observing him can help us successfully navigate our own times of spiritual development. As the Lord gives liberty, I want to preach on ***The Cultivation Of Gideon***. Notice with me the *thoughts* revealed in these verses.

v. 25-26 THE COMMAND GOD DELIVERS

- A. **It Was A Specific Command** – When God speaks to Gideon, it is in the same night that He called him. When God's puts His hand on a life, He does not waste valuable time. He calls people for specific tasks at specific times. When God calls, He commissions and He sends the called ones out to do His will.

The Lord's command to Gideon is very specific. He is told to take his father's "**second bullock**". Evidently, the first bullock had been dedicated to Baal, so the second one is the only one still clean. Gideon is to take that young bull and he is to use it pull down his father's altar to Baal. He is also to cut down the "**grove**" that stands by the altar.

Baal was the Canaanite god of fertility. The Canaanites believed that Baal was responsible for the success or failure of their crops and herds. They did everything in their power to worship Baal and ensure his blessings. The "**grove**" was a pole called the "**Asherah pole**". Asherah was Baal's female consort. Worshippers practiced vile sexual acts near the groves. They believed these acts would bring Baal's favor upon them and their families.

God's command was very specific. He was to tear down the altar and then he was to build a new altar on top of the rock mentioned in **verses 20-21**. Gideon was to build an altar to Jehovah and he was to offer the young bull as a burnt offering to the Lord.

Since altars to Baal were built on top of prominent hills, this was an act that could not be hidden. Everyone would know what Gideon had done. If they didn't miss the altar to Baal, they would see the smoke from the altar on top of the rock.

Note: By the way, God's commands for our lives are not hidden in mystery. His commands for us are just as specific as the commands He gave to Gideon. To find His will, we simply need to read His Word, abide with Him in prayers and walk humbly with Him in His will, **Rom. 12:1-2**. In fact, knowing the will of God is as simple as this: "**He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?**" **Micah 6:8**.

There are times when God will place a specific call on your life. When He does, He will let you know. He will speak through His Word, through His Spirit and through His church to reveal His will for you. Until He does that, just keep walking with Him, worshiping Him, talking to Him, listening to Him, and telling others about Him. When He wants more, He will show you!)

(**Note:** Gideon was to build his altar and make his sacrifice on top of a hill, because God did not want what He was about to do to be hidden away. In the same way, God wants our worship of Him and our service to Him to be done out in the open for all to see. We must never be ashamed of Him and of what He calls us to do. Many are in our day. Very few are vocal and visible in the worship and work for the Lord. We all should be! May He help us to honor Him by the way we worship and the way we work.)

- B. **It Was A Spiritual Command** – God had two purposes in issuing this command to Gideon. First, God intended to demonstrate His superiority over Baal. Gideon would topple Baal’s altar and Baal would be powerless to stop it from happening. Second, God wanted Gideon to know that God would be with him, regardless of the opposition he faced. This was a small step for Gideon, but it proved to him that God would never forsake him when he was doing the Lord’s will.

(III. By the way, God is still accomplishing those same two objectives in our lives. Every time He gives us a command to obey, and we carry it out for His glory, He shows a lost world that He is God and that He is worthy to be worshiped. And, every time He uses us to accomplish His will, He reminds us

afresh that we are not alone. He reminds us that His hand is on our lives for His glory! That is what makes serving Him so special. I don't have to know what I am doing I just have to do what He tells me and He takes care of the rest. When that happens, He is glorified and I am encouraged!

(Note: The main reason that altar had to be torn down was that it was a hindrance to God's work being done in Gideon's family, in his community and in his life. Until that pagan altar was destroyed and the people delivered from the power of Baal, God could not and would not move in power and glory.

The same is true in our lives. Until we take the initiative to rid ourselves of the things that hinder our walk with the Lord we will never see God use us like He wants to, **Heb. 12:1**. By extension, that same principle holds true for the church. If we want God's blessing and power to be upon us and what we do here, we must be clean and free from evil influences.)

- C. **It Was A Simple Command** – This was a command for Gideon to do something that he could do. This was a baby step to prepare him for what he could not do. Gideon had everything he needed to do what God was telling him to do; he merely had to do it. All he had to do was follow God by faith. God was using this simple command to prepare Gideon for something far more difficult. God was preparing Gideon to do things that were impossible. Gideon would have never believed God for the impossible, had he not seen the Lord first work in the possible.

Example: God uses the same strategy with us. When we are first saved, God gives us small tasks that we can accomplish.

Example A: **David** – Before he was called on to face Goliath, he first faced a lion and a bear, **1 Sam. 17:32-37**. Those small victories helped to prepare David for the big battle that was just ahead!

Example B: **Abraham** – He was taught obedience by first leaving home to follow God. After a while, he was ready to believe God for a baby when he was 100, **Gen. 21:1-3**. In just a few more years, Abraham would believe God for a miracle when he was commanded to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, **Gen. 22:5; Heb. 11:17-19**.

Example C: **Peter** - He denied the Lord the first time he was tested, but he learned to stand in faith and preach the Gospel in Holy Ghost power, **Acts 2**. Years later when it came time for Peter to die, he was ready to be crucified upside down.

As we prove faithful in the small things, God assigns us greater tasks. When we do those things by His grace, He leads us to do even greater things. That is how He works in each of our lives. **Luke 16:10**, “*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*”

Our problem is often that we do not do the small things He asks us to do, so we are never used by the Lord to do the greater things. When we will not pray, read the Bible, go to church faithfully, tithe, witness, or serve Him in all the many ways that are available, why should we expect Him to use us in great ways for His glory? He will never use us in great ways, until we first prove trustworthy in the small things of life.)

v. 27 **THE COMPLIANCE GIDEON DISPLAYS**

- A. **Gideon’s Faith On Display** – Without hesitation, Gideon did just as he was told to do. He got ten of his servants to help him and he tore down the altar to Baal and he cut down the grove. It was swift and complete obedience to the command of the Lord.

(III. Would to God we were that willing and ready to do the Lord's will. Would to God that we would jump when He calls and do exactly what He tells us to do without hesitation.

That's not how we typically respond is it? Usually, like Moses, we make excuses why we can't do it. Or, also like Moses, we will suggest that the Lord find someone else to do it. Or, Like Jonah, we run from the call of God, knowing full well that our disobedience dishonors Him, and that He will have His way in the end. May the Lord help us to develop a heart like Isaiah's. When the Lord issued His call in Isaiah's hearing, Isaiah responded by saying, "***Here am I; send me,***" **Isaiah 6:8**. I can't testify for you, but that is where I want to be!)

- B. **Gideon's Fear On Display** – While Gideon demonstrated faith in doing what the Lord commanded; he demonstrated fear in that he did what he did at night. He tried to hide his obedience to the Lord under the cover of darkness. **Verse 26** says "***he could do it by day***". Gideon knew that his father, his brothers and the rest of the village would be angry with him for tearing down the altar to Baal. He knew they would probably try to kill him for it. Gideon had faith, but it was small. He allowed fear to control his actions.

(III. I am sure that most of us would be honest enough to say that we serve the Lord out of fear too. Oh, we have the faith to believe Him for what He wants us to do, but we fear our own failures. We fear the consequences of our decisions. We fear the people who know us and live around us. We fear our own inabilities.

It is good that we have a realistic opinion of our own abilities, but we must never forget that success in the Lord's work is not our responsibility. Like David told Goliath, "***the battle is the Lord's***", **1 Sam. 17:47**. Success in the Lord's work is the Lord's business. Our duty is to submit to Him, allow Him to work through us, and He will accomplish His purposes, **John 15:5; Phil. 4:13** through us.

I've been preaching for 25 years and I still get terrified when it comes time to preach. I have never gotten used to doing what I am doing right now. However, I have reached the place where I think I understand my own limitations. I am not capable of doing this thing He has called me do you, but if I will yield to Him, rest in His power, and allow Him to live through me, the task of preaching is accomplished. I think this was what Paul was talking about in **Gal. 2:20**, when he said, "***I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.***" That is the ultimate secret to success in spiritual service!

Judges 6:36-40 Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

Now lots have been said about this fleece in the past. In fact, think of Gideon and for a lot of people this is all they know! Bit sad really. If you are interested in whether we should 'put out a fleece'

to God, then check the footnote^{10[10]}. The only real thing I want to add is that it again highlights Gideon's uncertainty and God's gracious response in confirming what was being asked of Gideon. God is again kind and will meet us to in our weakness if it is for the purpose of being obedient.

THE CONSEQUENCES GIDEON DEFEATS

(Gideon's actions caused uproar in the community. God was pleased by what Gideon did, but He was the only one! We need to be aware that there will be consequences for our actions. When we serve the Lord faithfully and obediently, He will be glorified, but those around us, who have not received the same call we have received, will not understand what we are doing. Let's take a brief look at the consequences Gideon faced, knowing that we will face similar consequences when we faithfully serve God.)

v. 28-30 THE ENMITY OF THE LOCALS – When the men of the village saw that the altar had been destroyed, they demanded to know who had done it. It wasn't long until they knew that Gideon had destroyed the altar and the grove. When they found out that Gideon had done this, they went to Gideon's father and demanded that Gideon be put to death for daring to defy Baal.

(III. We are deceiving ourselves if we think that everyone is pleased when we obediently serve the Lord. There will be people all around us who will not understand. Family will feel left out. Unspiritual people will feel threatened. Lost people will accuse us promoting ourselves.

David faced opposition, **1 Sam. 17:28, 33**. Jesus faced opposition, **John 7:3-5**. Paul faced this kind of opposition, **Acts 9:26**. It stands to reason that we can expect it too.

Instead of giving in to those who oppose us, we must obediently follow the Lord in spite of all that some would do to stop us. Let us determine that we will be found faithful, regardless of what others do!)

v. 31-32 THE ENSLAVEMENT OF HIS LOVED ONES –

Gideon's father responds to the attack against his son. I love his response to these men. He basically says, "*Will you intercede for Baal? Will you be his savior? If you are still foolish enough to serve Baal, you should be stoned to death as the Law commands! If Baal is really a god, let him come to his own defense. If Baal is real, he shouldn't need you to help him.*"

When Gideon took his obedient stand and honored the Lord's will in his life, God used it to touch his family. The altar of Baal was on Gideon's father's land. It was his idol! When Joash saw the faith of his own son, and the inability of Baal to protect himself, he was converted. He was done with idolatry and he was ready to follow the true and living God. In other words, Gideon's faith was used to deliver his family from spiritual bondage!

Example: The results of your obedience may not be so dramatic, but will use your obedient life to get glory. He could use your obedience to change your family, your church, or your community. As He has in the past, He might use the obedience of a single individual to change the world!

I have seen the salvation of one soul in a family change that entire family. I have witnessed as one after another of the members in that family came to faith in Jesus. I have seen God

take small acts of obedience, like an offering or some act of kindness, and use it to change someone's life. Who knows what He might do if you and I were totally obedient to His will for our lives!)

- v. **27-32** **THE EXPERIENCE HE LACKED** – One of the greatest benefits of this entire event was in the life of Gideon. All Gideon knew was that the Lord was calling him to do a great work. He was afraid and he was unsure how things would work out. As Gideon followed the Lord in this matter, he learned that God would walk with him, protect him and give him victory. That information would serve him well as the tasks he would be called to do grew larger.

Gideon learned on that day that God was able. He learned that God was more powerful than the false gods of the pagans. He learned that God was greater than the enemy. He learned that God would keep His Word and that He would protect His servants. That was valuable information for a future deliverer like Gideon.

Example: When we first start to follow the Lord by faith, we are a lot like Gideon. We are filled with doubts and we are filled with fears. As God leads us along, step by step, and we see Him give victory after victory, we are developed in our faith and we come to trust Him for even greater things in our lives. That is His plan for us, and it is a plan that works!

Some of you are much farther along than you used to be. You are willing to trust the Lord for more than you could have at the first. You are able to believe Him for big things that you could not have trusted Him for when you were first saved. Where did this faith come from? It came from God. It came from seeing Him move the mountains, meet the needs, answer the prayers and lift the burdens. It came from seeing His power at work in and around you. It came because He developed you

step-by-step, day-by-day, and event-by-event. He hasn't finished with you yet! There is more training ahead for you. God still has some altars He wants to see torn down. He still has some work He wants you to do. He still has a plan and He has made you a part of that plan.

Everything that God allows into our lives is a teaching experience. He uses all the events of our lives to teach us about His grace and His power. He uses the valleys and the mountains to train us for greater things. If we learn the lessons and walk in faith, He will use us in ways we never imagined.)

Conclusion : God worked in Gideon's life to train him for a huge task. God cultivated Gideon so that God could use Gideon for His glory.

Did you know that He is working in your life also? Did you know that everything that comes your way is part of the training process? How are you doping with your training?

Is there some idol in your life that needs to be torn down before God can use you like He wants to? Is there some fear that holds you back? Are you willing and available to the Lord for His use? Is He speaking to you about His plan for your life? If He is, come to Him today. Place your will, your life, your all on this altar and watch God use you in a great way!

Conclusion continues....

This study is just the beginning... an introduction into who God loves to use. And that is often people that others may look down on as not being overly useful! God has committed a simple message to simple people so that others may come to know Him. And He will often use the 'strife' of Midian to bring people to the place of weakness where they will totally rely on Him and His grace. This

is what we shall see in the second part of this study where Gideon, fresh from squeezing his fleece out, will have to come against the entire Midian army! Good luck Gideon!

The Message of Judges: Chapter Seven Gideon the Power of Weakness (Part 2)

2 Cor 4:6-7 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

Introduction

It was mentioned in the previous study that God loves to do the Gideon. 'The Gideon' is where God takes weak people and difficult situations, and turns them around for His glory. God has been doing it for thousands of years and He is not about to stop now! We saw in the first study on Gideon that when it came time to deliver Israel from the hand of Midian, God went to the smallest tribe, to the least family within that tribe, and chose the youngest member of that family... namely, our friend Gideon. Something special was obviously on the cards. This study carries on from there, and from Judges Chapter 7, focuses on Gideon's unique victory over Midian and its startling accurate portrayal of New Testament truth.

Let the Battle Begin!

Judges 7:1-2 Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The

LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands...”

So the plans for Operation Smash-Midian are under way. But right from the beginning we see that this is not going to be an ordinary fight! Gideon has rounded up all the men he can find and they are still woefully short on numbers. In all 32,000 men are willing to put their lives on the line in order to help deliver Israel (vs 3). From Judges 8:10 we read the interesting fact that Midian had 135,000 fighting men, so each Israelite would have to take out roughly four Midianites for there to be victory. Pretty long odds you would think and Gideon has reason to be more than a little anxious! You can probably imagine his surprise then, when the Lord finally speaks to him saying ‘Gideon, you’ve got way too many men!’ Have such words ever been heard before going into a battle? What war has there ever been when being hopelessly outnumbered, the word goes forth to cut the numbers down yet again? In the natural it seems absurd! In the spiritual it is the very thing God wants to teach us.^{11[1]}

Judges 7:2-3 In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

So God has decided to make weak Israel even weaker. Now why would God do that? Why does God allow times of weakness... even overwhelming odds at times? It is so that we will be more reliant upon Him and through that, He can show us more of Himself, His work on our behalf, and hopefully prevent us from stealing His glory!^{12[2]} The human heart loves to claim credit for any victory or achievement. If God had allowed Israel to defeat Midian with only a quarter of the number of Midian’s men, then guess who would have got the credit? That’s right... not God. He may have received a bit of token praise, but probably precious little

in the long run... and, it is just slightly possible that you would do the same thing!

Would You Be One Of The 300?

Judges 7:3-8 But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there... So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

We read in the previous verse that all those who were really too fearful to fight were allowed to go home. So 22,000 (over two-thirds!) said ‘thanks, but I’m out of here!’ This was in accordance with the command given through Moses in Deut 20:1-8 where those that were fearful, or those that were engaged but not yet married, could go home if they liked^{13[3]}. But there was soon to be another test. Out of the 10,000 people that remained, 9700 kneeled down and drank straight from the water where as 300 evidently stood, and used their hands to bring the water to their mouth. God was only interested in the smaller group who were more watchful and alert, and didn’t give themselves over completely to their natural needs.^{14[4]} The other thing to note is that the people themselves, all of whom were keen to be used to fight Midian, didn’t even know there was a test going on. Likewise, God tests us, looking for hearts that are truly His, and these tests come in the ordinary events of our daily lives often without our knowing. So in all, 300 people remained... that’s 300 Israelites versus 135,000

Midianites. Israel was outnumbered 450 to 1! Well, outnumbered that is apart from the small fact that Israel had one Almighty God on their side!

Encouragement from a good God!

Judges 7:9-15 During that night the LORD said to Gideon, “Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.” ...Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. “I had a dream,” he was saying. “A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.” His friend responded, “This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.” When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God.

Gideon and his 300 fighters are preparing to attack the camp of 135,000 Midianites. You can imagine what they were thinking... now was not a good time to be walking by sight! But God is incredibly kind here. I like this little passage because it shows the loving-kindness of God in bringing encouragement when His people are placed in a position of utter weakness. I like it because I can vouch for the fact that He still does it! When we need it most God still strengthens our faith through a dream, a verse, a prophetic word or encouragement from a friend. In this instant it came through a dream and its interpretation is clear^{15[5]}... God is going to give Israel victory! And look at Gideon’s reaction – He worshipped God! On the basis of that encouragement the deal was as good as done! He could walk forth in faith, even though in the natural the odds were truly against him. Hold on to the promises and encouragement God gives you in whatever form it takes.

Because it is from God it is as tangible as experiencing the real thing!

The Strange Weapons of our Warfare!

Judges 7:15-18 He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands." Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside. "Watch me," he told them. "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'"

So Gideon divides his 300 men into three companies and gives them their weapons. Put yourself into their position for a sec... You know you're massively outnumbered. I guess you would be hoping for some new flash sword utilising the latest technology? So you take your place in the line and Gideon hands out the weapons... an empty clay jar, a torch, and a trumpet! Oh thanks a lot Gideon! What are we trying to do? Burst their ear drums? Drive 'em crazy by playing off key? Well, we'll get back to these strange weapons that we have been given shortly, but for now it is simply worth noting that with God natural circumstances don't come into it! When you are weak, then He will prove Himself strong!

But We Have This Treasure Within Jars of Clay...

Judges 7:19-21 Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

Finally, Midian starts to receive their just deserts. As the jars are smashed exposing the light of the torches, and the trumpets are frantically blown on every side of the camp, confusion reigns amongst the Midian forces! God is bringing victory over Midian! From all angles a cry goes out saying ‘a sword for the Lord and for Gideon.’^{16[6]} Now, that’s all very well and lovely I’m sure you will agree, but what does it have to do with us right here and right now? You may remember from the first study that Midian means ‘strife’. They stand as a picture of the trouble, trials and well, strife that occurs while living on this planet. Does God still use Midian today?^{17[7]} And if so, what clay jars, torches and trumpets do we use to gain victory today? Good questions and I’m glad you asked them. This passage in Judges has its New Testament fulfilment in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. You are the fragile clay jar; Jesus is the light within that jar; and your testimony to His greatness is the trumpet call you are asked to sound! Please read the following passage and think about it...

2 Cor 4:5-10 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

God has made His light shine in our hearts. It is the light of the presence of the Lord Jesus within our lives^{18[8]}. But this ‘all-surpassing power’ God has placed within jars of clay... us! Fragile human beings – an earthenware vessel which contains the life of

God! But how does this light shine forth? God's light and power is seen in us as cracks appear in the outer jar. Just as Gideon and his army broke their jars to expose the light, so their must be times of weakness which cause a 'cracking' of our normal strength. Paul says it was times when he was... 'hard pressed', 'perplexed', and 'persecuted'. These times when through the power of weakness, 'the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body'. So Gideon, with his limited followers, armed simply with a jar, a torch, and a trumpet, stormed the Midian camp from every side. 300 Israelites versus 135,000 Midianites! Would the light of God and the trumpet call bring victory? (Yep, the questions just keep getting tougher don't they?)

Judges 7:22-23 When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites.

Yeah, ok, there was victory. I know... you knew that already! We shouldn't leave this chapter however without emphasising the last ingredient for true victory over Midian. The jars had been smashed, the light of the torches had been exposed, but it was when the trumpet sounded that the Lord brought victory over the Midianite enemy. Blow the trumpet! Not your own trumpet however. A lot of people blow their own trumpet and while they like the sound it gives, it is definitely way off key for the rest of us! Blow the trumpet of God. Look at how the Apostle Paul wrote it in the passage from 2 Corinthians that we have been looking at – 'For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord.' The testimony and trumpet call that we sound is about Him, not us. In the midst of difficulty, the real and honest testimony about God is an awesome thing. God will speak through it to draw Christians and non-Christians alike.^{19[9]}

Conclusion

In the last two studies we have focused on Gideon and what we have called the ‘power of weakness’. We have seen how God delights in using weak vessels to display His strength and faithfulness. We have also seen that this can often come about in the times when Midian (strife and trouble), is around. Like Gideon, it is daunting and scary when faced with overwhelming odds. Trials are never nice when you are in them, otherwise they wouldn’t be called trials! But we can take heart that God has a purpose for them. It is for the strengthening of your faith and the displaying of His life through you! Each crack in the clay vessel brings forth a little more light! The Apostle Paul said

2 Cor 12:9-10 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

To be honest I can’t say that I ‘delight’ in weaknesses and in hardships. Paul really had learned the reality of what this is all about. But I can look back and say that through difficulties and times of weakness, God has been my strength. And looking back now, I wouldn’t change those times even though at the time they were very difficult. So whether you are currently faced with ‘strife’ or can look back and recall such a time, always remember that God’s power is made perfect in weakness and that God loves to do the Gideon!

References:

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