

Lessons in the Book of Judges: PT 5
Gideon Pt. 2 “Trusting in HIM to do the Impossible”

Intro:

- I. Continuing with our study of the Judges; resuming the story of Gideon in ch. 7
 - A. Study so far has shown us the spiritual ups and downs of God’s people
 - B. We looked at the last verse in the book to begin with (21:25) and that quote continues to resonate throughout each story: everyone does what is right in their own eyes
 - C. Sadly, what is right in the eyes of many continues to lead them away from a faithful relationship with God
 - D. In spite of how faithful and strong the Judge might be (Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah,) as soon as their influence is removed, the people slide back into idolatry:
- II. After Deborah’s time as Judge had passed, the nation once again slid back into serving evil instead of the Lord, and as a result, 6:1 states that God gave Israel into the hands of Midian:
 - A. The oppression was harsh, the people were frightened and hid themselves, 6:2, and it was as though there was a famine in the land due to the devastation that the Midianite forces caused whenever they came.
- III. Our last lesson from Judges 6 introduced us to the next Judge Gideon:
 - A. When we found him, he looks like anything but a hero, or as the Lord would say, a “valiant warrior”-- he is hiding in a wine press threshing flour
 - B. He is also not a man of resilient faith, as he asks God multiple times for signs to assure himself that the Lord *really* is going to deliver them.
 - C. One of the questions that we asked last time, was why is God bending over backwards to provide sign after sign for Gideon: To a degree God was being patient as He brought Gideon along to a stronger point of faith:
 1. But I believe that ultimately, God was investing *so much* into building Gideon’s trust, because the Lord was going about to ask Gideon to place complete and total trust in God in a very difficult situation:
 2. And largely that is what this lesson will be about, strengthening our faith in God, to trust Him even when it is difficult to do so.

Verses 1-8

v 1

- Recall from the previous chapter that Gideon's army has already been assembled.
- Following the cleansing of the Idols in his home town, Gideon began to draw men to him
- In 6:34-35, men from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, as well as Gideon's own tribe have already gathered together.
- The forces of the Midianites and the Amalekites have already camped in the valley of Jezreel as well

v 2

- the Information from v 3 lets us know that the initial number of men in Gideon's army was around 32,000 men:
- Initially that sounds like a fairly formidable fighting force, and in many battles it would be; but the death toll in chapter 8:10 lets us know that the number that the Midianites and Amalekites had was around 135,000.
- So to begin with, that puts the Israelites outnumbered at a ratio of about 4 to 1
 - Anyone who can count can see that *this is a problem*-- and indeed, God comes to Gideon in verse 2 and says, we've got a problem, but it certainly wasn't the one that Gideon had in mind:
- God says that there are just too many Israelites in the army-- even though they are outnumbered 4 to 1, God states that Israel would claim the victory for themselves

v 3

- God's initial thinning of the ranks plays on the fact that everyone already knows that they are over matched, and the majority of the army is scared and wants to go home:
- So when God tells Gideon to let everyone who is "afraid and trembling" to go, a stunning 22,000 people desert and go home:
 - Now the odds, rounding up, have Gideon's army outmatched 14 to 1 (This is not an army of Samsons either!)

v 4

- But even with the ranks thinned to this degree, God says that it is still too many!
 - Imagine, a people who for the past 7 years have been beaten down, oppressed, hiding in whatever hole they can find, no leadership, no thoughts of throwing off their enemy-- that same people could go out and win a battle in which they are hopelessly outmatched-- and someone take the credit away from God!
 - Just exactly how hard had their hearts become, how far had their faith fallen?
- God tells Gideon this, that the Lord Himself will chose out from that 10,000 who will stay and who will go:

v 5

- Gideon led them down to the spring at Harod and is instructed to divide them up into 2 groups, those who got down on their knees and drank, and those who brought the water to their face:
 - Just on the surface, you might imagine that this might split fairly evenly, some folks this way, and other that...

v 6

- But when the men are divided you have two very uneven groups: 300 over here, and 9,700 over there!
 - Gideon knows that he is only going to get to take one of those groups with him, and is most likely hoping that it is NOT the 300!

v 7

- However, the Lord says to Gideon that he is to take these 300 men, and with them, the Lord will deliver Israel!
 - Ok, now lets re estimate our numbers-- they've gone from being mildly outnumbered at 4:1, to desperately outnumbered at 14:1, to hopelessly beyond all despair outnumbered-- 450:1

- God says, NOW, now I can get to work, I can really do something with this number. Now is the time that Gideon is going to have to use that faith and trust he Built in the previous chapter:

Verses 1-8 Application:

- Pausing for a few moments, what are some of the lessons that were written for our learning in these verses so far?

- Consider the initial statement of the Lord in v 2, and pair it with 6:13

- These Israelites had ceased to acknowledge that God was still around, they didn't recognize that He was still their God
- They had been doing this for so long, and to such an extent, that they were no longer capable of recognizing the source of their blessings:
- Might look at Israel and think, well that's an extreme example! I'd never get to a point in my life where I failed to realize God was behind every good and perfect gift: Remember what Paul said! These things happened for our learning!
 - God's people today need to be just as careful that we acknowledge God as being present in our lives, and the continue to recognize Him as the Giver

- Also consider this from another standpoint:

- We asked, how could this people be delivered from such a hopeless situation and still find a way to take credit for it, to think that they did it by their might?
 - That question intensifies when the situation gets even more hopeless, and God still says that they would take credit!
 - While we might have trouble imagining falling into this trap, this attitude is equally dangerous, and still prevalent among God's people today.
- God has done so much for us, and by comparison we have done extremely little: But if do not guard our hearts and attitudes, it is easy to become puffed up, and say I did this: I accomplished this by MY own might:
 - **Salvation:** We know that God paid the ultimate price, and relieved us of a debt beyond calculation-- We know that the good works we do as Christians are merely the physical manifestations of our faith in God-- But Scripture still warns us of the dangers of thinking that we are earning salvation

- **Spiritual growth:** God gives the increase-- *always*-- but when blessed with growth, or things just seem to be going well, do we take the credit for our (great teaching, great example, our hard work)?
- **Day to day:** Can we find ourselves blessed beyond what we ever thought we would have, and then go out and impersonate Nebuchadnezzar? Look at what all I've done!
- God's people today need to constantly be thankful, and acknowledge that we are the same as Gideon and his 300 men: we were hopelessly outnumbered, and God came in to save the day.

Verses 9-15

v 9-11

- For all of the grief that we gave Gideon for repeatedly asking for signs in chapter six, I have to imagine that he is feeling very nervous at the moment:
- His army has been whittled down to what is by comparison, a little scouting party.
- It is at this point that God reminds him again that victory is assured, and in spite of the overwhelming odds, God is still with him:
 - But, God says, if you still need convincing, I've arranged one more sign:
 - Go down to the Midianite camp, and listen to the dreams that they've been having:

v 12-15

- I love the details in the text, not so subtly reminding us that this should be anything but an encouraging experience for Gideon: he is seeing up close and personal just how vast the army is:
- But the guards are relating their dreams to each other, and the guard states that this must be the sword of Gideon:
 - God's providence is clearly seen in these verses. In the last chapter, Gideon is a complete unknown hiding in a hole, despised by many in his home town, and even now, most of his army has deserted.
 - But God has put Gideon's name in the mouths and ears of the Midianites-- and they are afraid!

- Gideon is emboldened by this, and praises God for it: He immediately goes back to share the good news:

Verses 9-15 Application

- I want us to take a lesson from those 300 men who remained: We already know that they were not afraid, because they were among that 10,000 that remained.
- But something else that they and Gideon shared was a belief that God can overcome impossible situations:
 - We've already stated just how hopeless the odds were, But that's all it is: just talk!
 - Can you imagine the faith it took to be one of those 300 men, standing on the lines of an army described like the sands of the seashore, and having the courage to stay standing, to not reduce the number down to 299!
 - This is why in spite of his slow, slow growth in chapter 6, Gideon is listed in Hebrews as one of the pinnacles of faith:
- What about you and me? Again, it is one thing to say about Gideon and his men: "How encouraging! What an example!"
 - But what about when we are placed in that hopeless situation? When our odds are 450:1?
 - How will we react? Will you say like Gideon, "Where is God?", think that "this is a situation that you can tackle with your own strength?"
 - Or will we place our faith completely in God to see us through, in spite of the odds?

Conclusion:

- So, There they are, Gideon and the 300 men standing on the edge of war, ready to rush down into the valley:
- And that, is where we must leave them for this week!