

The Power of 1%
3-Year Bible Reading Plan
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Bible Text: Judges 7
Preached On: Sunday, October 13, 2019

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For those of you who may not be aware, I'm somewhat of an old soul in an ever-increasingly aging body, but nonetheless an old soul. I can't hear that song without hearing George Beverly Shea singing in my ear. I remember I was at a Billy Graham crusade many years ago and because of those I knew and that which I was doing, I had access to being backstage and old George Beverly Shea was sitting by himself on a bench, nobody was talking to him, nobody was conversing with him, everybody was wanting, obviously, to have a word with Billy. So I went and sat by George Beverly Shea and I introduced myself and if you don't know, he's a very large man, and we began to talk and I was obviously much younger then, and he said, "Son," he said, "how do you know who I am?" And I said, "Well, I was raised on 'I'd rather have Jesus.'" He goes, "Then you were raised right."

Tonight I want to encourage you to do two things. 1. We're going to be in the book of Judges, but before we do that, I want you to take that hymnal out again. Now don't get scared, I'm not gonna lead us in another song. I want you to go back to hymn 379. We sang this hymn just a few moments ago and I want to point something out that you may not be aware of, I'm sure many of you are, but then I want to address something that I know you're probably not aware of. 379, I want you to look at the third stanza, first verse, "While we try to preach the word." It doesn't have a whole lot of confidence, does it? In other words it's saying, "God, we struggle at this. We're not very good at it. While we try to preach the word." Can we just say that that's not a real affirming question there? It's not a real affirming statement. Why would this great old hymn question, or shall we say, declare the difficulty in preaching the word of God? I want you to go to the very bottom and I want you to notice it says, "Words by George Atkins and music by William Moore." I have no idea who William Moore is but I know who George Atkins was, he was a Methodist preacher and a lot of times when you look at the bottom of the page, the words will be written by a personality and the music by a different one, and this old soul back in the day, many of the words of our hymns were written by the preachers and then the music was written by the musicians, and they merged their skills and their talents together. Why is that important to the story of Gideon in the book of Judges? Because it was a pastor, it was a man who regularly stood up before the people of God to declare the counsel of God who made the statement even though it is a rhetorical question, "While we try to preach the word." It was a pastor who questioned his own qualifications. It was

a pastor who questioned his own abilities, and dare I say, a pastor who was much after the heart of Gideon.

When we turn to the book of Judges 6 through 8, we discover that Gideon was a God-called judge. You say, "Why would you call him a God-called judge?" Because there's a lot of mom-called pastors, wife-called pastors, I'm scared of the real world-called pastors. For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, I have people come into my office all the time who feel like God has called them into ministry and I feel like it is my job to be the cold water on their hot flame of love. That's my job. You say, "Why would you do that?" Because if I can't talk you out of it, then maybe God actually called you to it. The first thing I encourage young men to do is run, run away and run fast because the two most miserable people in the world are those who God called to preach and they're not doing it, and those who God never called to and that's what they do.

Gideon, like George Atkins, was a God-called preacher and a God-called judge because the last thing he wanted to do was what God called him to do. I get real nervous when people get real excited about what God's called them to do because rarely does God call anyone to earthly worldly success. I have a pastor friend of mine that says that ministry is born out of misery. Well, that's exactly what Gideon experienced. His story, though we know it as a story of victory, is really a story of misery from beginning to the end.

As we look at the story of Gideon tonight, I want to address four areas of his life and ministry, not just him as an individual but the Israelites as a whole, and how it impacts us, and I've entitled it "The Power of 1%." Why? Because it was only 1% of the people that the Lord needed to accomplish his purpose. That's why in 1 Corinthians, which we're going to begin reading this week, it says that very few are called. Much like Samson's hair this morning, the Lord doesn't need a whole lot quantitatively to do a whole lot qualitatively.

So in the book of Judges, there are four things that we see in Gideon's life that I want to unpack tonight. The first one is this: that it always starts with a man; the second is, then it proceeds to becoming a mission. There is the possibility that that mission can become a machine and unfortunately when it becomes a machine, it ends with a monument. I'll explain all that very briefly in just a moment but chapter 6 is the calling of Gideon. Gideon was so called by God but yet so nervous about his calling, it actually took two signs, two signs for the Lord to get his attention. In chapter 6, verses 12 through 22, the Lord asked him to place a certain set of ingredients upon a rock and upon his staff touching those ingredients, they were consumed.

Now you understand that when a sign takes place in the Bible much like the rainbow in the Noah story, or a virgin conceiving in the book of Isaiah, it is something that only God can do. It cannot be replicated or imitated by man. But the most famous sign is found beginning in verse 36 of Judges 6, it says,

36 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, 37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if

the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. 38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. 39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. 40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

When I make the declaration that it starts with a man, I am presupposing for our context that everything in our life of faith begins with the man Christ Jesus, but as we begin to look at the early apostles, as we begin to look at the early church, as we even look at our contemporary world today, God always does that which he did in Gideon's life, he calls a man who believes himself to be unworthy to do that that only the Lord can accomplish.

One of the best definitions that I've ever heard of a minister of the Gospel is that we, and I put myself in that position, are merely a conduit or a piece of pipe. The entire task of a minister is to connect God to his people, that's it, and to get out of the way and let God do what he does best. That's exactly what Gideon is called to do. He was nervous about it, I would say he was probably scared about it, but the Lord put his hand upon him and called him with two very distinct signs: the food upon the rock and, obviously, the dew upon the fleece and the ground.

We get to chapter 7 and there's the famous mission. I'm gonna begin reading in verse 1, we're just gonna read the first six verses. It says,

1 Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. 3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. 4 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6 And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand

to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

Now I hope that many of you are familiar with this famous story in the Bible that Gideon is going to begin a series of campaigns in which they will face people by the dozens of thousands and yet attain victory with 300 people, 300 men.

Now we see in these first six verses of chapter 7 something that can, shall we say, taint the mission. Why did the Lord take it from 32,000 to 300? Well, his reason is real simple: he did not want man ever getting the credit. He did not want Israel thinking, "Somehow we deserve this victory or we are worthy of this victory," and the same goes for ourselves today. The Lord has a way of making it to where none of us could ever take credit for what the Lord does.

But I do want to talk about the paring down of the numbers as far as the mission of God is concerned not just in our life individually but also our lives corporately as a body of faith. The Lord's first "litmus test" was, "Anybody who's scared, go home. It's okay. Don't worry about it. It's not personal. Just go on home." Does it strike you odd that two out of every three guys took off? They went from 32,000 to 10,000. And we're not given the reasons, we're not told what the motivation was or what the exact concerns were, all we know is that two-thirds of the people said, "I'm out," and they went back to their homes.

Now again, we don't know specifically why or what but I think one of the things that we see when it comes to the mission of God in our lives is that we need not be people of compromise. Let me define what compromise is. Compromise is when you trade an eternal truth for a temporary blessing. That's exactly what these men were, they would rather have the fruit of this world than the battle being won by the Lord. Now I know they were fearful and scared or whatever it may be, but they thought that the Lord's battle was not nearly as important as whatever they had waiting for them at their homestead, and that's exactly what compromise is, when we'd rather please the flesh, whatever that may be, versus follow through what the Lord has called us to do.

And the second time he gathers 10,000 down by the river and he has them drink the water, and the Lord separates them by the means and the ways of which they drink the water. Now there's been a lot of conjecture about why the Lord chose these 300 versus the other 9,700 and oftentimes I think we try to read strategy and such into it, but when the Lord's gonna take 300 people in to fight tens of thousands without loss of life, I don't know if military strategy can be read into the passage, but I do know what can be read and that's the issue of carnality. You say, "What do you mean carnality?" Interesting that those who were chosen who were those who were more interested in looking across the valley than looking at the water. In other words, oftentimes the mission of God gets thwarted because we're more interested in pleasing our flesh than we are pleasing the Lord.

So we get down to 300 men who collectively are more interested in God having victory than them having earthly pleasure, and are more interested in seeing what God is doing out there than satisfying the flesh's cravings that possessed them. Here's the problem: everything goes great all throughout chapter 7 and half of chapter 8, but I want you to notice what happens beginning in chapter 8, verse 22. Gideon and his mighty 300 on the verge of retirement, actually Gideon's on the verge of death, which can we just honestly say is retirement, and beginning in verse 22 in chapter 8 it says,

22 Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

Now I want to stop there for just a moment. I used this analogy that it starts with a man, then it begins a mission, but it can become a machine. What a machine is, is you simply feed the proverbial beast just to keep the system in place. Notice what they said, "We want you, your son and your son's son." In other words, this is comfortable. This is good. We like what's happening. We don't ever want it to change.

We pick it up in verse 23,

23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you. 24 And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25 And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. 26 And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks. 27 And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

You know, Gideon is listed in chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews. By the way, I had someone come up to me today between services and say do I think that Samson made it to heaven, I mean, after all, life went really south until we got to the very end, right? And I don't know who is and who isn't but I do know this, in Hebrews 11 in the Hall of Fame of Faith, Samson is listed and so I'm just gonna presume that all is well and he and I can enjoy each other for all of eternity. Gideon is mentioned as well but it doesn't end well, does it? In fact, he takes all of this gold, he takes all these material items and he creates an ephod, he creates that which they lusted after and trusted in more than God himself.

You see, what happened to Gideon's 300 and to the Israelites as a whole, is rather than having the Lord rule over them, rather than having the Lord direct them, they began to just perpetuate a machine, "Let's just keep what we got going," and they took all the

resources of the past victories and put them into that which was focused on instead. Here's the problem: if we ever get in machine-mode, we end up becoming a monument. I want you to go down to verse 33,

33 And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.

Let me define for you what a monument is. A monument is that in which sometimes can be displayed physically but it is always accepted emotionally, where we talked about what it used to be rather than what it currently is. You know, every family of faith is subject to this system. You want evidence? Read the first couple of chapters of the book of Revelation. There's the church at Ephesus, the church at Smyrna, the church at Thyatira, even the church of Laodicea that today are simply relics and monuments of days gone by. Local bodies have risen and gone, denominations have risen and trickled away, Israel rose to the forefront of God's favor and then they ended up worshipping Baal and lusting after a piece of gold shaped as an ephod.

Unfortunately, this little strata rings true in our personal lives as well. How easily we become a believer in the man Christ Jesus and we begin to get on mission with God. We're more interested in what God thinks than anybody else could conceive, but pretty soon we just get in a pattern of just keeping the machine going and we go through religious exercises and we check off boxes and pretty soon we end up in a life talking about what God did 30 years ago and not what he's doing now. If you must know, this was the madness behind the method of the Bible reading plan. I don't want us to become people who say, "Oh, when I went through Master Life. Or years ago when I was in a certain class, or years ago when this happened." What I want us to be a people who say, "Today I read Judges and it changed my life. And tomorrow I'm gonna read 1 Corinthians and it changed my life." I'm not here to call out names or point fingers, but it's easy for us as a group and even as individuals to get in this machine mentality.

Now I will daresay we're not a monument collectively or personally, because I don't see us recollecting about days gone by, but it's easy to become a machine, it's easy to go through the motions, it's easy, it's Sunday morning, you just do what you do and Sunday night you do what you do, and sometimes you don't know why you did it, you just did it. So how do we get back to a mission focused walk with the Lord? Sometimes you've gotta go backwards.

One of my favorite books of recent days and I'm gonna go ahead and qualify this for those of you who are gonna go Google it, it is not a Christian-based book, it is not written by a believer at all, but it is called "The Plateau Effect," and it is a book written about what happens in systems and in sports and in business and such when entities, and by the way this can be taken personally as well, hit a plateau where they just, they can't progress, and they just kind of stay at the same level and they just go through the motions, and one of the things that this book points out is this: that those who have been

successful of attaining greater things in days ahead that even days past were those who took a step backwards.

Let me unpack that real quick before we close. My favorite example in that book is a man by the name of Derek Jeter. If you're not familiar with Derek Jeter, he was the shortstop for the New York Yankees for many years. I'm not a part of those who do the voting system but most likely will be a Hall of Fame candidate in the days ahead. Derek Jeter was an aging shortstop. Now when you say aging in Major League baseball, you do realize once you pass age 30, you're old in Major League baseball. He was quickly aging and he was not as quick as he used to be and one of the problems with Derek Jeter as a fielder as outlined in this book, not by my personal observation, is that he did not move to his left as well as he moved to his right. Now that's a problem if you're a shortstop, right? If a ball is hit up the middle, you have to move to your left. If a ball is hit to second base and there's a man on first, you have to move to your left to turn the double play. And as he aged physically, his movement to his left was starting to suffer so much so that he was concerned that his playing days were going to draw to a close.

So he got together with some consultants and some experts and they began to review the film. Do you know what they discovered about Derek Jeter? Now this is a man who had won multiple world series with the Yankees, this is a man who had won golden gloves and MVPs. I mean, this wasn't an average run-of-the-mill player, this was an All Star, that Derek Jeter actually when he took a step to the left, he stepped wrongly. He didn't do it the way you're supposed to. He had spent his entire life stepping wrong to the left. They had calculated that on a baseball field, he had probably stepped wrongly over 2 ½ million times over his lifespan. So what did he do in the off season? He got with a coach and here is a Major League All Star player who spent all the off season learning how to take a step to his left.

Now can we just agree real quickly in the flesh that seems silly, does it not? Why would a man with so much talent spend all the off season learning how to take a step to his left? Fast forward throughout his career. Derek Jeter overcame his issue of stepping to the left and last I heard is the only player past age 35 to win a golden glove at shortstop. What did Derek Jeter have to do? Derek Jeter realized that he was in a rut. Derek Jeter realized that because of his rut he was going to quickly become a monument and talk about the glory days that have gone by because it wasn't getting any better. He actually had to go back and step properly.

One of the reasons that I am imploring you to be a part of the Bible reading plan is because it helps you take a step back. It helps you go back to Judges. It helps you go back to 1 Corinthians. No more of this, "Oh, I know the stories. I got this. I've heard this before." One of the true blessings in days recent is when someone says they were reading the Bible passage of the day and they saw something they had never seen before, or God spoke to them in a way he had never spoken through that passage and that, my friends, allows us to break out of that machine mentality and be on mission for God not just as individuals but collectively.

I close with this. Gideon was an incredible man of God, called by God, led the people of God, but can we all agree that his last days were not his prettiest? He created an ephod that the Israelites went after and for generations to come, they served Baal. What if Gideon had taken a step back? What if you take a step back? What if I take a step back? Maybe sometimes God's best strategy is just to get us back to the basics and go back to stories that we've read a dozen times, characters that we grew up with in vacation Bible school and have us look at them with fresh eyes so that we can maintain the mission that God has called us on.

Sunday Evening Service 10/13/2019

Judges 6-8

The Power of 1%

Starts with a man (6:12-22)

There is the mission (7:1-25)

It can become a machine (8:22-27)

Ends with a monument (8:33)