

From Coward to Conqueror – The Story of Gideon

Judges 6:11-16

11 Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. 12 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.” 13 And Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian.” 14 And the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” 15 And he said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” 16 And the LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.”

Why is it that everyone likes to pull for the underdog? You know, the one who according to statistics and data and all the information, is not supposed to win. Is it because the favorite gets all the attention? Is it because the favorite comes across prideful? Or is it because most of us really relate more to the underdog than the favorite? Many of us can understand what it feels like to have the odds against us. Many of us can understand what it feels like to have to work harder for what we have. So, to see someone who when presented with the evidence is not supposed to win, it is in our nature to be excited about the underdog prevailing against all odds.

Today we have an underdog to pull for. We have one who when the sports writers turned in their votes, it was overwhelmingly in the opponent’s favor. That underdog is Gideon.

Gideon is one who's future is bright. Gideon is one who is poised for greatness, but there is a problem. The problem is he is regular. He is ordinary. Nothing about him is great. Nothing about him stands out, nothing about his personality draws you to his company. Nothing about him screams leader, commander, warrior, nothing says greatness.

But one thing we have to understand, one thing we have to wrap our minds around is that greatness is a quality that cannot be determined by who you are and what you do, but greatness is only defined by what God has for you and if you have done that job to the best of your ability. When you do that for the glory of God, God sees greatness.

God determines greatness not man. Because you may be able to point to your success and say I am successful by the world’s standards, You can point to your money and say look I am rich, You can point to all you have accomplished and say look what I have and look what I have done, but what you cannot say is look-- I am great. You cannot say look I have done it. You cannot look at yourself and accomplishments and ascribe greatness to yourself.

Your perception is skewed, your bias is tainted by the fact that you are created, you are human, you are sinful in nature, unable to ascribe greatness to anything by your own standard, because greatness is only

defined by what God has done with you and how you have allowed Him to use you for His glory. So what does that mean? That means that everyone can be great. That means that everyone can be quote, unquote somebody.

That means that there is no reason for anyone to get to the end of their life and say all I have ever been was ordinary. All I have ever brought to the table was average. No one can look at themselves now and say I have nothing to offer but ordinary. I have nothing to offer but basic and bland. What you need to know is that God specializes in taking the ordinary and doing extraordinary things. God specializes in taking average and shooting it to above and beyond. God specializes in taking nobodies and making somebodies out of them. And get this, he will do it in the midst of nobodies who are not going anywhere who are hoping the same for you.

In Judges chapter 6 we have the story of Gideon, for some of you this is a well-known story, for others you may not have heard of Gideon.

But before we talk about Gideon, we have to talk about how we got to Judges chapter 6. God saves Israel from Egypt, leading them through his servant Moses. Moses leads them until he dies and then God chooses Joshua as his successor. And Joshua leads Israel into their land which was promised them and Joshua led the charge to take the land from the evil groups of people that were there and Joshua chapter 1 says the people served the Lord and followed Him all the days of Joshua, then Joshua died and those who were loyal to Him died and their came a generation of Israel that stopped following the Lord's commands and lived evil lives in the sight of the Lord.... Kind of mirrors our generation.

We have moved in mass from being driven by principles of Godliness to living in a rationalistic godless society that cares nothing about the things of God.

What happens is Israel goes in a spiral of cycles where they did evil, God judged them, they cried out to God, he sent a deliverer, they lived in peace for a season then they would forget God and begin to do evil again. This happens seven times in the book of Judges. In chapter 6 we have the account of one of those cycles. Israel has been worshipping idols and God has allowed the Midianites to overtake them. They cry out and the person chosen to save Israel is Gideon. Gideon is visited by the Angel of the Lord.

Quick lesson here is this is what we call a Theophany, what we see here is an appearance of the second person of the Godhead, the trinity, in bodily form before the incarnation of Jesus into the world during what we know as Christmas where we celebrate the birth of Christ, God with us, Emmanuel. Throughout the Old Testament when Jesus is presented in visible bodily form, he is called the Angel of the Lord. This is who is approaching Gideon. This is who is calling Gideon to action.

Gideon was threshing wheat, separating the grain from the unused part of the stalk. Grain was threshed by first beating the heads of the cut stalks, then discarding the straw, and then tossing the mixture of chaff and grain in the air, allowing the wind to blow away the chaff while the heavier kernels of grain fell to the floor.

Because of the threat of the Midianites, Gideon was forced to do this process in a covered area used for pressing grapes for wine. Seeing that it was covered it was hard to get wind so he either had to wait for a strong wind or run out in the open and toss the grain up and hurry back for cover. The Bible said they were under the oppression of Midian for seven years. You can imagine having to do this for seven years hoping to have food for survival would depress and deplete anyone's confidence.

But God's people cried out and He is going to send Gideon to lead the charge against this massive army of Midianites. And from this underdog fight, we will see that God can take a coward and make him a conqueror.

There are three lessons I want us to learn from this coward turned conqueror...

The first lesson we learn from Gideon is...

1. Don't let your current position cause you to question God's eternal purpose.

Judges 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." 13 And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."

Gideon said if God is with us then why do we not see the miracles our fathers saw. We have to be careful not to blame God for trouble we have brought on ourselves. The blindness of our own sin gives us the audacity to question where is God? When, the critical hopeless situation we may find ourselves in may be because God is using it to ask where are we? The break down of the family is God asking where are we? The increase in divorce is God asking where are we? The number of single mothers and violent crimes in our city is God asking where are we? If a separation has occurred, it was not God who has left us, but the evidence shows it is we who have left God.

Gideon is saying God has forsaken us and let these pagans destroy us. He even remembered the stories, as he says, "Where are all His wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us." The question he is asking is, I have heard of what God has done, but what I want to know is, what has God done for me lately!

I don't want to hear about what He did, I want to hear about what He is doing. The question you have to ask yourself is, if He is not doing it now is it because of something you are doing. What is hindering the progress? What is altering His mode of operation?

Gideon said the Lord has given us into the hands of Midian. The Lord has delivered us. He did not question God's ability to deliver, he questioned God's integrity. God can deliver, He is just deciding to delivering us into evil hands.

He said God put us in the hands of the Midianites, recognizing that where they are is divinely directed, showing they knew God had the power and ability to place them, but in light of His promise, from their perspective He chose not to keep it.

What they could not see is that the promise of God's deliverance and protection was hindered by their own disobedience.

There are many promises of God for the believer, but many miss out on the fullness of the promise because of their own disobedience. And then we blame our position on God.

Having to stay too long that place can cause you to sink into a mindset that leaves you thinking you are less or insignificant and or seeing God as less than able or uncaring about who you are and where you are and the state you are in.

What you need to ask is, when was the last time you evaluated your life to see if there was anything that could be causing you to be left in such a dire situation.

Judges 6:1 The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.

The giving over into the hands of Midian was the response to Israel doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

What activities are you participating in? What people are you allowing to occupy your time and space? Keeping it straight, what sins are you committing that you know are wrong that are causing you to be in a place where it seems like God doesn't care. You have to evaluate that.

People ask me, "If God forgives my sin then why am I still suffering." I tell them that God forgives the sin, but you still have to deal with the consequences. If you steal a car and get caught, you can ask for forgiveness and honestly and sincerely mean it, but that's not going to stop the police from taking you to jail. If you made bad financial decisions in the past and messed up your credit and now it's hard to get what you need, God will forgive you for the bad financial decisions, but you still have to live with the consequences of having to work your credit back up and the struggles that come along with that.

Another question you should ask is, who do you have around you that has your best interest in mind?

Who do you have around you that will see you focusing too much on the negative and will encourage you to see God's hand in your situation. If all you have around you are people that compound and add to your negative attitude, you don't have much of a chance, but if you have some people around you that will call out your sin when they see it and put their arms around you to walk with you when you are down, you will be less likely to focus on the negative and question God.

Jeremiah 29:11 says "For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

God has a plan for your life, but if you get in the way, you will cause God to have to get you back aligned to His plan which may look like he is not keeping his promise, but he loves you enough and has a purpose beyond your current outlook and must do what is necessary to get you to the place he wants you.

Have you ever tried to put a rubics cube together? I can get one side all the same, but I was unwilling to mess that side up and found out that in order to get the whole cube correct the one correct side had to be scrambled.

You may look at God like why are you messing with what I feel is good and God is saying I have to scramble some other stuff in order to put it all back together correctly. He may have to allow some turbulence in your life to cause you to trust him more. He may have to allow some set-backs in your life to prepare you for what is coming next. He may have to disrupt your comfort zones to push you into his next season of blessing. Don't let your current position cause you to question God's eternal purpose.

- 1-Don't let your current position cause you to question God's purpose...
2. Don't let fear get in the way of your future.

Judges 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."

Judges 6:14 And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" 15 And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and opens up the conversation by calling Gideon a mighty man of valor.

You can imagine Gideon looking around like are you talking to me? The messenger is calling him a man of bravery and he's hiding in a wine press threshing wheat afraid of the Midianites finding him and taking all his grain, and this messenger calls him a mighty warrior.

God looks at Gideon and identifies him by his potential not by his present circumstance.

He didn't see the runt, but the warrior...He didn't see the coward but the conqueror. A friend of mine says Don't overlook anyone God sends your way. They may be miracles disguised as needs.

I'm too short, I'm too poor, I don't have the education, I don't have the position or status, I'm not qualified. These are all needs that put people in position to be used by God for miraculous results.

Being ordinary may be a description, but not a definition. You may ask Who am I that God can use me for anything? The question is not who are you, but Who is God? God is the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Creator who specializes in taking nothing and creating something. Your feet are on evidence of that right now.

Genesis says in the beginning the earth was formless and void and God in His power spoke the world and planets and solar system and atmosphere into being, now if he is able to intelligently design and arrange the universe, what makes you think he is unable to use you in whatever state you are in for His purpose.

In verse 14 we see the Angel of the Lord giving Gideon his assignment and in true form of one who feels inadequate he delivers excuses for why he is not fit for the job.

Judges 6:15 And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Sound familiar? This is the same attitude Moses had when God approached him about being a deliverer. His excuses were, they are going to kill me. My speech is broken. There's gotta be someone better than me.

Here we See Gideon put on the same display. The Angel of the Lord says you are the one I am going to use to deliver Israel. Gideon says "I'm the youngest in the smallest family."

A couple of things jump out at me. I didn't here God ask him how large his family was. I also didn't hear God ask him how old he was. God says you are my choice for this assignment.

Too often God needs us for his purpose and we respond with excuses and fear, when if God is wanting to use you for his purpose to lead, to work, to follow through, he has already taken your weaknesses into consideration. He already knows your faults and short comings. And generally from evidence in scripture, it was the weakness that made you a prime candidate for God to use you.

I think about Paul, a killer of Christians. One day on the Damascus road, Jesus knocked him off his feet, and told him I have work for you to do. And he put him on a journey to bring life to the same Church he was trying to destroy. Paul ends up writing at least 13 books of the New Testament. In one of his writings he confesses, I am the chief of sinners. If you we're to look for someone worthy of being a spiritual giant, if you we're looking for someone perfect to write books in the bible, you missed it with me. But some how God was able to look past my faults...past my fears...and use me.

God has a future for you and if you start listing to all the reasons why you can't do it, you are letting fear get in the way of your future. You are letting yourself get in the way of God using you and many have missed their opportunity to be used by God because they let fear and excuses keep them from being used for God. Don't let fear keep you from your future.

1-don't let your position cause you to question God's purpose....2-don't let fear keep you from your future....

3. Don't let your inability determine God's ability.

Judges 6:14 And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

Judges 6:16 And the LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.”

In verse 13 Gideon is finishing his excuse for why he can't lead this charge and the messenger of the Lord answers almost like he wasn't even listening to what he said. “Go...”

Then he clarifies his request by asking the rhetorical question...Have I not sent you?

Gideon, If you were relying on your family's support alone then you may have cause to be afraid. If you were leaning on your own education and training, then you may have cause to be afraid. If you were hoping that someone would lend you a hand as your only source of support, then you would have cause to be afraid, but the power by which I am sending you to complete this task is by the power of God. Have I not sent you? The implication is if I have sent you, it's not a matter of whether you will succeed or not, it's a matter of if you will go or if I will need to choose somebody else.

And what I like about God is that whenever he sends you or assigns you to a task, he always guarantees his presence with you in the task. He said in verse 16 “I will be with you...”

Don't take that lightly...That means when you are pressing through hard waters and you feel alone, God is with you...when those who started with you got scared and turned around...God is still with you...When it seems like it was a bad decision to move into uncharted territory and you want to give up...know that God is with you!

If you will give God your life, He will give you the promise of his presence where ever you go. What I like about that is that as long as I have His presence, He has a way of making my best efforts, as dumb and off as they may seem sometimes, work so that His will is accomplished and My well-being is kept.

He identifies the weak for his purpose because it is through the weak that the power of God is made manifest.

When we allow God to use us in our ordinary state, people will recognize our supernatural authority.

We see this in the rest of the story...Gideon gathers 32,000 men to fight against an army of 135,000 men.

Judges 7:2 The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ 3 Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.’ ” Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained. 4 And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ shall not go.”

After giving them with the water fountain test, Gideon is left with 300 men. I can imagine his knees were shaking when his 32,000 faced 135,000. This is just plain crazy! Gideon was valiant, but he was still a little scared.

Judges 7:9 That same night the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. 10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. 11 And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp.

If you are afraid take Purah...so he took Purah. He is still in that I believe but help my unbelief state!

The summary of the battle is, Gideon goes at night splits the 300 into 3 different companies strategically placed around the Midianite camp. He gave the signal and all 300 rose and blew their trumpets, the Midianites wake up afraid and started taking each other out until all that were left fled the scene.

God got victory from the underdog. God used the few and the futile to get victory for His glory. And because they were made to be even more under doggy then they were, There was no doubt where the power came from.

Don't be discouraged about who you are or where you are in life, because God gets great pleasure in using you to reach your neighborhood, using you to be the light at your job, using you to do great things for the kingdom when you have no problem acknowledging that he deserves the glory.

When my kids were small, there was a very snowy day and I was trying to go up this hill and the truck I had got stuck. I was trying to get up this hill and the kids in the back were like go go go. Then this guy got behind me with and bobcat mini tractor and said get in and I will push. The kids thought I was rolling up this snowy hill talking about you did it daddy, but I knew the truth. It wasn't me. It was the man pushing me. It was power that was not mine that gave me victory.

When I looked in my rearview mirror, I saw the real power. There was no doubt in how I made it up that hill.

God wants to supply the power to the humble---God wants to use the ordinary ...the regular...the poorest...the weakest...so that when it is all said and done their will be no question to where the power came from when you look in your rearview...you will know that it was God who pushed you...it was God who propelled you...it was God that gave you strength.

Because when you in your weakness gain victory for God, everyone has to acknowledge that God did that and be drawn to know the God who is able to take someone so weak and accomplish something so great.

Think about your life before you met Christ. It was the power of God that changed you. It was believing in Jesus who lived a perfect life and died for you that saved you and turned your life around. And that same power is available for you today.

So, what did we learn today, 1-Don't let your position cause you to question God's purpose. 2-Don't let fear keep you from your future. 3-Don't let your inability determine God's ability.

And the church said Amen!