

OK... Truth be known...? ... We do not want suffering... we want **success!**  
... .. We identify **not** with those who are low and hurt... but with those who  
are high and healthy. ... We don't like society's lepers or losers very well...  
we prefer climbers and over-comers.

What I have just described is so often the case... even though we are well  
aware... that God continually calls for you and I NOT to be this way... ..  
Jesus was a friend of the meek and lowly... must grow to be more like  
Jesus every day. ... .. But... for us... as believers... the temptation to be  
conformed to this world (and all of it's preferences) is desperately sweet  
and strong.

Because of this... the point of our passage this morning... will rub many the  
wrong way. ... It will be difficult to agree with some of the conclusions I will  
infer from our text. ... But I am asking you... up front... that as we work our  
way through these verses this morning... to see if you think I'm **on** point...  
or **off** the point of today's passage... in saying that it teaches us... .. God  
only gives His hardest assignments... to the weakest among us. Think  
about that! ... Then as we study our passage... see if this is a proper  
inference we can make. ... Because... Yahweh's power is seen as  
perfect... in our weakness. Here is what the Apostle Paul wrote...

### **2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)**

*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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

The Apostle Paul wrote that God said to him: "My power is most fully displayed when My people are weak."

So doesn't it make sense... then... that "God usually calls servants – not heroes!"...? ... In other words the type of person that we like to identify our selves with... the strong... the successful... the high and healthy... those that don't fit the mold of a Madison Avenue prized person... are the ones who God uses in a significant way. ... Now Paul had a lot going for him... when God called him into His service. ... He was a Hebrew of Hebrews... a respected Pharisee... with a reputation for his zeal. He was from his nation's most powerful tribe. Paul was well educated and well connected in Jewish society... to the High Priest and to the Sanhedrin. ... Wow! What a catch for the cause of God! ... But God... first... had to break him. Paul was brought low through a lot of suffering... and a particular thorn in the flesh that he asked God to remove three times... but the Lord said to him: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

Gideon... on the other hand... we saw last week... was already rather lowly... when God called him. He depicted himself as being from the least tribe... the weakest clan... and the least of his father's household. And where was Gideon when the Angel of the Lord found him...? He was hiding in a winepress.

But after giving Gideon the assurances he needed... (to know that God had not made a mistake... and that Gideon was actually hearing correctly from the Lord)... God needed to next reinforce the necessity... for being weak. God only gives his hardest assignments... to the weakest among us. ... Because... Yahweh's power is seen as perfect... in our weakness. ... But we do have to allow God to test and strengthen our faith. ... This is where we pick up the narrative about Gideon... this morning.

## Judges 7:1-3

God had confirmed His power and call with Gideon in performing the miracles of the fleece. ... Last week we saw how Gideon tested the Lord three times. He brought a sacrifice of a meal... God consumed it with a flame and then disappeared in that flame... (something that only God could do.) Then Gideon put out a fleece and said... *“God if this is You speaking... I want the ground dry and my fleece wet... when I get up in the morning...”* Gideon believed like a pagan... but God condescended... and submitted to Gideon’s demand. Gideon... however... was still unsure... so he said... *“OK... now here are the conditions that You must meet for me. Tomorrow morning... I want the ground wet... but the fleece dry...”* And God submitted to **that** request of Gideon. ... .. But... here... in what we just read... God (RIGHTFULLY) tested Gideon... And this is a second time... (the first was in having Gideon tear down his father’s idols)... A little latter...in today’s passage... we will see God test Gideon a third time. ... Then they will be 3 for 3.

A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted. ... Faith is more than a "warm fuzzy feeling." ... And it is so vital... that God rightfully tests it.

God tests our faith for at least two reasons: first... to show us whether our faith is real or counterfeit... and second... to strengthen our faith for the tasks He's set before us. ... I've noticed in my own life and ministry that God has often put us through the valley of testing before allowing us to reach the mountain peak of victory.

This puzzles the non-believer. ... Gideon's army was only 32,000 ... but it was still a small army compared to the Midianite army... which had 135,000 troops (according to Judges 8:10). ... Natural man would seek an increase in the size of Gideon's army... not a decrease.

But it isn't only the non-believer who is perplexed... is it...? ... The natural man inside each of us is often confounded by what God does. We want God to strengthen us... not weaken us! ... *"For crying out loud... Lord! I am weak kneed to begin with! Why aren't You adding to my numbers... not subtracting from them...?"*

Considering this passage... and the Lord's dealings with Gideon... it is clear to me that I need to become weak... so that I might know my need for the Lord. ... I need to know my need for the Lord... to tame the beast of pride... that often rages inside of me. ... And... because I will not weaken myself... I need the Lord to weaken me. ... I must have God make my need for Him glaringly obvious. ... That is why... God doesn't always allow us to go from victory to victory. ... Because He knows when we need to taste defeat. Thanks to God... my sense of self-achieved victory never lasts for long. He weakens me. He reduces me. ...And He does the same for anyone who has given their life to Him.

Although it can be said in one sense that the Lord strengthens us (he strengthens our faith)... it can also be said in another sense that he weakens us... (he weakens our self-confidence). ... As Jacob was preparing for a possible attack from Esau... the angel of the Lord met him... just as he met Gideon... and wrenched his hip... weakening him for his encounter with his brother (Genesis 32:25). ... And we already

acknowledged that the apostle Paul was weakened by “a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan,” to keep him from exalting himself (2 Corinthians 12:7).

The Israelites had too many troops for their own good. Many of us, simply, are too capable for our own good. May the Lord weaken us and reduce us. Have you ever considered that perhaps you have not achieved the success you have coveted, however you define success, because the Lord has been protecting you from your pride?

Gideon is outnumbered four to one... and the Lord tells him he has too many! ... God is trying to teach Gideon the battle is not won by might... nor by power... but by the Spirit of God. ... God is concerned about an unseen enemy of His people. ... He is concerned about the Midianites, but also a deeper problem... their **pride**.

God told Gideon why He was decreasing the size of the army: He didn't want the soldiers to boast that they had won the victory over the Midianites. Victories won because of faith... bring glory to God... because nobody can explain how they happened. Seminary professor... Dr. Bob Cook... would tell his students... who were to become pastors and missionaries... *"If you can explain what's going on in your ministry then God didn't do it."*

Pride was a concern... and so was fear. ... Neither pride or fear were to be present. Gideon used the condition of fear in reducing his troops. ... And in telling the fearful soldiers to return home... Gideon was simply obeying the law Moses originally gave:

### **Deuteronomy 20:8 (ESV)**

*And the officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'Is there any man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go back to his house, lest he make the heart of his fellows melt like his own.'*

I have often wondered why Gideon did not go home. When he said, "*All of you who are fearful and afraid,*" he could just as easily have said, "*Follow me, because I am going home, I think that I will heed the words of Deuteronomy 20:8.*" ... .. But Gideon stayed. God had specially commissioned him... and God was specially developing him.

Pride after the battle robs God of glory... and fear during the battle robs God's soldiers of courage and power. ... Fear has a way of spreading... and one timid soldier can do more damage than a whole company of enemy soldiers.

(LISTEN) ... Fear and faith can't live together very long in the same heart. Either fear will conquer faith and we'll quit... or faith will conquer fear and we'll triumph.

### **Judges 7:4-7**

What significance was there in the two different ways the men drank from the river? ... Since the Scriptures don't tell us... we'd be wise not to read into the text some weighty spiritual lesson that God never put there. ... Most expositors say the men who bowed down to drink... were making themselves vulnerable to the enemy... while the 300 who lapped water from their hands... stayed alert. I am amazed at the number of commentaries that I read... written by men who I deeply admire... and they all felt it was right to say something like... "*The soldier that brought water up in his hands*

*and lapped it manifested that he could keep an eye out for the enemy at the same time. The soldier who put his face in the water to drink was throwing caution to the wind..."*

Oh Really...?!!! I thought that verse 2 clearly announced that God wanted to show Israel that He was bringing the victory... not the capabilities of the soldiers. ... Verse two is the key verse to our understanding... and contrived explanations... which contradict it... are useless! ... Gideon was not looking for the best soldiers who had special alertness... who could attribute their abilities to the victory! It is not the vigilance of the lappers that is key! Verse two is the key!

### **Judges 7:2**

In other words... because of the tendency of God's people to glorify their own efforts... to trust in their proven methods... to credit their own contributions... to think well of their cleverness... Yahweh frequently insists that His people be reduced to utter helplessness... so that they *must* recognize that their deliverance can only be chalked-up to Yahweh's power and mercy.

My assumption is... (and this does **not** contradict our key verse of the passage)... that God chose this method of sifting the army... because it was simple... unassuming (no soldier knew he was being tested)... and easy to apply. God only wanted 300 men. ... .. By the way... Some churches today are mesmerized by statistics... and think they're strong because they're big and wealthy... but numbers are no guarantee of God's blessing.

And apparently... neither is having the latest and greatest equipment. ... Take a look at the provisions they took. Once again... it is not what we might expect.

### **Judges 7:8**

We know from reading further what the provisions were. The soldiers who departed left some of their equipment with the 300 men thus each man could have a torch, a trumpet, and a jar—strange weapons indeed for fighting a war.

### **Judges 7:9-11**

The Lord told Gideon for the fourth time that He had delivered the Midianite host into his hand. (In verse 9... please note the tense of the verb.) ... Although the battle was yet in the future (it hadn't been fought yet)... verse 9 is worded as if Israel had already won! ... Well because of God's promise... they had. ... The 300 men could attack the enemy host confident that Israel was the victor.

The Holy Spirit devoted an entire chapter in the New Testament—Hebrews 11—to the victories of *faith* ... won by ordinary people who dared to believe God and act upon His promises. ... It may be a cliché to some people... but the old formula is still just as true... as when I first saw it printed on a magnet and attached to my older sister's car dashboard: "God says it—I believe it—that settles it!"

God had already told Gideon three times that He would give Israel victory (6:14, 16; 7:7), and He had reassured him by giving him three special



signs: fire from the rock (6:19-21), the wet fleece (6:36-38), and the dry fleece (6:39-40). After all this divine help, Gideon should have been strong in his faith, but such was not the case. ... Gideon is a most unheroic hero.

We sometimes dupe ourselves into thinking that a real servant of the Lord is only someone who is dynamic, assured, confident, brash, fearless, witty, adventuresome, or glamorous – with one or two appearances on a Christian television network.

Don't think you are unusable because you don't have that air about you. Christ takes uncertain and fearful folk... strengthens their hands in the oddest ways... and makes them able to stand for Him in school or home or work. ... We must not forget how the writer of Hebrews describes those we sometimes call the "heroes of faith": 'They were weak people... who were given strength to be brave in war... and drive back foreign invaders'

And something else should capture our attention here. ... How grateful we should be... that God understands us and doesn't condemn us because we have doubts and fears! ... He keeps giving us wisdom and doesn't scold us when we keep asking... Our great High Priest in heaven sympathizes with our weaknesses... and keeps giving us more grace... God remembers that we're only dust... and He never mocks us because we are fragile.

### **Judges 7:12-15**

Barley was the cheapest substance for bread making. The Israelites and other poor people would feed it to their cattle or eat it themselves. (The Arabs today still call the Israelites "cakes of barley" ... as a derogatory name ...and they call themselves the "wheat".) ... The divinely intended

symbolism is clear (barley bread aptly described the poverty-stricken Israelites, and the tent referred to the nomadic Midianites. Their homes were tents.). ... It did not take a genius to interpret this dream.

The barley-cake image of Gideon and his army spoke of their weakness and humiliation. The picture is that of a stale hard cake that could roll like a wheel... not a complimentary metaphor at all! ... But I am sure Gideon didn't mind being compared to a loaf of stale bread... for now he knew for sure that Israel would defeat the Midianites and deliver the land from bondage. ... the Midianites were having nightmares about him! Terror was on their hearts.

### **Judges 7:15**

(LISTEN) ... We must worship well or we will not serve well. (*REPEAT*)  
...Service comes from the heart. If our heart is not right, our service will not be right.

The story of Gideon... though it includes a few more chapters... climaxes here... as he falls to the ground on enemy turf. ... Whatever happens from this point in his dealings with the Midianites... whether he fights or not... whether he wins or loses... his act of humble worship... constitutes his greatest victory.

Worship is the victory before the battle... it is the victory before the victory. As always... God's people win their greatest victories in advance... on their knees. ... Therefore... if the Lord has called you to some task... before you undertake it... before you rally the troops... before you do anything at all... fall to the ground.

Gideon was a new man when he and his servant finished their worship and returned to the Israelite camp. ... Gideon's fears and doubts were gone as he mobilized his small army... and infused courage into their hearts by what he said and did. "*The Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand,*" he announced to the men.

### **Judges 7:16-18**

Gideon surrounded the Midianites on three sides. ... The fourth side (facing East)... was purposely left open... It was the escape opening for the Midianites to flee.

And what does Gideon put in the "hands" of those men? ... Trumpets... clay pitchers... and torches — not weapons! ... What are they going to do...? Blow trumpets in the faces of their enemies...? ... Break pitchers over a few dozen heads...? ... Set some tents on fire...? The pagans covered the land like locusts! ... And whose strategy is this... anyway... the Lord's or Gideon's? ... The narrator doesn't say.

All of a sudden... though... Gideon sounds like a confident leader. He is commanding his troops not only to follow him... but also to imitate him. ... And what does Gideon command his men to do once they march on the enemy? Blow their trumpets and shout. What kind of strategy is that?

Will any of Gideon's troops follow him into battle? ... If Gideon hesitated to believe the Lord... then his troops have every reason to hesitate to believe him. ... If Gideon's men do follow him... what sort of chance does their little trumpet and pitcher brigade have against a mighty military force?

### **Judges 7:19-21**

Gideon's strategy — surrounding the enemy camp in the middle of the night... blowing trumpets... smashing clay pitchers... raising torches... and shouting — features psychological warfare. ... Breaking pottery spooks camels. ... Trumpets were usually blown only by captains... not ordinary soldiers... so Gideon makes it sound as if he has an army of three hundred thousand. ... The first thing the Midianites did... was start whacking their swords in every direction. The Israelites did not have swords. ... All they did was hold the light so the Midianites could go after **each other**.

"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." The interesting thing is that Gideon did not have a sword and neither did any of the three hundred men. You see they were under the rule of the Midianites, and the Midianites did not let them have an arsenal. They kept the weapons and the swords for themselves. So Gideon's strategy employed pitchers, lamps, and trumpets.

Probably they included Gideon's name in the shout... because Gideon had heard... when he went to spy on two common soldiers... earlier... that they knew his name and were terrified. ... It was part of their effort to create panic among the Midianites. (So shouting Gideon's name... also... was probably meant to add to their fright.)

Verse 21 - *"Every man stood in his place around the camp"*... This was a strange but a very sagacious thing to do. If they had moved down the hill... the Midianites would have quickly realized how few were involved in the attack. ... but standing still on the hills... kept the Midianites in constant fear. ... For all they knew... many... under the cover of darkness... were coming

down the hills to attack them. ... Later Gideon and his men did indeed chase the Midianites... but first they waited until the fleeing had begun.

### **Judges 7:22-25**

The church today can also learn from this event and be encouraged by it. God doesn't need large numbers to accomplish His purposes, nor does He need especially gifted leaders. Gideon and his 300 men were available for God to use, and He enabled them to conquer the enemy and bring peace to the land. When the church starts to depend on "bigness"—big buildings, big crowds, big budgets—then faith becomes misplaced, and God can't give His blessing. When leaders depend on their education, skill, and experience rather than in God, then God abandons them and looks for a Gideon.

God only gives His hardest assignments... to the weakest among us. ... Because... Yahweh's power is seen as perfect... in our weakness.

Listen to these words from Oswald Chambers:

*A gilt-edged saint is no good, he is abnormal, unfit for daily life, and altogether unlike God. We are here as men and women, not as half-fledged angels, to do the work of the world, and to do it with an infinitely greater power to stand the turmoil because we have been born from above.*