

Judges 7B

- Gideon is the fearful leader of a pitiful army of 300 nonconformist water lappers
 - The Lord has called him to enter battle against 135,000 Midianites and Amalekites with hordes of camels
 - They have no chance, humanly speaking
 - Still, the Lord has promised a victory
 - And as we studied last week, the impossibility of this battle was intended to expose Gideon's fearful nature
 - Gideon's fear may be natural, but it's also an impediment to trusting the Lord
 - Gideon is guilty of a mistake every believer will make from time to time
 - He's judging his circumstances with worldly understanding
 - He's not applying the God multiplier
 - He isn't giving proper consideration to what God can do
 - One commentator observed that no character in the Bible receives more divine assurance than Gideon and yet no one displays more doubt
 - In fact, Gideon is the only judge that the Lord speaks to directly by way of the Angel of the Lord
 - He's the closest to the Lord in that sense
 - Yet Gideon's prone to acting like the Lord is nowhere to be found
- Perhaps it's because of Gideon's weakness that the Lord is working so hard to reassure the hesitant warrior
 - Last week, the Lord offered a measure of reassurance to fearful Gideon
 - The Lord told Gideon to go attack, with only a few hundred men and no real weapons
 - But the Lord added that if Gideon was too afraid, he shouldn't go
 - Rather the Lord would give him confidence from the camp of the enemy

- Let's back up a few verses to get that context again

[Judg. 7:9](#) Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands.

[Judg. 7:10](#) "But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp,

[Judg. 7:11](#) and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp." So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp.

[Judg. 7:12](#) Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

- As we saw last week, the Lord told Gideon to venture into the camp of the enemy to receive a word of confirmation
 - Even this step of assurance is a test of Gideon's trust
 - If the guy is already afraid of going into battle against the Midianites, then surely he fears approaching their camp too
 - The Lord could have given Gideon a sign right then and there
 - Instead, the Lord asks Gideon to take a small, manageable step of faith
 - And in grace, the Lord has allowed Gideon to go by cover of darkness
 - And the Lord provides a friend, Purah, to accompany Gideon
 - Once more we see the Lord paving the stepping stone for Gideon to follow in faith
 - The Lord is leading Gideon in the direction He wants Gideon to go
 - And He's merciful to give Gideon stepping stones to get there
 - And with each stone, the Lord asks Gideon to meet Him halfway with a degree of trust and faith
 - In this case, the Lord asks Gideon to walk down the hill to the camp trusting the Lord to make good on His promise to encourage Gideon

- This is the essence of faith in the face of calamity
 - We have to place our trust in the character and goodness of God
 - We say to ourselves, "I know the situation leaves me fearing and tempted to run away, but I trust the Lord is up to good somehow I can't see yet."
 - As Jeremiah said to Israel centuries later:

Jer. 29:11 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'

- And just to reinforce for us how reasonable Gideon's fear was, Samuel records just how great his adversary was
 - The army filling the Jezreel Valley was beyond number
 - They are as laying in the valley like locusts
 - And just trying to count all their camels was like trying to count the grains of sand at the seashore
 - How will 300 men defeat this army?
 - Only by faith in the Lord
 - Remember the Lord is the One Who assembled this enemy in the first place as a measure of judgment against Israel
 - And now the Lord has hand-picked the men in Israel to battle this enemy
 - The Lord decided it would be a fight of 135,000 vs. 300
 - It's not a fair fight for the Midianites
 - That's where faith in trust comes in for Gideon and for us
 - Do you believe that the Lord is in control
 - Then you can sit back with the popcorn and enjoy the show that the Lord has planned
 - Or you can worry about things you can't control, and that worry gets you nowhere
- Then it comes time for the moment of encouragement the Lord promised

Judg. 7:13 When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, "Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat."

Judg. 7:14 His friend replied, "This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand."

- Somewhere on the edge of the enemy's huge camp, Gideon and Purah are hiding nearby a couple of Midianites
 - As they hide in the bushes or perhaps a boulder, they overhear the men talking
 - These men were probably reclining after the meal, perhaps near an open fire
 - Maybe they were inside their tent with Gideon listening outside the tent walls
 - As Gideon eavesdrops, he hears one man telling a dream to the other man
 - In the Bible, the Lord periodically uses dreams to reveal things to men and women
 - We remember Joseph's dreams of course
 - Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar received dreams
 - Later in the New Testament we see Pilate's wife receive a dream concerning Jesus
 - When these dreams are properly interpreted, they lead to a revelation from the Lord
 - Not every dream is a message from God, so we can't expect to interpret every dream with an expectation that it leads somewhere meaningful
 - Moreover, the Lord is no longer speaking through dreams and prophets
 - As Hebrews 1 reminds us, the Lord has moved to speaking to humanity through His greatest Messenger, Christ
 - And no other method is needed at this point

- But in Gideon's day, dreams were still an instrument God used, so through this conversation the Lord relates to Gideon both a dream and its interpretation
 - The dream is of a barley loaf barreling down a mountainside into the camp of the Midianites
 - And this barley loaf bowls over the tents leaving them turned upside down
 - Barley was the grain commonly eaten by the poorest of Israel
 - And it very well may have become the primary grain for the people since the Midianites were taking the wheat for themselves
 - The interpretation of the dream comes from the soldier's neighbor in the camp
 - He says the barley loaf is a symbol of Gideon
 - And the knocking over of the tents is a premonition that that Gideon's army will defeat Midian
 - How did this soldier know to connect the barley with Gideon?
 - Humanly speaking, news may have reached the camp that Gideon was assembling a force to oppose the Midianites
 - Of course, we know the whole thing is being orchestrated supernaturally by the Lord
- The Lord uses enemy soldiers to bring both the dream and its interpretation to Gideon
 - If you read scripture with a proper appreciation for the sovereignty of God, then you won't miss the significance of moments like this
 - First, remember that Gideon was not given any direction on where to go in the camp
 - He just went to whatever spot he came upon first
 - And yet he happened upon the exact tent out of 135,000 men where this dream was being discussed
 - And he arrives at the perfect moment to hear the conversation

- This reminds us of God's omnipotence to orchestrate all events according to His will
- Including bending the will and actions of men to fit God's preordained plan
- Secondly, the man Gideon happens upon has *already* experienced the dream, whether earlier that night or perhaps the night before
 - In fact, this man was having his dream even before Gideon was told to go into the camp
 - We might ask how the Lord knew that Gideon would take Him up on the offer to spy on the camp
 - This reminds us of God's omniscience to look into the future and anticipate all events to fit His purposes
 - He's always working even on events that have yet to materialize in our experience
- Finally, there was a soldier with the proper interpretation to understand the revelation of the dream and speak it out loud for Gideon to hear
 - Clearly, the man didn't arrive at such an obscure interpretation on his own
 - There is nothing obvious about associating Gideon with barley loaves
 - And in fact, it's remarkable that this particular man even knew Gideon's name at all
 - This reminds us of God's omnipresence by His Spirit to be working in every place at all times to accomplish His will
 - In this case, the Spirit was working in the heart of this soldier to reveal God's will
 - Even as He was working in Gideon's heart to steady his nerves and lead him to the right tent
- If you want to follow the Lord in strength of faith and confidence, you need only remember you serve a God Who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent
 - I think it's a rule of scripture that our strength of faith is proportional to our understanding and acceptance of God's sovereignty

- When you have a high view of God's sovereignty, you'll worship Him more earnestly, follow Him more faithfully, and acknowledge Him more boldly
- You'll find courage in the face of trials more easier when we understand that every detail you're facing was planned by God before you even knew what was coming
- That's the primary source of encouragement for Gideon here
 - Notice what Gideon does immediately after hearing this message

Judg. 7:15 When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands."

Judg. 7:16 He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers.

Judg. 7:17 He said to them, "Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.

Judg. 7:18 "When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'"

- When Gideon hears this exchange, he bowed right then and there in worship to the Lord
 - Can you imagine the relief Gideon felt?
 - The fear left him, the tension and worry evaporated
 - I imagine he had tears of gratitude and joy welling up
 - Spontaneously, he enters into a moment of worshipping the Lord God
 - But notice that there was nothing new in the information Gideon hears
 - Even before he traveled down this mountain, he heard the Lord say in v.9 that He had given the camp into Gideon's hand
 - What Gideon heard from the soldiers was exactly the same thing, that Gideon would destroy the camp
 - So why did Gideon worship now and not earlier in v.9?

- Because that's exactly how you feel when you have an encounter with the sovereignty and power of God
 - In an instant Gideon began to grasp the power of a God Who could bring all these details together for Gideon's sake
 - I've been in moments like this...perhaps you have too
 - The Lord pulls back the curtain a little to show you how much of life's seeming randomness is following a script God wrote
 - When the full force of that recognition hits you, you can't help but worship
- That's the encouragement the Lord wanted to offer Gideon, and the basis of that encouragement was to come to know the power of God
 - There is only one answer God gives to those who doubt Him or fail to follow Him in trust and obedience: a display of His power
 - When Jacob feared, the Lord showed him a ladder of angels coming to help him
 - When Moses doubted, the Lord made his hand white with leprosy
 - And to Gideon He shows His power to control the enemy
 - Gideon didn't receive proof he would win or even how the battle would proceed
 - But what he did receive was evidence that God is more than capable of doing what He promised
 - And if case you've been left out, you've received an even greater display of God's power to keep His promises

2Cor. 4:13 But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak, **2Cor. 4:14** knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

- The Father raised Jesus before the apostles' eyes so that we would have that proof of God's power to keep His promises
- Death is not to be feared...it is not the end of you and it leads to your glory

- Live your life for God without fear of what might come, because nothing can harm you when the Lord is on your side
- That's the message Gideon received
- So emboldened by his confidence in God's power to deliver him, Gideon jumps into action

Judg. 7:19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands.

Judg. 7:20 When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

Judg. 7:21 Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled.

Judg. 7:22 When they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

- As it turns out, Gideon had a plan, and a pretty good one
 - Perhaps the Lord gave Gideon this military maneuver directly or simply lead him to this idea through the advice of other men
 - Regardless, it was a daring idea and it would have given the men a reason to hope for a positive outcome
 - We know Gideon is leading the fight on the basis of the confidence the Lord gave him through the dream
 - But it's another thing to convince 300 men to enter battle against such long odds
 - What Gideon proposed to gain their confidence was a surprise attack designed to convince the enemy that a vast Jewish army was descending upon them from the hills
 - Gideon split the 300 men into three groups of a hundred each
 - In v.19 we're told that Gideon takes his hundred men and moves to the outskirts of the camp at the middle watch of the night
 - The middle watch was midnight, when the Midianites would have been sleeping

- They attack right after the watch was posted, so the new guards were still settling in
- The other two groups of one hundred men each moved left and right from Gideon on the hillside so that they spread out around the valley
 - Then Gideon's group initiated the launch
 - Simultaneously, each man blew a shofar, a ram's horn that makes a loud, resonating tone
 - Secondly, each man carried a lit torch, but the light of the torch was hidden inside the pot
 - Then at the moment of the attack, they smashed their pots and the light in the pot suddenly became visible
- Typically, in battle only the commander of a squad of men carried a shofar and a torch into battle
 - He would use them to direct the attack of his unit
 - But in Gideon's army all 300 men possessed both a torch and a shofar
 - So that at Gideon's sign, all 300 blew their horns and exposed the light of their torches
- There's a beautiful picture being created by Gideon's brilliant plan
 - The blowing of a horn announces the appearance of God in scripture
 - Particularly in the feast of Trumpets at the inauguration of the Jewish New Year and the picture of the Resurrection of the Church
 - And the light of these torches pictures the light of the Spirit in the world through the lives of God's children

2Cor. 4:6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2Cor. 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

2Cor. 4:8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

2Cor. 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

2Cor. 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

- These 300 men were earthen vessels carrying the light of God in their faithful obedience to the Lord's call
 - But before that light could shine in the darkness, the earthen vessels had to be shattered
 - As long as the men lived in their fearful flesh, the light of God in them remain hidden
 - God had to smash their dependence on flesh and expose His light in them
 - Only then could they achieve victory
- The enemy in the camp awakes in a groggy state to see the hillsides alive with points of light and the sounds of many horns
 - Assuming that each point of light and horn represents an entire unit of soldiers, the Midianites conclude that a great force was descending upon them
 - But in v.21 we're told that Gideon's 300 men just stood in their place on the hillside
 - They don't run into the battle
 - They let the Lord win the battle for them
 - Immediately, the Midianites react in panic and confusion by killing each other
 - Why would they do this?
 - Well, the camp was actually three marauding armies of Midianites, Amalekites and other Arabians
 - And these different groups didn't share the same language
 - So perhaps in the confusion, they mistook each other for the enemy
 - The bottom line is the Lord was directly this outcome, and Gideon and his troops didn't need to do anything at all
 - Once again, the Lord had this plan from the beginning
 - Which explains why he only needed 300 men for the battle
 - And they didn't need to be particularly strong warriors either

- They just had to be men willing to follow the instructions of a man following the Lord
- If you were a soldier evaluating this situation with human logic, you would have given up on God and Gideon long ago
- You would never have gone along far enough to get this moment, to see this miracle take place
- Faith will take you places that sight can never reach
- Very soon, the panic drives the enemy to retreat out of the valley
 - And Gideon's forces see their opportunity to finish these guys off once and for all
 - But clearly 300 soldiers aren't going to destroy such a large force on their own
 - So they call for help

Judg. 7:23 The men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.

Judg. 7:24 Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were summoned and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.

Judg. 7:25 They captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.

- Immediately, Gideon summons support from the surrounding tribes of Israel
 - And the tribes respond by sending men to prosecute the battle
 - Gideon makes another sound tactical maneuver
 - He calls for the men of Ephraim on the eastern border of Canaan to guard the way to the Jordan
 - The hill country of Ephraim included all the escape routes to Midian by way of the Jordan River through wadis or deep canyons
 - By controlling these canyons, the Israelites could prevent the enemies of God from fleeing to fight another day

- So Gideon calls for Ephraim to secure their border from Jezreel to Beth-barah, which is directly East of Bethlehem
 - That's a distance of 60 miles through the heart of Canaan to the northern border of the Dead Sea
 - By preventing an escape, the Israelites capture and kill most of the Midianite army including the two leaders
 - The two leaders' names mean Raven and Wolf
 - Their names reflect the way the Midianites were scavengers and predators, but now they become the hunted
 - The places of their death still carried their names in Samuel's day
- In the end, this victory is nothing if not a testimony to the power of God to do anything through the feeble hand and feet of faithful servants
 - It began with a call and progressed to signs of encouragement
 - It moved to removing fear and dependence on human wisdom and strength
 - And it included signs of encouragement and displays of God's authority
 - Once God's servants were willing to worship the Lord who called them, then the work began
 - And in the Lord did all the work
 - So why did He even need Gideon in the first place?
 - We already answered that...God never needed Gideon
 - Gideon needed the Lord even more than Gideon understood
 - And so Gideon was invited into the battle to build his faith
 - How is the Lord testing your faith? Because He's certainly at work in your life at all times
 - Has He placed a certain call on you? Are you hesitant to obey?
 - You may have your reasons, but perhaps reason is the problem
 - Let the Lord show His sovereignty in your life and worship and follow Him