

Topic	Gideon and the Amazing Victory
Reference	Judges 6-7
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Today we are going to talk about the famous account of the Old Testament hero by the name of Gideon and his tiny army of 300. Gideon and his 300 is such a popular bible story that I was able to find many pictures and paintings based on these two chapters of Judges 6 and 7.

The central figure in our text is actually God himself. We will see his mighty hands moving across the events in the text. We shall learn more about God and what He is like, so that we can respond to him accordingly. When we don't know a person well, we can only relate to him or her superficially but when we get to know or understand a person more deeply then we can relate to him or her more meaningfully and effectively and it is same with our relationship with God.

How do we get from imperfection to perfection by the transformational work of the spirit?

Gideon wasn't the perfect candidate nor a natural leader to do God's work and yet God picked him. None of us here is perfect and yet God can use us, and he uses us to do his work, he transforms us.

We can easily divide the text into five parts, because the boundaries between them are clear.

The Structure of Judges 6~7

- 1. The **Plight** of the Israelites 6:1~10
- 2. The **Profile** of Gideon 6:11~32
- 3. The **Proof** of the Fleece Miracle 6:33~40
- 4. The **Paring** of Gideon's Army 7:1~15
- 5. The **Power** of God 7:16~25

Geographically all this took place in the area known a Jezreel Valley, mentioned in chapter 6:33, which is southwest from the sea of Galilee. The Jezreel Valley and its vicinity is where we find the four tribes of Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali and Manasseh, from which Gideon later enlisted his men.

1. THE PLIGHT OF THE ISRAELITES (6:1~10)

In verses 3 and 5, we read that the Midianites together with the allies from the east invaded the land of the Israelites and they came in huge numbers mentioned here with camels like swarms of locusts. Midianites are the people from the land of Midian. It was located in the Northwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula. So, there may be a little bit more Arab. They were located to the south of land of Canaan, but according to verse 23 below, they attack from the east, they came in from the east after crossing the River Jordan and joined by the allies also from the East. But known to many of you, from Genesis 25, Abraham had a son named Midian and the Midianites were descendant from him. After the death of Sarah, Abraham took a second wife by the name of Keturah who bore him six sons and one of them was Midian. In Genesis 37 when Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to a passing caravan, they were actually Midianite merchants on their way to Egypt and so the Midianites are mentioned here and there in Genesis itself.

Now coming back to our text, the Israelites suffered much under the Midianites. They were in dire straits, in a desperate situation. Verse 2 describes the invaders as so oppressive, verse 6 describe the Israelites as so impoverished. In verse 4 we see that the Midianites coming in to rob and steal their crops, mostly wheat and barley and also their livestock; sheep, cattle and donkeys. So much so that the Israelites have to take refuge in the mountains as mentioned in verse 2. The more important question is this, why did the Israelites have to suffer to this extent under the hands of the Midianites. Why did God allowed his people to be so oppressed? In fact, later in verse 13, Gideon himself asked God this very question, but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us. The answer to this is right at the right beginning in our text in verse 1.

1 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years He gave them into the hands of the Midianites.

What this means is that the Israelites were disobedient to God and they turn away from God and the Midianite oppression was a punishment from God and it went on for seven years. So why did the Israelites suffered? As a punishment. This brings us to our first lesson that

Lesson #1

God disciplines His children when they sin against Him. There are consequences when the people of God disobey Him.

The good example of this is in 1-Cor 11,

1 Corinthians 11:27, 30

...whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord....That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

God does allow hardships and troubles to come our way when we sin or disobey him. I call it correctional suffering and a common word for this is discipline. He does this in love in order that we may return to the right path as it says in Proverbs 3:12,

Proverbs 3:12

...the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Further it says,

Hebrews 12:10, 11

...God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness...

Certainly, discipline can be painful. While God allows us to suffer as a result of our sin or disobedience, not all sufferings are due to sin or disobedience. So, when a brother is experiencing suffering, don't be quick to point your finger at him. There may be multiple reasons of a person suffering. Sin and disobedience is just one of the reason.

In our text we see that God does use sufferings to discipline his people. Some of us might wonder, what kind of evil did the Israelites do and how were they disobedient to God. Now I mentioned in my sermon at the beginning of last month when I preached on Judges chapter 1 that even before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, God had already warned them in Exodus 23

Exodus 23:32~33

Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against Me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.

In other words, God commanded them to drive out the Canaanites completely from the land, don't let them stay or they will influence you and you will start worshiping their gods and end up compromising your faith. As we saw last month in Judges chapter 1, the Israelites did not drive out their enemies and the

Canaanites ended up living among the Israelites. Well the result of that was rather predictable, slowly but surely the people of God started to turn to gods of the Canaanites.

Judges 2:11~12

...the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord,... They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them.

This is the result of disobeying God. So, coming back to our text, it is therefore not surprising to find that later in verse 25 in part 2 that Gideon's father himself, even he had an altar dedicated to the Canaanite god, Baal, and also to the Canaanite goddess Asherah. This is shocking. Gideon was later commanded to destroy that altar.

Lesson #2

God is greatly displeased when His people worship other gods. He commanded us, you shall have no other gods before Me.

God is very unhappy when his people worship other gods. Now granted most of us here don't worship pagan gods, most of us here can say, look I don't keep any idols at home, now some of you might have had them at home last time and you have destroyed them, but today the Canaanite gods in the Book of Judges, they have taken other subtle and less noticeable forms. For example, your money could be your god or other such material things. Your career or your business could be your god. Food could be your god. Even your ministry could be your god. When something or even someone is more important to you than God then that thing or that someone has become your god. If you have something more than important to you than God, one day you might find God having to act to discipline you. The test is very simple. If you can't let go of something then most likely it is the god in your life.

Now let's move on. We find that Israelites crying out to God for help mentioned in verses 6 and 7. It is not the first time that they are doing this, because earlier in Judges chapter 3 and 4, three times in the two chapters they cried out to God in desperation and each time if you read that two chapters, God answered them and delivered them from their enemies. So here in our text, it is the fourth time, they pleaded with God to save them and once again God responded.

In verse 8 God responded initially by sending a prophet to the Israelites. He explained to the Israelites why they were oppressed from verses 8-10. Essentially God was telling his people, because you have not listened to me at

the end of verse 10. The next thing God did was to meet Gideon to prepare him to carry out the task of defeating the Midianites and that brings us to the end of part 1.

Lesson #3

God hears when His people cry for help. He is always sensitive to the plight of His people.

This is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. When Israelites were suffering in Egypt they cried out to God. God was concerned, and he sent Moses. When the people of God are in distress, God hears them when they cry out for help to Him and He will respond. Perhaps not in the manner or timing that we might prefer or imagine but respond He will.

2. THE PROFILE OF GIDEON (6:11~32)

God came down and had an encounter with Gideon at a place called Ophrah. Here the term the 'angel of the lord' may mean an angel sent by God or it could mean God himself or a physical manifestation of the Almighty God. Now in our text it was God himself, not an angel who came to meet Gideon.

Ophrah was right in the middle of Jezreel Valley where Gideon and his father lived and worked and in verse 11 God found Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress because they wanted to hide the crop from the Midianites.

What kind of person Gideon is that God should find favor in Him? We shall examine the profile of Gideon.

As the angel appeared to Gideon, he called Gideon a mighty warrior in verse 12. Was Gideon a mighty warrior? Of course not, but God was going to make him a mighty warrior soon. Gideon's initial reaction was rather subdued. To begin with he wasn't sure who this visitor was. Maybe a prophet, maybe someone sent by God, he wasn't sure, but to Gideon he looked like someone important, that's why he called him my lord in verses 13 and 15. Gideon started the conversation

13 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all His wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." by lamenting about the plight of the Israelites, on his people 14 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?" 15 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

In other words, I am nobody, why me. Time again across the pages of scripture God choose people who felt inadequate or weak to carry out his task. He tended to use as his instruments, humble people, unassuming people and lowly people. David was just a shepherd boy. At least four of Jesus's disciples were simple fisherman, which brings us to lesson #4

Lesson #4

God often chooses people who feel they are not up to the task, to do His task.

If you think you are right for the job then you are not right for the job, strange as it might sound. God favors the humble, the weak and the lowly when it comes to serving him and doing his work. The logic behind this isn't hard to understand. Because if you think you are so smart, so knowledgeable, so capable then you are so full of yourself that there is no space in your heart for God to take charge. When you are so full of self-assurance, self-sufficiency and self-drive and so on then you are so full inside that God cannot come in to do his work. On the other hand, when you feel empty and weak then God's spirit can come in to fill you. When you feel weak, then God's strength can be manifested. This is what the Lord told Paul in 2-Cor 12:9

2 Corinthians 12:9

My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.

The profile of a servant of God is one of humility and teachability, which is another way of putting across this lesson #4

So God told Gideon in verse 16

16 The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

Gideon was overwhelmed by this but he was still not sure about the visitor, so he asked for a sign

17 Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in Your eyes, give me a sign that it is really You talking to me."

What happened next is rather dramatic. After asking his guest to wait, Gideon went inside to prepare a meal for him. To which God replied in verse 18

18 ...And the Lord said, "I will wait until you return."

I find this mind boggling that instead of man waiting for God, here the Almighty waits for a man. Our God is a patient God, he is willing to wait for us.

19 Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, 20 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. 21 Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in His hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the Lord disappeared. 22 When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, "Alas, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!"

What we learn from this is that, Gideon asked God for a sign and God gave him one and the question begging to be asked is this, can we similarly ask God for a sign, so that we can know for sure who he is and what he wants us to do. There are Christians who are uncomfortable with this. Other says, sure you can always go to God and ask for a sign. But here is a way to look at this. We who are on this side of the cross, we are actually more blessed than the people of God in the Old Testament. We have the full scripture. God has revealed his nature, himself and his will to us through the pages of scripture. In addition, we who are on this side of the Pentecost, God has really poured out his spirit on us and his spirit is constantly at work in us guiding us and leading us.

Lesson #5

God reveals to us today who He is, His nature and His will, through His word and His Spirit's work.

If you study the Bible diligently and let the Holy Spirit work in you then there will be less need to ask God of sign,

So in the rest of part 2, just as Gideon wanted to be sure if the visitor was God, God also wanted to be sure if Gideon was up to the task and this is part of how God prepared Gideon to be his instrument.

25 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.

What is this Asherah pole?

Asherah is a Canaanite goddess and this Asherah pole is like a tree or a bunch of trees dedicated to this goddess and that night Gideon and his men did exactly as God commanded. The next morning there was a commotion in town

The people of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it." Judges 6:30

Joash the father intervened by telling them, hey if Baal was really a god, he could defend himself, don't worry, you don't have to defend Baal and he would deal with the person who broke his altar and as a result Gideon was saved. God wanted to show his people that all these Canaanite gods are powerless, and they are useless in the face of the Midianite invasion.

3. THE PROOF OF THE FLEECE MIRACLE (6:33~40)

It is the most instructive part of our text. This part will teach something about the faith

34 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

The all met at a place called Spring of Harod. Out of the blue, Gideon came out with this bizarre idea involving this piece of fleece that he had. In verse 37 he told God,

37 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."

It was a strange request and amazingly God granted his request, because the next morning he woke up early and it was as he requested. He was able to squeeze from the fleece a bowl full of water, but that's not all in verse 39 he told God again

39 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, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew."

Amazingly God granted his request a second time. Earlier in part 2 when Gideon asked God for a sign, in a sense he was like testing God, but this time it is clear that he was really testing God, not once but twice. In fact, he said it himself in verse 39, allow me one more test with the fleece.

What do we make of this because it runs counter to what we have been taught from Deuteronomy 6:16

Deuteronomy 6:16 (quoted by Jesus in Matthew 4:7)

Do not put the Lord your God to the test ...

How dare Gideon put God to the test and perhaps even more baffling is why did God allowed himself to be tested by Gideon. It is a tough question. Now known to most of you, there is a verse in Malachi that suggest that it is okay to test God

Malachi 3:10

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing...

God was saying to his people in Malachi, come and test me, bring all your tithes and offering and see if I will bless you mightily, test me in this he said. So how do we reconcile this with Deuteronomy. The answer lies in the amount of faith. God would rather that we relate to him by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God from Hebrews 11:6. If our faith is strong, we are less inclined to put God to the test, hence do not put the Lord your God to test, but if our faith is weak we tend to ask God for signs in order to boast our faith and sometimes amazingly God grants us the concession of a sign to help us or to encourage us. The same thing can be seen when Jesus performed the signs and miracles during his earthly ministry. It was once early in his ministry when Jesus said to the people in John 4:48,

Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe, because it recognize that evidence can be a cure for doubt and he proceeded to heal the official son. On the other hand, towards the end of his time on earth Jesus also told Thomas in John 20:29, because you have seen me you have belief, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have belief. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have belief. Faith is when we have not seen and yet we believe.

Lesson #6

God would rather we have faith in Him, but if our faith in Him is weak, He does grant us signs to help us.

4. THE PARING OF GIDEON'S ARMY (7:1~15)

In verse 1 as we saw earlier Gideon's army 32000 men from four tribes, they were camped at this spring of Harod. Now the enemy camp was to their North near the hill or Morah. Now although not mentioned here but later is mentioned in Judges chapter 8, the size of the Midianite army was 135,000 men. It is roughly four times the size of the Israelite army. The Midianite camp was about maybe 10 kilometers north from the Israelite camp. So, they were actually quite near. But before the battle could begin, shockingly God told Gideon in verse 2, you have

2 The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against Me, 'My own strength has saved me.'

If people would have win, he would boast, and you will credit yourself with the victory and so God commanded Gideon to trim the number of men. So, in verse 3 those who tremble with fear, those who are afraid they were told to go home. Because God could use those who have humility as we saw in lesson #4 but not those who show timidity. When you are humble, you will be willing to grow your faith, but if you are afraid then you have no faith and so 10,000 brave men remain, 22,000 faint hearted ones were excused. Although not explicitly mentioned here, God noticed that Gideon was little concerned about the grinding number of men, but he was preparing Gideon by teaching him the crucial lesson of faith in order that he will learn to trust in God and not depend on the size of the army. So, God went further to really teach him this lesson on faith. In verse 4

4 But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water,

Over the next few verses, God commanded Gideon to conduct this strange drinking test to further cut down the number and the men were told to go down to the Spring of Harod and to drink from the spring. Those who went down and drank with their mouth with their face to the water they were disqualified. On the other hand, those who cupped the water with their hands and let the water with their tongues, they were chosen. Strange way to do the final selection. 300 men were chosen in this manner.

To this day, it is really a mystery of why God choose Gideon's army using this drinking test. Some Bible scholars speculate that those who knelt down and drank with their face to the water, they lack the quality of being alert. While those who drank from their cupped hands, they were more alert and more careful of their surrounding and therefore they were deemed more suitable to be soldiers, but no one really knows. Anyway, it is not important. This reduction of Gideon's army from 32,000 to 10,000 and then to a mere 300 offers us a crucial lesson.

Lesson #7

God wants us to depend on His strength when doing His work, and not on our strength.

He wants us to trust him fully. It is often said that there is safety in numbers but in God's arithmetic that is simply not true. We must always rely on God and not our own abilities.

5. THE POWER OF GOD (7:16~25)

Now this is climax of the account of Gideon and his 300. So, Gideon and his man were all prepared for battle. Even though very small in numbers, like 300 only. The other side, 135,000. Anyway, they were all prepped for battle, but instead of swords or spears or shields, in verse 16 they were instructed to carry trumpets, empty jars and torches. What happened next is something that no one would have imagine. From verses 16-23 and this is how the night battle unfolded, actually it wasn't a battle, between the two sides, because it turned out that Gideon and his army didn't really have to fight, because they encircled the Midianite camp by surprise and simultaneously, they blew their trumpets, smashed the clay jar and shouted, a sword for the Lord and for Gideon.

The Midianites panicked when they heard suddenly the sounds of trumpets all over and smashing off the jars and the shouts of the Israelites and in the ensuing confusion and chaos in verse 22

When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords."

Judges7:22

It was estimated that 120,000 of them were killed. Gideon and his men didn't even have to enter the enemy's camp. It was an amazing victory for the Israelites by the mighty power of God. So, the final lesson for us is clear.

Lesson #8

Our God is an immensely powerful God, and He displays His power in ways we cannot imagine.

CONCLUSION:

Let's take another look at lesson #8. I said our God is an immensely powerful God which main takeaway from our text is, but the question is this, why do we have trouble taking this in. Intellectually in our minds we know that God is immensely powerful, but it is not often reflected in the way we conduct our faith. It doesn't really show out in our lives. In a way our situation is like Gideon's when he had a conversation with God in chapter 6 in part 2, there is this verse 13, he was like telling God I am sorry God where are all your miracles that we hear about that our forefathers told us. Similarly, we also ask, okay God so are so powerful, I have read all about your miracles in the Bible but where are they now. Many Christians yearn for signs and wonders to booster their weak faith. No wonder Jesus said, unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe.

At any given time, there will be a few of us in our congregation who battle with cancer. Now let me say this, if God cures every cancer case in this church then if the word gets out, we will need to move our service to a stadium. Now I am not against all these healing rallies, because I believe that God still heals people even today.

But we need to ask, are these people there because of God or because of the healing. Perhaps the real question is this, how much evidence from miracles do we need in the conduct of our faith. Now our text from Judges chapter 6 and 7 describes a series of fantastic miracles to show that God is powerful, which is the main focus of the text and I purposely showed you maps and paintings and photos to convince you that these are historical events, not the stuff of legends and fables, but to some Christians, this is not enough. They want to see miracles right before their very eyes. Now granted we need evidence to booster our faith, our is not a blind faith. We don't believe blindly but as it is sometime said, where reason ends faith begins. Evidence and reason can only carry you so far, but better still have faith carries you all the way. So perhaps it boils down to the question of the level of our faith. God much prefers us to relate to Him by faith. Although he sometimes grants us the concession of signs when our faith is weak, because faith is the main currency in God's economy. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have belief, but if somehow you need to see a miracle to go on, some of you do need to see a miracle to go on. The greatest miracle is that God despite all our imperfections, our weaknesses, our sins, he reaches out, touches us and saves us. Despite our unworthiness, our gracious God came

down to earth and died for our sins, so that we can have a personal relationship with him. That is the greatest miracle. You don't really need the miracles in Judges 16 and 17.

There is nothing in us that makes us worthy to be God's child, nothing whatsoever. We are a nobody, yet God turned his face towards us. That's the gospel message. The gospel is a living miracle. All of us who are children of God are a walking miracle. That alone should prompt us to burst out in praise and worship. May we have a greater and greater measure of faith in the powerful God and may our dependence on him be multiplied manifolds.