

March 22, 2020

Prayer (3)

Weakness Turned to Strength

Judges 7:1-9

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One of our basic instincts is that we want to be physically strong, be in a position of power, be in control and have others think highly of us. We tend to think we are better than others, judging them and seeing ourselves as good and worthy. But God wants us to be weak and dependent, so that we can fully rely on Him and His strength. The Lord will not entrust us with His work unless we realize how weak and inadequate we are. God wants to empty us of our toxic self and fill us with His presence. God works through weak people and humbles those who seem qualified.

In today text, God weakened Gideon by reducing the number of his soldiers. Then the Lord encouraged Gideon in his weakness! *"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."* (v. 7:2) God told Gideon and Israel that He would deliver them, but not by the strength of their military might, nor by the number of their soldiers. So how did God do this with Gideon and his army?

First, God reduced the number of Gideon's soldiers from 32,000 to 10,000 (vv. 2-3). Gideon was thinking that he had too few men for battle, but God told him that he had too many! The 22,000 men who trembled with fear and lacked faith were allowed to return home. Matthew Henry says that this reduction in numbers may help us understand those divine providences which sometimes seem to weaken the church and its interests. God may at times deliberately weaken us, our church, and our ministries, so that we have to rely more on Him.

Second, God reduced the number in Gideon's army again, (vv. 4-8), this time from 10,000 soldiers to only 300 men! In the first reduction, the men decided who will go. In the second reduction, God decided by how they drank water. There was no virtue in the way of drinking. Some scholars mention significance in how the 300 men drank water and their method showed them to be ready for action. God wanted Gideon to trust God. How about you? Can you trust God when His ways don't make sense to you? Can you still trust God when cancer hits your loved ones, when you get in a serious accident, or when the coronavirus negatively impacts and threatens your life, not only your health, but our economy and lifestyle?

In today's text God reduced their number from 32,000 to 10,000 (1/3) and then to 300 (1/32). Gideon will face 135,000 enemy soldiers (Judge 8:10), meaning that he was outnumbered 450 to 1. Why did God reduce their number here? In verse 9 God commanded Gideon to obey, promised to cling to, and confirmed to rejoice in. God commanded him to get up and go down to the Midianite camp in the middle of the night. He promised that He would give the camp into his hands. Verse 9 says, *"During that night the Lord said to Gideon, 'Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands.'"* God came to him with a command to obey *"Get up and go down to the camp"* and with a promise to believe and trust: *"I am going to give the enemy camp into your hands!"* At first, the sight of the vast number of Midianites, and even just seeing their campfires and the size of their encampment, might have discouraged Gideon. But God allowed him to overhear the conversation between two Midianite friends in the camp and it greatly encouraged him! These Midianites were talking about him and even they were afraid of him! God knew that Gideon was afraid (vv 7:10-11) and He knew the best way to strengthen and encourage him. The Lord used the introvert, the uncertain, and the fearful.

We look for more money, more workers, more volunteers, etc., while God may be looking to give us more faith, more encouragement, more trust and reliance upon Him and His promises. God is always graciously seeking to break us, humble us, and make less of us so that Christ may increase. But we don't like this process. It makes us fearful or angry or discouraged or depressed. But God does it because it suffocates our sinful pride and helps us to see God's power and grace more clearly, so that we will respond by worshipping Him! God weakens us, so we have to rely on Him, fully rely on Him alone! What about you? Are you relying on Christ alone for your forgiveness, for your encouragement, and for your future? Are you relying on God for the deliverance from the guilt and power of your sins, or for overcoming your idols and addictions, or for victory and joy in your heart?

So how do we learn from today's text? First, we need to rely on God instead of trusting in the number of people in our church. Many churches can boast of having big congregations and various programs for every age and need. But as you know our congregation is not big enough and doesn't have enough resources. We have wondered how we will turnaround to grow in a few years. But I believe that God has been doing some amazing things among us, through us, and for us!

Second, we need to rely on God instead of trusting in the number of dollars in our bank. We tend to find our security in the number of dollars in our bank account, our savings and retirement accounts, etc. But what if God wants to reduce those numbers of dollars through a stock market plunge or through a financial emergency or through unexpected accidents? We would not be able to boast of or take pride in or trust in our financial resources.

Third, we need to rely on God instead of trusting in the number of healthy years in our body. We can expect that as we age we will still have a certain measure of health and mental awareness, so that we will be able to live a certain lifestyle and enjoy it for a certain number of years. But what if the Lord greatly reduces that expected number of years? What if at age 50 or 60, you or your spouse are now looking at having only a few good years or months left? What if a devastating illness hits you in your 20s, 30s, or 40s, and now it appears that your good years have almost disappeared? How will you face the "Midianites," in other words "challenges," with poor health, declining faculties, or major disabilities? In today's story we learn that God wants us to accept and rejoice in our weaknesses. God encourages us as He works through us.

22,000 of the Israelites soldiers were afraid of being killed in battle (v. 3) Gideon himself was afraid of facing the vast number of Midianites, especially with only 300 men. (v. 10) But ultimately it was the Midianites who ran in fear from Gideon's small band. God designed the battle so that Gideon's 300 did not have to fight, only to frighten the enemy. Therefore, we need to fear God, not humans and not our circumstances. We need to stand by faith. Where is your faith? Only in Christ we can stand.