

Gideon

Welcome everyone! I am both nervous and excited to be worshipping here with all of you at our new location. Excited to see how the Lord will lead us ...but also nervous.. well, because of all this. I mean look around... This hotel, this location.. the work that is ahead of us... it all seems **SO BIG** to me. I'm sure that some of you can relate.

So with all that going on in my mind... as I was thinking and praying of what might be something appropriate to preach on this Sunday.. I was reminded of the story of Gideon and his 300 men.

For those of you who aren't familiar with the story, let me lay out some context for you... The two great leaders of Israel, Moses and Joshua.. have passed away. God, through Moses, had delivered the people from slavery.. and after 40 years of wandering in the desert, Moses had brought the people to the front steps of the Promised Land... From there, Joshua, his successor, led the people of God as they conquered and drove out the evil nations occupying the lands...

Enter the book of Judges... The nation of Israel is with no leader or king. Moses is dead. Joshua is dead. And there is no successor. And so, what happens is people begin doing what was evil in God's eyes...I have the verse references up on the overhead prepared for you... In fact, if you take a look.. There were too many verses for me to fit into one slide... It wasn't blatantly **SINFUL** at first... they just started doing what was convenient for them... they began doing what was **RIGHT** in their own eyes... and slowly but surely, they stopped reading their Bibles and they began neglecting **GOD** altogether And soon enough... they became just as evil... if not more so, than the pagan nations that they had driven out. In fact, the book of Judges is filled with strong language and imagery of how Israel began **WHORING** after other gods...

And in response, God, who is **JEALOUS** for His Name and His people... would give them over to their oppressors. But again and again... its this cycle that repeats in the book of Judges... Israel sins. Israel is oppressed. Israel cries out to the Lord for mercy... And God raises up these leaders called judges to deliver them from their enemies.

Gideon was the fifth of such judges.

The people had sinned. AGAIN! They had just been delivered from their enemies... and as soon as they were delivered, they began SINNING and doing what was right in their own eyes... So God... hands them over to the Midian army and naturally, the people start feeling sorry about their sin... But instead of SAYING - OK THAT'S IT! THAT'S THE LAST STRAW. I have had JUST ABOUT ENOUGH WITH YOU!!! I don't WANT TO HEAR YOUR WHINING AND COMPLAINING EVER AGAIN! INSTEAD OF THAT, God begins to set in motion this plan to DELIVER them.

He approaches Gideon in Judges 6:14 and says, "“Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” But Gideon replied... "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? I’m from the weakest clan in Israel, and I am the least in my father’s house." BUT, the Lord said to him in verse 16... Gideon. I know you are from the weakest clan. And I know you are the burnt of the pack.. But I will be with you. I WILL BE WITH YOU. and you shall strike the Midianites .

So that's God's PLAN. He goes to the weakest clan then picks out the runt of the pack to SAVE Israel from this MASSIVE ARMY... Why? Because God isn't interested in raising up superheroes. What God wants to HIGHLIGHT is HIS POWER and HIS SUFFICIENCY, not Gideon's ability.

Now, here is where the story gets fun. By Judges 7... Gideon had somehow managed to gather 32,000 men to fight alongside him! But on the other hand... the Midianite army had joined forces with the Amalekites AND ALL the EASTERN clans so that their camels - camels were the calvary back then - so that their camels WERE WITHOUT NUMBER! That's a fancy way of saying, TOO MANY TO COUNT! And their infantry? As numerous as the sand on the seashore! In other words, Gideon and his 32000 men were HEAVILY outnumbered.

So what's God's next step?

Judges 7:2 "The Lord said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand? WHAT? Gideon you have TOO MANY

PEOPLE WITH YOU! I won't help you win the war lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'WE DID IT OURSELVES!'

So God tells Gideon "send everyone home who was trembling with fear." One by one, the people start leaving.. until only 10,000 men remained... But God says - THATS STILL WAY TOO MANY... So this time, he has all the men drink water from this river and everyone who knelt down to drink was sent home....

That left three hundred men. 300 hundred men against the ENTIRE EASTERN ARMY...

And God was FINALLY CONTENT... OK. Now you are WEAK enough and SMALL ENOUGH for me to do great things through you.

But Gideon wasn't convinced... For those of us who know the story, we know that Gideon had tested God and asked for miraculous CONFIRMATIONS back in chapter 6.... And God had given them to him. But even after all that, Gideon was still not sure...

So on the night of the battle, God comes to Gideon and says to him

Arise! and go down against the camp, for I have given them into your hands. But if you are afraid, Here is option 2: sneak down to their camp and you will hear something that will encourage your heart and give you confidence!

Well, Gideon took option two. AND that is SO ENCOURAGING FOR ME.. Because you see.. That's ME! I'm an option two kind of guy... And its so encouraging to see that God is merciful to people like me.... people who need extra signs or encouragement and do not have the courage to ACT immediately.

In God's mercy and patience, He was willing to give a remarkable dream and a perfectly TIMELY interpretation of that dream in order to encourage Gideon that God was in this. Look at verses 13-14: "When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat." 14 And his

comrade answered, "This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp."

How amazing is that? And although people haven't been having dreams about me, I cannot tell you how encouraged I have been during the past month as people prayed for me and told me how they see the Lord is at work in Bridge Community Church and that I don't need to fear...

Anyways, back to Gideon! After hearing of this dream that the Mideonites were having... **ALL FEAR IS GONE!** Gideon is **PUMPED UP AND READY!** And so, that very night... He wakes up **ALL HIS MEN**...And he hands each of them... **NOT SWORDS... BUT A TRUMPET** and torches inside an empty jar...

And he has them line up evenly around the hills that surrounded the Midianite camp.

The plan was to take the hundreds of thousands of men by surprise... they would hide the torches for as long as possible... And when they got close enough, they would all break their jars... in unison and cry out for the **LORD** and for **GIDEON** as they blew there trumpets.

Remember, its the middle of the night... most of the people are asleep. So imagine the **SHOCK** when suddenly, you are rattled awake by **THE NOISE OF 300 TRUMPETS** and **300 TORCHES APPEARING** in the night sky! All around you... And in the midst of that **CONFUSION**... God got to work.

Verse 22 writes that the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. Such was this spirit of confusion that engulfed the camp that they began killing one another as they retreated before Gideon and his 300 men!

And it was made clear... to everyone that night that it was the **LORD** who had given them the victory!

That's the whole point of the story. God wants to make sure that we and everyone saw that God got the victory, not Gideon.

And that is going to be the story of Bridge Church moving forward. God is going to do some crazy things.. and we are going to squirm and worry... BUT its all part of the plan. He is orchestrating everything so that when people look at our church, they are going to say “GOD GAVE THEM THE VICTORY!”

But the story does not end there... Gideon's phenomenal success story won the hearts of the people and so they tried to crown him as their KING! RULE OVER US, they said... RULE OVER US FOR YOU HAVE DELIVERED US FROM THE HAND OF MIDIAN..

But Gideon replies... I will not rule over you. Don't you get it guys.. It wasn't ME... Don't PUT YOUR TRUST IN ME!!! IT WAS GOD WHO SAVED YOU! AND ITS GOD WHO YOU SHOULD PUT YOUR TRUST IN!

IN THE SAME WAY... no spiritual leader...that includes me... NO SPIRITUAL LEADER SHOULD DIVERT your ATTENTION AWAY FROM GOD WHO RULES OVER ALL AND GIVES THE VICTORY. DON'T GET LOST IN ALL THE ACTION! Its easy to DEPEND on a leader that produces AMAZING RESULTS - BUT GOD WANTS YOU TO DEPEND ON HIM!

Let me say it again. IT IS GOD. NOT GIDEON. NOT GIDEON. NOT GIDEON. NOT GIDOEN. NOT GIDEON. IT IS GOD! THAT gives us the victory.

Finally, let me end by stepping back from all this talk about how God will WORK and remind us of what God has already DONE FOR US. Because if I, or anyone else, were to end a sermon about Gideon on that note...you might as well attend a Jewish synagogue.. because you would hear the exact same message. Of how God will WORK for us... But our, Christianity's focus is ALWAYS on what HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE FOR US 2000 YEARS AGO!!! On the cross.

You see.

No matter how amazing and flamboyant the story of Gideon may seem, we have to remember that he was the fifth judge. That means there were judges before him...

and judges after him... that had to constantly RESCUE God's people from their enemies ... WHY? Because the people of Israel were enslaved to their sin.

In fact, let me read for you Gideon's legacy. Judges 8:33

"As soon as Gideon died. Mark that. As SOON AS GIDEON DIED... the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god."

How can that BE??? After ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE???

That's because in the eyes of the Israelites, the problem was the Midianites. It was the Philistines. It was the Roman Empire. THEY WERE NEVER THE PROBLEM. It was always SOMETHING OUTSIDE of them.

But time after time after time, they failed to GRASP that the PROBLEM WAS INSIDE of them. They would sin. God would hand them over to their enemies. .. The people would repent.. And God would raise up a leader to SAVE THEM... And as SOON as Gideon DIED.. the people turned again to their WHORING.

That's a graphic yet ACCURATE description of the enslaving POWER OF SIN. It turns us INTO WHORES.

By the way. That's the story of our lives, isn't it? We sin. And we suffer from our sin. Sometimes God disciplines us. And we cry out for mercy... And God SAVES us. But once we are home free, what do we do? We sin again.

BUT.. here's where the GOOD NEWS KICKS IN! According to the GOSPEL - WE ARE FREE IN CHRIST! We are no longer SLAVES TO SIN!

When you read through the book of Judges, it hard not JUDGE the Israelites.. I mean they are LIKE MORONS .. Almost every other chapter begins with the words AND THEY SINNED AGAIN.. OR THEY FORGOT THE LORD AGAIN! I mean, SO SOON! But that's the power of sin. IT ENSLAVES US AND CAUSES US TO BECOME UTTER FOOLS!

But Jesus - JESUS did what no judge could ever do. He not only saved us from our enemies, BUT HE DESTROYED the grave and CONQUERED SIN! Christ has died for US... WHATS MORE... Not only did JESUS DIE FOR US, the Bible makes it clear that we have DIED ON THE CROSS WITH HIM... We have been CRUCIFIED with CHRIST... so that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the LIFE I NOW LIVE in the flesh, I live by faith... BY FAITH... I live BY FAITH in the Son of GOD, who LOVED ME and gave Himself for me. We DIE with CHRIST, and we have BEEN RAISED TO NEW LIFE WITH HIM!

Brothers and sisters. God, in Gideon, conquered the entire Mideonite army with 300 men.. And I look forward to see what God will do through our small flock in this new location... But in our anticipation... of what God will do for us in the future, let us not LOSE SIGHT of what He has already done for us in JESUS CHRIST - lest we become like the Israelites...

Jesus has ALREADY given us victory over the legions of hell and has SET us free from SIN! So for every one look we take into the future, let us look 10 TIMES BACK into the past and ground ourselves upon that hill on which Christ was crucified.

Lets pray.