

Judges

Strength in Weakness

Fearful Choices

- Our goal this week is to look at some examples of people who allow God to work within their lives for good even though they were filled with Fear, had made poor choices in their lives, and even though they had committed great sins
- Because the lesson for us is that God shows forth his **Strength in Weakness**
- The Judges are a great lesson for us, because the Judges were just like us
- And even though they were just like us, warts and all, and made bad choices in their lives, God still chose to work within those frail, human, sinful characters to show forth his Glory and his Strength
- And he will do the same thing in our lives as well
- Specifically, we'd like to talk about God working in your life even when you make **Fearful Choices**
- When you are not living at a spiritual peak, and you let fear run your life, and make decisions that are not worthy of the strength and glory that God has called you to
- We're going to talk about Gideon
- A Poster Child for living a life directed by Fear
- But, nonetheless, a person that God chooses to lead Israel
- Let's look at the end of the verse right before the chapter we read:
- Judges 5:31
 - 31) ...And the land had rest **forty years**.
- How long is a generation?

- There you go...
- No sooner does the generation pass away that were instructed by the faithful acts of Deborah and Barak, and...
- Judges 6:1
 - 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 Midianites came upon them like Locusts
- And like Locusts they left them nothing to eat
- God sent a prophet first, then an angel
- The Angel finds Gideon threshing wheat by the winepress near Ophrah
- Do you know how to thresh wheat?
- Threshing involves crushing the wheat on the ground to loosen the Grain from the Chaff, and then winnowing it by throwing it up in the air and letting the breeze separate the Chaff from the Grain
- Do you know where you would place a winepress?
- A winepress would typically be in a hollow or a ravine
- This is a sign of how bad things had become
- Gideon was hiding in a valley somewhere to do work that would best be done high on a hill
- So, our first picture of Gideon is not that flattering
- It's more humiliating, as a man hiding somewhere doing a job in a most inefficient way because he is afraid of the Midianites
- But, look at the Angel's greeting to Gideon:
- Judges 6:12
 - 12) And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, **mighty man of valor.**"
- Does anyone think of Gideon as a Mighty Man of Valor?

- Don't we rather think of Gideon as a weakling?

- Look at his words and actions:

- Judges 6:15

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."

- Judges 6:27

27) So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But **because he was too afraid** of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night.

- And such are the men through whom God prefers to work!

- But, we mustn't confuse weakness and lack of valor as a lack of faith

- Oddly enough, what Gideon says to the Angel actually confirms his faith in God

- Judges 6:13

13) And Gideon said to him, "Please, sir, 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."

- You see, it isn't a sign of weakness to question God, but rather a symbol of the strength of one's relationship with God

- Consider David and all of the tough questions that he raises to God in his Psalms

- Consider Job and the frank manner in which addresses the Almighty

- Consider the Prophets who continually question God's decisions

- **COMPLAINING** is wrong

- **GRUMBLING** is the sin that Israel was guilty of

- But, **QUESTIONING** God, doesn't bother Him, because it shows a strong relationship

- The reply from the Angel raises the hair on the back of my neck...

- Judges 6:14

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?**"

- You start to wonder if this isn't similar to an earlier event when the Angel of the Lord met with someone and told them to deliver Israel
- Moses was given signs, so maybe Gideon puts two and two together and he asks for a sign as well
- The "Sign" seems to be more of a Sacrifice in Verse 19
- Notice what was sacrificed
- Judges 6:19
 - 19) So Gideon went into his house and prepared a **young goat** and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them.
- Maybe Gideon felt bad about his fearful actions...
- Look at this verse:
- Leviticus 4:22-23
 - 22) **"When a leader sins**, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt,
 - 23) or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, **he shall bring as his offering a goat**, a male without blemish,
- When the Angel touches the Offering with his Staff it is consumed in fire
- What an amazing and awesome sight:
- Judges 6:21
 - 21) Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And **fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat** and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.
- But, even this awesome sight seems to scare Gideon
- Now Gideon is certain that this is an Angel from God, and he feels bad that he didn't bow, or cover his eyes, or remove his shoes like Moses did
- He's afraid again... Afraid that he will have to die for his actions
- But, God reassures him

• Judges 6:23

23) But the LORD said to him, “Peace be to you. **Do not fear**; you shall not die.”

- God wants to work through Gideon, and he is patient and kind helping him through his fears
- Gideon’s first task is to clean up his own Father’s house
- Look at the person that God has chosen to work with
- It doesn’t matter who your parents are!
- Joash, Gideon’s Father, was the leading man in town, and therefore the Altar to Baal was at his house
- Gideon means, “He who cuts down”, and that night he earned his name
- He does what the Lord asks him to, but he does it in the secrecy of night, and not in the open of the day
- The people are obviously upset, and call for Gideon’s life
- Gideon’s Father steps up to the plate, and joins in the Reformation that his son has started
- Let Baal defend himself, he cries
- And Gideon is established as Judge in Israel
- We read in Verse 32 that the people started calling him Jerubbaal, which means, “Let Baal contend with him”, because he threw down the altar
- Take a look at what happens in the next verse...

• Judges 6:33

33) Now **all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East** came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.

- The Midianites rally!
- But, what happens to Gideon next is interesting...

• Judges 6:34

34) But **the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon**, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him.

- The original Hebrew here is “*Labash*,” which means to “Clothe yourself in a garment”
- It should probably read “*The Spirit of the Lord clothed itself in Gideon*”
- Who’s helping whom here?
- This really isn’t the way I’ve always thought of it
- “The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon”
- Like the Power of God helps out Gideon in this battle
- This is more like “The Spirit of the Lord went out to fight the Midianites, and it put on Gideon as a garment to wear into the battle”
- It’s not about us and how good, or strong, or smart we are!
- It’s about us trusting God to fight for us!
- But, Gideon is still a little fearful...
- Gideon sought another sign from God
- Why? Wasn’t that awesome burning rock enough?
- I think it really is a perfect example of how much God is willing to work with our weaknesses
- Over and over again we come to God fearful and weak
- Not confident in how to move forward
- Forgetting all the great things that he has done for us in the past, and instead being sway by our own fears and weaknesses
- Just look at this exchange between God and Gideon:
- Judges 6:36-38
 - 36) Then Gideon said to God, “**If** you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said,
 - 37) behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.”
 - 38) **And it was so.** When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water.
- God didn’t simply condescend to Human Weakness **ONCE** with the Sacrifice
- He did it a **Second Time**, with a Fleece!
- Is that how much God cares for us?

- Is that how much he wants to work with us?
- Work through all of our fears, and weaknesses and human frailties?
- **NO!**
- But, Wait! There's more!
- Judges 6:39-40
 - 39) Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew."
 - 40) And **God did so** that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.
- God cares about us so much that he will encourage and strengthen us over and over again
- That is how much God is willing to work with us!
- God actually **PREFERS** to work with our **Weaknesses** than with our **Strengths**
- God doesn't want us to start to think that we are able to accomplish great things because of our Might, he wants us to remember that **HE** is the one who delivers us
- So, God wanted to prove this to Gideon very clearly
- Gideon had called for warriors from his own tribe Manassah, and also from the surrounding tribes of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali
- 32,000 Men had gathered ready to follow Gideon into battle against Midian
- If we peek ahead at Chapter 8, Verse 10, we will see that Midian had 135,000 Soldiers
- But, God felt that the odds of 1 against 4 were still too great to prove His point
- Judges 7:2-3
 - 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.
- Of course 22,000 left! The odds are like 3 of us against 13 of them!

- And we are pretty light in the metal department, remember
- Surely, that would be enough to make God's point
- Surely, 10,000 against 135,000 (1 to 13 Odds) would prove that God is the one who delivers the victory
- Judges 7:4
 - 14) 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."
- God chooses to whittle the 10,000 down to 300
- He chooses to do so in an odd way
- I don't think that what I was taught in Sunday School about this lesson is correct
- *Only 300 were vigilant warriors who always wanted to keep an eye out for the enemy, so they didn't put their heads down, but always looked up*
- That's just silly!
- I think that if God is trying to show HIS power, and not the strength of the army by increasing the Odds from 1 to 4, down to 1 to 13, and then down to 1 against 450, do you really think that He is going to choose the BEST and most vigilant soldiers?
- You don't show that God is strong and man is weak, by choosing the strongest of the men to fight your battle
- I think that there is probably a more spiritual reason
- In the Middle East natural springs are regarded as blessings from the Gods
- Archaeological evidence points to every single spring having an idol of some pagan god there to bless the water
- The idols would have been specifically placed next to the springs so that those who stooped down to lap up the water (the most common way of drinking) were effectively bowing down to the idol
- God chose the 300 with presence of mind enough to not bow their heads
- So, with odds of 450 to 1, God is now prepared to deliver the Midianites into Gideon's hand...
- But Gideon gets a little nervous...

- Umm... I would be too!
- Yesterday he had over 30,000 soldiers with him, and now he is stuck with only 300
- God tells Gideon to sneak down and listen to the Midianite soldiers talking, and he would be encouraged...
- In the middle of this next verse we find a neat lesson...
- Judges 7:15
 - 15) As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he **worshipped**. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand."
- It's the middle of the night...
- Gideon is facing a huge army with only 300 men on his side
- He has snuck down to the Midianite camp with only his servant
- They are laying there in the cold, damp grass all alone
- And Gideon **worshipped**...
- I think that our understanding of what it means to worship God is often a little confused...
- Webster's Dictionary defines Worship as,
 - "Respect or reverence shown to Divine Being"*
- But, does that really help us?
- Respect? Reverence? What do these ideas really speak to us?
- We define words by our own relation to them...
- Gay meant something totally different in the 1920's than it does today
- What does "*Worship*" mean to us?
- We probably think of it as what we are about to do this morning...
- Dressing in our "Sunday Best"
- Coming together in a large group

- Singing hymns of Praise and speaking Prayers of Thankfulness to our Creator
- It IS that, but it can be so much more!
- Gideon was all alone in the middle of the night...
- Surrounded by the enemy...
- Terrified and lacking in faith...
- And he **worshipped**...
- Whenever we give God priority in our life and show praise to Him for the goodness He has shown us, we worship Him
- Whenever we turn what we are doing over to God, and do it for Him, we worship Him
- Gideon understood that, and we need to learn that lesson also
- And THAT seemed to be the turning point in Gideon's life!
- Not the Burning Rock
- Not the Fleece... Or, the second Fleece
- What Gideon hears when he creeps down to the camp changes his life
- From the point that Gideon hears the enemy quaking in their boots over the coming battle against Israel we see that everything Gideon does is marked by the most complete confidence in God
- Now we begin to understand why Gideon is included in Hebrews 11
- It's also important for us to note that his faith matured from personal experiences with God
- You may not be today the kind of person who is included in Hebrews 11, but God is not done working with you either!
- Gideon is now so convinced in the deliverance of God, that he doesn't even provide the few soldiers that he has with weapons
- He gives them only trumpets and torches
- Gideon then gives them the best instruction a good leader can:
- Judges 7:17

17) And he said to them, "**Look at me, and do likewise**. When I come to the

outskirts of the camp, do as I do.

- Gideon knew to lead by example
- He didn't tell them to go down and fight the Midianites... He lead them
- The Midianites were all sleeping restlessly, as they dreamed about the Army of Gideon, and then they hear this loud crashing noise...
- Judges 7:20

20) Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, **“A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”**

- And the rest is history...
- Hopefully, the lesson for us is clear...
- We have a natural tendency to think that Strength is what God seeks
- The concept of Natural Selection has been ingrained in our minds, and we just tend to accept the idea that in a competition between strong and weak, only the strong survive
- Sub-consciously, we base a lot of our thought processes on this concept
- Because strength is an attribute, something to be desired, people don't want to admit weakness – any kind of weakness - physical, emotional, mental, or even moral
- But, at it's very core, acknowledging God is fundamentally acknowledging our innate weakness as a human being
- God wants us to learn this lesson – To not think that we can muscle our way through our problems if we are just strong enough
- To come to the realization that the only way to get through our problems is to acknowledge that each and every one of us is weak, and that we need God in order to gain the victory
- The Bible teaches us that the weak shall lead the strong
- Gideon and his 300 weak men conquered the Midianites
- Jonathan and his armor-bearer defeated the Philistines
- Young David killed the giant Goliath
- And most importantly, Jesus Christ came as a poor, “meek and lowly” Jewish carpenter, and he conquered death on a CROSS

- Not by rising up and defeating the Romans by raining down fire and lightning on them
- But, by meekly and mildly teaching and encouraging the poor, the sick, the handicapped... Sinners
- Showing that God can work good through anyone
- It doesn't matter who you are, and where you are born
- Look what Paul says in 1st Corinthians
- 1st Corinthians 2:1-5
 - 1) And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.
 - 2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
 - 3) And I was with you in **weakness** and in **fear** and much **trembling**,
 - 4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
 - 5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men **but in the power of God.**

• ***Weakness? Fear? Trembling?***

- This is the man that the Jews described as having *“turned the world upside down?”*
- Paul knew that God is more powerful than man could ever aspire to
- Strong Men are a vanity
- They think that they can do great things, and God laughs at their plans
- They don't understand that the weakness of God is stronger than men
- Are you feeling beaten down?
- Are you feeling weak?
- Are you feeling like you are not strong enough to carry on?
- Perfect!
- You are exactly who God is looking for!
- Don't look around you at all of those strong, smart, good-looking Brethren and think, *“They are the kind of people that God works through in the Ecclesia”*
- Wrong!
- YOU are the kind of people that God works through in the Ecclesia

- God goes out of his way to work specifically with people just like you
- He doesn't want someone amazing specimen of a man to fight his battles
- He wants a short, overweight, balding Insurance Salesman!
- **When I am weak, then I am strong!**
- The dictionary defines fear as "a distressing emotion aroused by an impending pain, danger, evil, etc. *or by the illusion of such.*"
- There's an important distinction here: Fear may be brought on by *either* a real *or* an imagined threat
- One kind of fear is a normal response to real danger
- When you see a snarling Doberman chasing you, it is reasonable to run
- But, that kind of fear doesn't happen very often does it?
- Mostly, we are just afraid because we don't know what is going to happen
- We don't like change, and we don't know where we are going to end up if we continue down the road that we are on
- We aren't really comfortable with the position that we are in, and we feel out of place, alone, or isolated
- We're afraid
- And, when we're afraid we don't make good decisions
- We make hasty decisions that we regret later
- Some people are too afraid to go off to College and regret the opportunity lost
- Some people are afraid to be single, and settle for an less than ideal partner and suffer a lifetime of disappointments
- Some people are afraid to quit their bad job and look for a new one, and spend their entire lives doing something that they don't like
- We make poor Spiritual Decisions because we are too afraid to step out in Faith
- Gideon was a man just like you and I
- He was full of fears, and worries and anxieties
- He didn't want to commit himself to anything unless the dew was on both sides of the

fleece

- But, he trusted in God
- He was faithful
- He allowed God to work through his weak and fearful life
- He may not of even clearly known the great things that God had planned for Israel through him
- But, he was willing!
- Like a child with a Lack of Self-Confidence, but a strong Confidence in God he moved forward in faith
- Sure, he was still scared
- Sure, he thought it was crazy to go against an army of 135,000 soldiers with just 300 men who don't lap like a dog
- But, he was willing!
- He trusted in God to strengthen him to do things that he really didn't want to do
- Let's close with this reminder from Isaiah...
- Isaiah 40:28-31
 - 28) Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.
 - 29) **He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.**
 - 30) Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;
 - 31) but **they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength**; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.
- Be like Gideon
- Move forward in Faith
- No matter how scary it seems