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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

This is the second half of the message about Gideon. Don Barron, who used to be a hunting guide, tells a story about going out to West Texas on a dove shoot one day and he encountered the ugliest looking guy he had ever seen before who was supposed to go dove hunting with them. They walked out into the fields to start the dove hunt. This guy did not have a shotgun or anything so Don said, “Well, aren’t you going to take a gun? Aren’t you going to hunt?” The guy says, “I’m going to hunt, but I don’t need a gun.” Don said, “Why not?” The guy said, “Well, I just ugly ‘em to death.” Don laughed, but he knew the guy was ugly so, sure enough; they got out there hid behind some bushes and things. A covey of doves flew over and the man jumped up and put his face up there to those doves and 2 or 3 of them just fell flat. Don said, “Well, that is the most amazing thing I have ever seen in my life somebody so ugly that they can “ugly” a dove to death.” The guy said, “Shoot! That’s nothing. I have a brother that’s uglier than me.” Don said, “Why don’t you bring him hunting?” The guy said, “He tears them up too bad.”

The Midianites had a secret weapon. That secret weapon they had was called a camel, because at this stage in Israeli history, they did not really know what camels were. The good thing a camel could do was walk 300 miles without needing water and if that didn’t work, you could just look at a camel and it would “ugly” you to death! The Midianites were 135,000 strong and armed to the teeth and they had a lot of camels. Now here’s poor Gideon: A judge. I told you last week that judges were temporary leaders in this time in the history of Israel. Two weeks ago we talked about how God often calls people who feel unqualified. Gideon said, “Why are you calling me? I’m not a mighty man. I’m the weakest one in my tribe.” The second thing we learned was God confirms his will in a variety of ways. Gideon laid out a fleece before the Lord. I talked about how a lot of people talk about laying out fleeces, but Gideon is the only one God ever used a fleece with. God will reveal his will to us in unique ways. I also said in the New Testament as Christians we have the Holy Spirit who speaks to us through the Bible through prayer through circumstances and through the church.

There are some more lessons we need to learn from the life of Gideon as we continue this second part of this message.

Judges 7:1-3. “Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The Lord said to Gideon, ‘You have too many men for me for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’ So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.”

Here they were gathered, about 135,000 Midianites in the Valley of Jezreel, which by the way is what we call The Plain of Armageddon today, where the final conflict of the world is going to take place—the most perfect battlefield on the face of the planet and Gideon calls all of the Israelites to gather together for a battle. How many show up? Thirty-two thousand they are already outnumbered almost 4 to 1—thirty-two thousand against one hundred and thirty-five thousand but God looks at that number and he says, “You have too many because if thirty-two

thousand beat an army of one hundred and thirty-five thousand, you are going to say, ‘Look at what we did! Look how powerful we are!’ so God said, “You have too many. We have to cut that number down.”

I. GOD CAN DO GREAT THINGS WITH A COMMITTED FEW

Here’s the first thing we are going to learn tonight. We are learning some principles from the life of Gideon. God can do great things with a committed few! As an example of that, you ought to look among yourselves. What is Green Acres Baptist Church? Green Acres Baptist Church on paper is over 9,000 people, but on any given Sunday even over the period of six weeks or so only about half of those even show up. About half of our church on the rolls never come and never give one dime but then you keep bringing that number down. Look at how many are here tonight Look at what we have here tonight we have more than 300 but what we have here tonight is just a small number of the committed few in our church. I do consider you within that number of the committed few. There are others not here that are also committed but it is amazing what God is doing through Green Acres Baptist Church in terms of world missions and in terms of ministry with a relatively small number of people. Sometimes we boast about our membership and anytime somebody says, “Well, what’s it like to pastor a church with 9,000 members?” I just laugh. They say, “How many are you running at that church?” I say, “Well I’m running all of them, but I’m only catching about half of them.” The total membership doesn’t mean anything. It’s those that are really committed that really matter. God can take a small group of committed people who are totally sold out and he can do miraculous things.

II. GOD OFTEN TESTS US IN THE SIMPLE MATTERS OF LIFE

I want to move on to the second lesson we are going to learn, because it ties in with the first one. Number two: God often tests us in the simple matters of life. Gideon said, “Anybody who’s afraid, go home!” Twenty-two thousand of them left, leaving ten thousand. Gideon looks at the ten thousand and he says, “Well I know that’s not nearly as many and now the odds are about 14 to 1, but maybe we can do it.” God says, “I’m not through yet.”

Judges 7:4-6. “But the Lord said to Gideon, ‘There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go; but if I say, ‘This one shall not go with you’ he shall not go.’ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, ‘Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.’ Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.”

Look at the numbers. Ten thousand of them went down to drink. Nine thousand, seven hundred of them got down on their hands and knees, put their faces in the water and slurped the water up. Only three hundred were vigilant enough to bend down with their sword in one hand, looking around for the enemy and drinking the water. God said, “That’s the test! And the ones who passed the test are the ones I am going to use.”

Look at verse 7. “The Lord said to Gideon, ‘With the three hundred men that lapped I will save

you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go each to his own place.”

This is amazing! Wouldn’t you think if you were going into battle, you would try to take as many people as possible? Thirty-two thousand show up. “Anybody who is afraid, go home!” I’ve talked to men who have gone into battle and just about everybody is afraid. Twenty-two thousand of them were honest enough to say, “I’m afraid!” and they go home leaving ten thousand. Ninety-seven hundred of those are excluded until there are only three hundred. The point I want you to understand is God was using a simple little matter like how they drank water to test them about whether or not they could be depended upon. God sometimes uses the very simple, ordinary experiences of life to test us.

I often use an illustration I heard from a businessman. He was the head of a multi-national business in Birmingham and had just come from the boardroom on the top floor of a skyscraper. They had talked about promoting a certain man who was at that time in middle management. They had just spent an hour talking about his qualifications. They were ready to offer this man a substantial raise and promotion. After the meeting broke up, they all went down to the company cafeteria that was in the basement of the building. The man who was telling me the story said he happened to get in line behind the man they had been talking about promoting. As they were going through the company cafeteria line, this man took a two-cent pat of butter and hid it under his napkin, not knowing that the man behind him had just been talking about promoting him. They went through the line and he didn’t pay for the butter. The man went back upstairs and said to the executives, “That’s not our man because any man that would steal a two-cent pat of butter would steal from our company if given an opportunity. That guy never knew that he was being watched and that simple act of hiding a two-cent pat of butter just about ruined his future.

God takes the simple things of life and tests us. That’s amazing, because I have been to this very spot in Israel and you can see today this spring where this water is. In order to get to this spring you have to come down out of the rocks out of the mountains and there gathered on the hillside and in the valley were these thousands of Midianite soldiers. The Bible says they were as many as locusts out on the field. So to drink they were in full view of the enemy, but some of these people didn’t care they were so thirsty, they just got down and drank. What was God trying to teach Gideon? What was he trying to teach these people? The New Testament message is this “Be serious. Be vigilant, because our enemy, the devil, roams about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.” You and I as Christians like these three hundred faithful must be vigilant.

III. OUR GREATEST WEAPONS ARE FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Here’s the third lesson we are going to learn tonight: Our greatest weapons are faith and obedience. Here’s the scenario. God says, “Gideon, I want you to take three hundred men.” They are outnumbered four hundred and fifty to one. Here are the directions Gideon gave the soldiers”

Judges 7:17-22. “‘Watch me,’ he told them. ‘Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon.’ Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the

middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew their trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, ‘A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!’ While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled. When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.”

They fought the battle without conventional weapons. Can you imagine Gideon as he was gathering his army of three hundred around him saying, “Okay, boys. It’s time to go into battle. Here are your weapons.” What would you expect a group of three hundred commandos to use as they go into battle? Have you seen these Rambo movies? I imagine these three hundred Israeli commandos thought they would get a spear for one hand, a sword for the other hand and a bow and arrows and a shield. But instead Gideon says, “Okay, here’s your trumpet! Here’s your clay jar and here’s your torch.” They said, “What?” He said, “That’s right! You don’t even get a sword. This is what we want you to do. Divide up into three groups, with one hundred in each group. Surround the camp and when you hear me, blow the trumpet, break the jar and shout. Hold up your torch blow the trumpet and shout again.”

Now this was in the middle of the night. All the Midianite soldiers were in their tents sleeping. It is getting close to midnight. The guard has just changed. People are just settling down. Suddenly, they hear the sound of three hundred trumpets! Do you know what they thought? In a normal army, you maybe had one trumpeter for about a thousand soldiers. So when they heard three hundred trumpets, they thought there must be at least three hundred thousand soldiers! Then when those three hundred clay jars broke, can you imagine that sound? That sounded like the clinking of swords and spears together. They’re thinking, “There must be thousands of them out there!” Then, they held up the torch and maybe they thought, “one torch bearer for another thousand soldiers.” Then they heard the shouting and sound of the trumpets again. Panic and chaos set in! They jumped up, grabbed their swords and every shadow became an enemy and they started lashing out and the Bible says they killed each other. The whole time Gideon and his army stood in the fields watching the whole thing—and not a one of them was injured!

That is one of the most amazing battles and victories in the Bible. Do you know who got the glory and the credit? God did! Not the soldiers. I want you to understand that when we enter into spiritual warfare; we don’t use conventional weapons either. 2 Corinthians 10:4 says, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal or fleshly, but are mighty unto God to the pulling down of strongholds.” When we talk about spiritual warfare in which every one of us is involved, we don’t use normal weapons. We don’t use real swords; we don’t use our fists; we don’t kick with our feet; and we don’t bite with our teeth. We have other weapons. According to Ephesians 6:17, our weapons are “...the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.” Our faith is a shield we hold up against the fiery darts of the devil. Our feet are shod with the battle boots of the preparation of peace. We have surrounding our hearts the breastplate of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Our legs are protected by the word of truth. On our head we are protected by the mind of Christ, the helmet of salvation. Our weapons are not normal they are not conventional—but they are mighty to God!

1. Trumpets: Boldness

Look at the spiritual significance of the three things they did and what it means to each one of us. Here’s the application. The trumpets represent boldness. That means if you want to have victory in the spiritual life, you ought to be bold. A trumpet announces something. It says, “Something is coming!” It represents boldness. Today we need men and women who are going to be bold for God. Are you a brave man? What is a brave man? Is a brave man one who can go out and put a deer in his sights and pull that trigger and shoot it? You may think that takes bravery, but it takes more bravery than that for you to sit down with your son, hold his hand and say, “Son, let’s pray together!” What is a courageous man? A courageous man is one who sits down with his family, opens the word of God and says, “We’re going to have family devotions!” That is a brave man today. It doesn’t take a brave man to go and sit out in the cold and cheer for some football team, it takes a brave man to go out and talk to somebody about Jesus Christ. A trumpet represents spiritual boldness.

2. Clay jars: Spiritual brokenness

The clay jars represent spiritual brokenness. In Psalm 51:17 King David prayer this psalm of repentance after the prophet, Nathan confronted him with David’s sin of adultery with Bathsheba. David said, “...a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Brokenness in the Christian life is when the big “I” of ego is bent and broken until it becomes a zero and then it is reformed into a “C” for Christ. We have a word in our English language that comes from working with horses. When a horse has never been ridden, we say, “That horse hasn’t been broken.” But do you know what it is to take a horse and bring about brokenness in it? It means you bring about submission to authority. When a horse is broken, it can be ridden and directed by a bridle and reins. That horse is no less strong. That horse is no less majestic than it was before—it was broken; it can now be controlled. For a person to truly be broken doesn’t mean they are weak. It means they can be guided and directed by the Holy Spirit. In our economy when something is broken, we think it is worthless. When a television is broken, if you don’t want to fix it, you throw it away. When a dish or a saucer is broken, if you can’t fix it, you throw it away. But in God’s economy, broken things are more valuable, because God uses broken things. The clay jars had to be broken for the light of the torches to be seen. Jesus took those five loaves and two fishes from that little boy and broke them and blessed them. Mary broke the alabaster box of perfume and the aroma filled the room. Jesus said, “It’s not until my body is broken for you that it is worth anything. So, “broken” in the Christian life is very valuable.

3. Torches: Brightness

What about the torches? Well, obviously, the torches represent brightness in the Christian life, how we ought to “shine for Jesus!” Philippians 2:15 says, “so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life...” You and I are to “shine for Jesus.” Jesus said, “You are the light of the world!” He also said, “I am the light of the world” Which is right? Is Jesus “the light of the world” or are we “the light of the world”? The answer is

“yes.” Jesus is the one who radiates the glory of God like the sun. We, like the moon, only reflect the glory of Jesus Christ. That’s what we ought to be doing, reflecting the glory the brightness and the brilliance of the Lord Jesus.

So in the trumpets we see the boldness that ought to be ours in the Christian walk. We see the brokenness and the brightness that ought to be ours. I wish I could tell you that is the end of the story. I wish I could say Gideon and the army won the battle and everyone lived happily ever after. But that’s not the end of the story. Isn’t it sad that in the Bible that there are so many people who start out great and end up lousy? It was true of Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. The Bible said in his old age his wives turned his heart from God. What about Saul? In the Old Testament Saul stood head and shoulders above everybody else? He started out as the anointed king of Israel and became so perverted he ended up consulting a fortuneteller. What about Noah? After he built an ark and delivered those animals and his family through the flood, he got drunk exposed his nakedness to his family and ended with a curse upon his family. The same is true for Gideon. He did not end well.

WARNING: Even after victory, failure is possible

That leads us to our final lesson I want to share with you as we finish. Warning: even after failure is possible. I would not be a true preacher of the word of God if I didn’t share with you the last chapter of Gideon’s life. Obviously, Gideon was a hero.

Judges 8:22. “The Israelites said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian.’ But Gideon told them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.’ And he said, ‘I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder.’ (It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings) They answered, ‘We’ll be glad to give them.’ So they spread out a garment and each man threw a ring from his plunder onto it. The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels. [That’s almost 50 pounds] not counting the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian or the chains that were on the camels’ necks. Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.”

An ephod is a fancy apron worn by the high priest and the high priest only. There were some pockets in this ephod that was worn by the high priest at the tabernacle and in these pockets were kept urim and the thummim, which they determined God’s will by. There was only to be one ephod worn by one high priest associated with one Ark of the Covenant with one tabernacle. At this time the Ark of the Covenant was in Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, but Gideon must have said, “We don’t need to go all the way to Shiloh. Listen. We can just worship God our own way. Let’s do our own thing!” “I don’t need to go to church to God on Sunday. I can worship God out on the lake. Let’s just do it my way!” So he made a gold ephod, put it in his hometown and they bowed down and worshiped this ephod as if there was something magical and mysterious about it. The Bible says they prostituted themselves before it. They sold themselves to it! And it became a trap not only for Gideon, but for his family.

Now didn’t it sound good? “I won’t be your king just give me your gold.” it sounds like Washington, doesn’t it. “Just give me your gold.” Do you know what Gideon named his son? He named his son Abimelech, which translated means, “my father is the king.” So apparently, even though he tried to avoid the temptation, he fell into the snare and the trap of luxury of wealth of giving in to the worship of the people.

Would you agree with me if I were to say that the devil has set a trap—perhaps many snares—for every Christian in this room? I believe there are hidden traps or snares for every Christian and if you are not careful, you’ll make the same mistake Gideon made. That’s why I like that book Steve Farrar wrote, *Finishing Strong*. The Christian life is a race and I hope to God that when I get close to the finish line, I will be sprinting to the finish line and I hope to God that when you approach your finish line, you won’t be sitting down. You won’t be falling into the mistake Gideon fell into or Noah fell into or Saul fell into or Solomon fell into, that you’ll be sprinting to the finish line so when you cross that finish line, you can do so with a spirit of victory!

You don’t have to finish bad, but you need to keep your eyes on Jesus who is our finish line the author and finisher of our faith. If you keep your eyes on Jesus, you can finish strong!

OUTLINE

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III. OUR GREATEST WEAPONS ARE FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

1. Trumpets: Boldness
2. Clay jars: Spiritual brokenness
3. Torches: Brightness

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