

GOD CALLS GIDEON

Judges 6:1-8:32

Key Verse: 6: 14

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midians's hand. Am I not sending you?"

In today's passage, God calls a man named Gideon to deliver his suffering people. Gideon was reluctant at first to respond to the call of God. He did not always possess strong faith and like all of us he had many weaknesses. And he made all kinds of excuses as to why he couldn't do what God was calling him to do. God had to patiently work with him and put up with all his fears and excuses to prepare him for leadership. Let's pray that through this passage we may also accept God's calling and vision for us so that we may be great spiritual warriors for this generation.

I. "THE LORD IS WITH YOU, MIGHTY WARRIOR" (6:1–32)

Look at verse 1. *Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.* From last week's message, we found that the Israelites were not living life as God intended it to be lived. Instead of being faithful and obedient to the Lord, they forsook the Lord, they went after other gods, and they intermarried with the Canaanites. God wanted them to live a life that would reflect his glory that all the nations would ask, "What is it about the Israelites? God seems to bless everything they do." But because of compromise and disobedience, Israel ended up in bondage and captivity over and over again. By the time we get to the story of Gideon in chapter 6, Israel had already experienced 43 years of suffering under the harsh rule of the neighboring nations. Yet they still had not learned their lesson.

This time God used the Midianites as his rod to discipline his children. Allied with the Amalekites and other eastern people, the Midianites came every year at the time of harvest and devastated the land. They stole everything that had been grown during the year and drove the Israelites into the mountains. The Israelites were forced to retreat to caves with only small portion of food that they could carry with them. The Midianites and their allies destroyed everything in sight and left, only to return at the following year. These repeated invasions brought the Israelites into not only material but also psychological ruins. They were physically and psychologically living in caves. Even during the months of the year when no enemy could be seen the Israelites knew that attack and defeat were coming. Finally they cried out to the Lord for help.

The first response of the Lord to the cry for help of his people is to send a prophet. Let's read verses 7-10 together. *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."*

Through this unnamed prophet God reminded them of the wonderful way he had delivered them from Egypt. He also reminded them of his generosity in giving them the land and helping them overcome their enemies. Verse 7 says that the Israelites cried to the Lord because of Midian, but the prophet said their problem was their worship of Baal. The reason that they are weakened before their enemies and unable to deal with their problems is that they chose to worship and put their faith in something other than the true God. As a result, they had become hollow and ineffective and were easily overwhelmed.

After helping his people to know what their real problems were, God called one person to deliver his people. Look at verse 11. *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.* The angel of the Lord came to Gideon when he was hiding down in a winepress to thresh wheat. Normally people use an open place to thresh wheat where the winds would blow away the chaff. Then why was Gideon hiding in a winepress and threshing wheat in such an uncomfortable way? Was it some kind of new technology to thresh wheat? So he didn't want anybody to see it. Verse 11b says that it was because he was afraid of the Midianites. He was desperately trying to save a little bit of food that he had hidden from the Midianites. This is not the picture of a courageous hero, it is the picture of a defeated, discouraged man, filled with doubts and fears. The repeated invasion and defeat made this young man hopeless and visionless.

But how did God see him. Let's read verse 12 together. *When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."* Gideon must have looked up and looked around, "Where is this mighty warrior?" God didn't listing the sins of Gideon and itemizing his failures. He didn't start with any negatives at all. Rather he called him, "You, Mighty warrior!" Who are the mighty warriors. They are the people who are not afraid of death. They are the people who can fight against hundred and thousand enemies and win the victory. "You, Mighty warrior!" This was God's hope and vision for Gideon. In spite of his current weaknesses, God saw great potential and possibility in him.

Here we learn that how we see ourselves is very important. Gideon thought he was a hopeless and ordinary man, but God said he was a mighty warrior. When God called Abraham, he was an ordinary old country man without any children. But God helped him until he finally accepted vision to become a source of blessing and father of all nations through his babysitting and encouragement and even sometimes through rebuking. God even changed his name from Abram, which means "noble father", into "Abraham", which means "father of all nations." God called Peter "Rock" when he was unstable. When we live a life of faith, we often put a lot of our interest in our achievements and the blessings we have. But how other people see us or even how we see ourselves are not that important. The real important thing is to know how God sees us and how we live a life according to God's vision for us. If you think you are just ordinary salary man or housewife, then you will live such ordinary life. But if you accept God's vision and hope for you, then God will bless your life and your name great.

Then how did Gideon react to the angel's greeting? Look at verse 13. *"But sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our father 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."* When Gideon looked at his and his people's current situation, he couldn't believe God had been with him. But how did God answer this question? Let's read verses 14 and 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?"*(14) *The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."*(16) God never forgot nor abandoned his people. He was always with his people and looking for a person who could humbly accept his call and save his people. When God was with Gideon, no matter what kind of humble background or human weakness he had, he would be a mighty warrior and strike down all the Midianites.

Look at verses 17-24. Gideon asked for a sign to assure him that it was really the Lord who was speaking to him and the Lord was gracious to accommodate himself to Gideon's unbelief. Gideon prepared a sacrifice, which was a costly thing to do at a time when food was rare. God waited for him to return and then consumed the offering by bringing fire from the rock. The sudden appearance of the fire and disappearance of the visitor convinced Gideon that indeed he had seen God and spoken to Him.

Look at verses 25-32. That very same night, God gave Gideon his first assignment. God told him to destroy the altar dedicated to Baal, build an altar to the Lord, and sacrifice one of his father's valuable bulls, using the wood of the Asherah pole for fuel. Obviously, this was a tough assignment. Especially in light of the fact that Gideon's own family was involved in Baal worship. The tearing down of the Baal altar and the pagan idols was more than just a "statement," and more than just an "act of courage." It was a very real step of spiritual renewal, repentance, and recommitment to the Lord. That's evident the next morning when the townspeople, after an initial outburst of anger, decided themselves to renew their commitment to the Lord. Look at verse 31. *Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.* Joash and the other townspeople realized that they had been worshiping not a god but a human construction. Gideon's first step in battle had been one of spiritual renewal, for himself and for his townspeople. How did you begin today? Today is your battlefield as a Christian. How did you begin your battle? Did you begin by worrying about all things that you have to do today? Did you begin by wondering how you'll get it all done? Or did you begin by turning to God for direction and renewal? Ephesians 6:10 tells us to "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." Let us pray that we may allow the Holy Spirit to prepare us spiritually, mentally, and emotionally for the battle that is ahead of us everyday.

II. GIDEON AND HIS 300 MEN (6:33-8:32)

The Midianites and their allies made their annual invasion about that time as more than 135,000 men moved into the Valley of Jezreel. It was time for Gideon to act,

and the Spirit of God gave him the wisdom and power that he needed. Gideon blew the trumpet first in his own hometown, and the men of Abiezer rallied behind him. Then he sent messengers throughout his own tribe of Manasseh as well as the neighboring tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Thus at Gideon's call, 32,000 men responded. But compared with the 135,000 enemies, the 32,000 men looked too small. So, before he led the attack, Gideon asked God to give him two more signs. Gideon set out the fleece the first night, and it came back exactly as he's asked. But still he was not so sure. So he made a second request of God: "Will you reverse the process-make the ground wet and the fleece dry?" During his two days of struggling to believe, Gideon developed an increased fear of God. And his faith grew as a result.

Look at verses 7:1-7. What was God's instruction as Gideon and his men prepared to fight against the Midianites? *The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her" (2).* Thirty-two thousand men appeared to have no chance of winning a battle against the Midianites and their superior weapons. But God told Gideon that he had too many men. What did God want to teach Gideon and his people through this battle? First, he wanted to plant faith. Probably Gideon thought they needed more soldiers to win this battle. But God cut his army by two-thirds, from 32,000 to 10,000, later 10,000 to 300. God wanted to know he was really depending on God or on his big army. God wanted them to know that deliverance didn't depend on the number of soldiers but on God. Faith is exercised when we don't have any tangible things to depend on. People tend to depend on something else such money, ability, knowledge than on God. So God often puts us in a situation that we feel overwhelmed, so that our fear is exposed and our dependencies are revealed. This is way God helps us to depend on him instead. Second, he wanted to reveal his glory through this battle. The only interest of Gideon and the Israelites was to win the battle and live a peaceful life. But God knew that they would be proud and immediately go back to their old idolatry and sinful lives if they won the battle with big army and their strength. By delivering them with his mighty power, God wanted his people to remember his grace and mercy and live holy and faithful life

Then what did God say to Gideon to reduce his army? Let's read verse 3 together. *"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. God ordered anyone who trembled with fear to go back home. This battle was not only for the nation of Israel but also for the glory of God. But the twenty-two thousand men didn't have any fighting spirit to fight for the glory of God. They worried more about themselves than about the future of the nation Israel. After 22,000 fearful soldiers left, the rest were separated by how they drank water. The vast majority of them knelt down and drank water from the stream directly. But a small number stood up alertly, cupped the water in their hands, and lapped it from their hands. What was the problem of the 9,700 men who knelt down and drank water? They were courageous and had great desires to fight for the glory of God, but they didn't have strength to control their physical desires. Outwardly they looked strong but actually they were weak men because they couldn't overcome themselves. Compared with the 135,000 enemies, 300 looked

small. But they were chosen people and committed people. God wants such courageous and committed men and women of mission.

Look at verse 9. *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."* But after he got his first glimpse of the numerous Midianite armies, Gideon's heart began to tremble again. So God gave him another sign. God told Gideon to go down against the Midianite camp and overhear the conversation of two soldiers. God had given one of the soldiers a dream, and that dream told Gideon that God would deliver the Midianites into his hand. Gideon was a new man when he and his servant returned to the Israelite camp. His fears and doubts were gone. He returned to the camp and called out "Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands," (7:15)

Gideon's plan was simple but effective. He gave each of his men a trumpet to blow, a jar to break, and a torch to burn. They would encircle the enemy camp, with the torches inside the jars and their trumpets in their hands. At Gideon's signal, the men would blow the trumpets, break the pitchers, reveal the lights, and then shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" Gideon led his small army from the Spring of Harod to the Valley of Jezreel, where they all took their places around the camp. At Gideon's signal, they all blew their rams' horns, broke the jars, and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" Finding themselves surrounded by sudden light and loud noises, the Midianites assumed that they were being attacked by a large army, and the result was panic. The Lord intervened and put a spirit of confusion in the camp, and the Midianites began to kill each other. Then they realized that the safest thing to do was flee. Thus they took off on the caravan route to the southeast with the Israelite army pursuing. Gideon sent out a call for more volunteers. The original army of 32,000 responded to Gideon's call, and tribe of Ephraim came to his aid. That day a hundred and twenty thousand of swordsmen of the Midian fell and the Israel won the great victory.

Gideon and his men were exhausted and hungry after the great battle, but they pursued the enemy kings. They were determined to fulfill the mission that God gave them. When they were pursuing the enemy, they were met with criticism by the Ephraimites and indifference by the people of Succoth and Peniel. Likewise we often have to overcome criticism and indifference in our spiritual battles. Gideon was a man of his times. He tried his best to do right things. But he also made mistakes. He had good intentions, but his golden victory trophy became an idol later.

In today's passage, we learned how God raised up a fearful and hopeless young man named Gideon as a mighty warrior and great leader for the Israelites. May God raise up many spiritual soldiers who are willing to trust God to do great things for his glory. May God help us to accept his vision and hope for us and to be raised up as a kingdom of priest and holy nation!