

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

March 11, 2018

Gideon's Tragic Final Lessons

Judges 8

Prayer: *Father, I just again thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the richness of your blessings, I thank you especially for your word. Father, it just amazes me that we can go again and again into it and just kind of continue to mine it and it continues to yield treasures every time we do and I just again realize it's your Holy Spirit that gives that power and ability. And so this morning as we are finishing up our study on Gideon, I just want to again pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us into truth and that it would be of permanent value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, like I said, we are back to our -- this is our final study of Gideon, that mighty warrior of God, and when we last left Gideon, he had scored this astounding victory over the Midianites. He had given the signal, the trumpets were sounded, the jars were broken, the torches were exposed and a force of 300 routes an army of 135,000. Miraculously God turns the Midianites against each other. The midnight army basically slaughtered itself and then it

scattered, leaving Gideon and his men hot on their trail. So Gideon recognizes his opportunity to end this threat that the Midianites were to Israel and so he engages the rest of his tribe in this mop-up mission that's designed to completely eradicate the threat of the Midianites.

So just to kind of bring us up to speed, this is where we started, this is *Judges 7:22*, takes us to the start of that war. It says: *When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian. Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.*

It's an incredible victory, just an astounding victory but Gideon

never had the opportunity to stop and savor this victory as his immediate threat shifted from the Midianites to his own people. I mean he immediately finds that he's facing not one but two very different types of rebellion amongst his own people, and this is a rebellion he's never anticipated. This is *Judges 8:1*, it says: *Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they accused him fiercely.* You'd think the men of Ephraim would be extraordinarily grateful and glad for this opportunity they had to pursue a mop-up operation against the very people who had been tormenting and oppressing them for the last seven years, but that's not the case at all. They're furious with Gideon and they're furious with him because he hasn't initially included them in his battle plans. There's a number of things that are at work in their anger here, I mean first and probably foremost is what they consider to be an opportunity for glory that they've been denied. All they got to take part in was this mop-up operation since the army had already been routed and was on the run and they saw that as an insult. But what may have been an even greater factor was the fact that this was an army of 135,000, and getting routed as they had, they would have left an enormous amount of spoils and territory that would have to be distributed. I mean as they say, to the victor goes the spoils. And the men of Ephraim in all likelihood saw their diminished roles in defeating the

Midianites as paving way for them to have a diminished share in the spoils, and for that they were extremely unhappy. You have to understand, this was as serious a situation that Gideon faced as was the entire Midianite army. This entire victory could have very easily dissolved into an extremely ugly civil war were it not for Gideon's wise response to his fellow countrymen. In verse 2 it says: *And he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezer? God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?"* Then their anger against him subsided when he said this. You see Ephraimites had come in at the very end of the battle much like gleaners coming in to glean a vineyard at the end of a harvest, but Gideon humbly points out, he says, but look what it is you've gleaned, I mean, you've brought to the table the very lives of the princes of the Midianites, I mean, all we've done, says Gideon, we by God's grace confused these common soldiers. But you Ephraimites, I mean you guys by comparison, you have gleaned the very cream of the crop of the Midianites. In fact you brought us the heads of the prince of Oreb -- Prince Oreb and Prince Zeeb and you brought them to us to prove that. So what he's saying is you Ephraimites have accomplished more just by gleaning than we Abiezrites, which is the clan that he was from, have accomplished by harvesting the whole vineyard. We can't compare to

you Ephraimites when it comes to contributing to our victory. This is what he says: *"Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezer? What have I been able to do in comparison with you?"* You know he should have gotten an Academy award for that performance. I mean it was wise and it was extraordinarily humble. You know it's as if Gideon had put directly into practice the words of *James 3:13* which says: *"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."* It's interesting that James chooses to frame the word "wisdom" with the concept of meekness because meekness is exactly the quality that Gideon demonstrates before these Ephraimites. Meekness is often confused with weakness when in fact it is its polar opposite. Meekness means power under control. Gideon has just, he's routed an army of 135,000, he's in the process of just cleaning out the remaining pockets of resistance when he encounters his angry brethren. And instead of flexing his newfound power, Gideon demonstrates extraordinary meekness. You could almost call it Christ-like because nobody demonstrated meekness better than Christ. And Jesus was not dealing with some angry brothers demanding a bigger slice of the pie, I mean, he dealt with people who saw his goodness, who understood his perfection and because of that wanted him dead. Jesus could have dealt with all of them in a nanosecond but instead he chose meekness. He chose to keep his power under control. And

just imagine what kind of power he had. I mean this is the power to be able to shut down nature itself and terrify powerful demons, now picture that power meekly accepting the arrest and the profound humiliation of the cross. I mean the most powerful person in the entire universe, the creator, the sustainer of life itself including the lives of those who are tormenting him, he was stripped, beaten and crucified like a common criminal. And all of it was because he chose to keep his power under control. I mean it wasn't the Jewish leaders of the Roman government who put Jesus to death, it was Jesus who moment by moment for the joy set before him was willing to endure the cross so that by faith we could exchange our sin for his righteousness. I mean one word from the Savior's mouth and God would have sent thousands of avenging angels to utterly destroy his attackers. But we know that word was never to come and that's the essence of meekness. It was the greatest power there ever was under the greatest control there ever was. I mean it was a power so certain, so internally self-confident that it precluded any need to display itself as powerful. I mean there's an old joke that says: Where does a 900-pound gorilla sit? Wherever he wants. Strictly speaking, a gorilla can afford to be meek in the biblical sense. You see there's absolutely no need for chest-thumping when everyone knows that you're in charge of the seating arrangements and that you have the power to back it up. Biblical meekness has that same sense of certainty, that same

confidence rooted not in your own personal power but rooted in the sovereignty of God. You see the truly meek believe that God really, really is in charge, and they believe that he doesn't make mistakes and because they generally believe that, they can afford to put up with behavior that others feel compelled to react to. I mean the Ephraimites could have started a civil war that would have destroyed Israel outright. And Gideon having just come from this spectacular display of God's control is content to exercise the wisdom of meekness because he knows, he knows that God is in control.

You know remember the game of musical chairs, that awful game that we used to play when we were little at parties, birthday parties? You know, everybody's looping around in a circle, they're eyeing for a seat, the music is playing and everyone's jockeying for position because you know as soon as that music stops, somebody's going to be out? Well, when it comes to the musical chairs of life itself, a truly meek person, he doesn't worry, he doesn't worry about jockeying for people or positions because he genuinely trusts that God really, really is in charge of the music. And when we look at our lives in terms of musical chairs and we find ourselves jockeying for positions in our jobs, in our families, in our church, in our community, if that's the case then we can safely assume we've got a problem with meekness. Gideon certainly sensed

that jockeying for position in the aggression that came from the Ephraimites. I mean think about it, these folks, they show up at the very end of the conflict and they essentially demand that Gideon apologize for not making them front and center from the beginning. Gideon doesn't take the bait because he believes that the very same God who routed the Midianites is still in charge of the aftermath.

And you know the question for Gideon and for us becomes who do we truly believe controls the music? I mean is it you? Is it chance? Or is it God? Our text says: The men of Ephraim "accused Gideon fiercely." Well, the very same thing was said of Christ. And it's Christ who we pattern our lives after. *1 Peter* says this: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* I mean Gideon was able to not revile in return when he was reviled because he too trusted in the God who judges justly. And so he goes out of his way to shower the Ephraimites' efforts in praise and diminished his own role as if it was next to nothing. What did it cost him? I mean it cost him nothing but his pride and the results proved his wisdom. I mean *Judges 8* says: *Then their*

anger against him subsided when he said this. Gideon simply bore out the proof of *Proverbs 11* which says: *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.*

Now Gideon's response to another rebellious wing of the family proved far more brutal, but understand it may well have been necessary, given the significance of this other rebellion. Let me just tell you about it. This is *Judges 8:4*. It says: *And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. So he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." And the officials of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?"* Now you have to understand again, these are again brutal times, these are brutal people. I mean, the heads of Oreb and Zeeb, the two princes of the Midianites who were slain, they were provided as proof that they were indeed dead. Well here we have the officials of Succoth demanding a similar type of proof, and what they're basically saying is until you supply us with the hands or head or any other body parts of these two kings proving that you've killed them, we have no intention of supporting you at all. And you got to understand, this is not a dispute as to whoever gets to fight whereas it was with the Ephraimites, this was

outright rebellion and a refusal to supply an exhausted and starving army who had just saved their lives. Verse 7 says: *So Gideon said, "Well then, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." And from there he went to Penuel, and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. And he said to the men of Penuel, "When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."* Gideon's promising severe repercussions to the towns of Succoth and Penuel and for good reason. I mean, they may have been part of the nation of Israel but these two cities were in outright rebellion and they just committed what was essentially an act of war against their own people. I mean not only had they violated the basic laws of hospitality that should have been extended to any Israelite in need, well they added to that a large measure of hostility coupled with faithlessness. Gideon's army shows up and they're exhausted, they're desperate for food, having defeated the very army that had oppressed Succoth and Penuel for years and basically they're shown the door. Worse still, Gideon's army, they're not looking for R and R, they're looking to be re-provisioned so they can continue the attack on the Midianites so they can forever rid Israel of that threat. I mean these two towns may well have been working for the enemy. And Gideon promises by God's grace to first take out Zebah and Zalmunna and then come back to Succoth and Penuel to make an

example of them. Verse 10, he says: *Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the east, for there had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword. And Gideon went up by the way of the tent dwellers east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, for the army felt secure. Well the army felt secure because Karkor is actually many, many miles from Megiddo and they figured nobody is going to follow us. They never understood that Gideon was absolutely certain that he was going to eliminate this kind of threat and so he does follow them this great distance. It says in verse 12: And Zebah and Zalmunna fled, and he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and he threw all the army into a panic. Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. And he captured a young man of Succoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men. And he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Behold, Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted?'" And he took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson. And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.*

This is tough stuff. And commentators are really trying to figure out, they're divided as to what it is actually that Gideon did. I mean some say he executed all of the elders of Succoth and Penuel; others said, no, he severely punished some, he killed others that took place in battle. What we can say for certain is that Gideon used them as an example of what could be expected for those who by denying aid to Gideon had actually sided with the enemy. So having dealt with these two cities, he turns his attention to these two captured Midianite kings. He says: *Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor?" They answered, "As you are, so were they. Everyone of them resembled the son of a king." And he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you."* So he said to Jether his firstborn, *"Rise and kill them!"* But the young man did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a young man. Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, *"Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength."* And Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels. Again I have to emphasize, this is brutal times, brutal times and brutal outcomes. And in all likelihood Zebah and Zalmunna understood exactly what would have happened if a young man with no experience tried to take their lives. In all likelihood they wisely opted for someone who would dispatch them quickly which is

exactly what Gideon did. Verse 22 says: *Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian." Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you."* What we have here is really a wonderful response to these people who are clamoring for an earthly ruler. I mean Gideon knows that all of his victories have come from the hand of God so he rejects all of their entreaties to rule over them.

Now if the story of Gideon had ended right then and right there, it would have been a wonderful story, and we could have gleaned an awful lot of wonderful joyful lessons from that but it didn't end there as so many stories in scripture do not. This is how it ended, this is *Judges 8:24: And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: Every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil" (for they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, "We will willingly give them: And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels. And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah.*

And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family. So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon.

So here's what happens, Gideon, he asks for and he receives a fortune in gold, and he fashions it into an ephod which can either be a covering for a high priest or it could also be an idol for people to worship. And it seems apparent that the ephod in this case was an idol 'cause it says in scripture: *And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.* So in the end it seems like Gideon's victory is what's known as a pyrrhic victory. A pyrrhic victory is a victory that winds up costing you more than it would have cost you if you had lost. You know, let's say that I'm battling an infestation of mice in my house. No matter what I do, they just seem to multiply and it absolutely drives me crazy. So I get five gallons of gasoline, I pour it in the house, I light a match, I set the whole thing on fire and I'm raising my hands triumphantly that I have killed all of the mice. That's what a pyrrhic victory is. By the way, you burned your house down. See, Gideon has certainly won the victory but in the end spiritually it became a pyrrhic victory. And once again we have to ask ourselves the question, okay, what does this have to do with me? Well, as we look over Gideon's life, we can

see him, he starts out as this idol worshiper oppressed by the Midianites and he has this confrontation with God and God puts him through a series of trials in which he strips him of all of his resources, forcing him to practically understand that God's strength truly will be made perfect in his weakness. I mean Gideon lets his army go from 32,000 to 10,000 to 300, and against impossible odds he has this spectacular victory over a force of 135,000. It moves from a battlefield victory to a series of mop-up operations and it's these situations that I want to focus on because here's where God is really doing a work in Gideon's life. If you think of Gideon's life as a picture of what God does in each of our lives, there's a powerful lesson to be learned here. You know it's easy for us as we read this to see these simply as military problems that Gideon was facing. You know we had two different Israelite cities on two different occasions refuse to re-provision his army. Just to revisit it, it says: *So he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian."* And the officials of Succoth said, *"Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?"* And then the next one is Penuel, he says: *And from there he went up to Penuel, and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered.*

Okay. These look like just simple military problems. It's a reaction that's way, way beyond the pale. I mean Gideon and his men have put their lives on the line and had rescued these people from these vicious marauders who had been enslaving them for seven years. And they're not asking for tribute, they're not asking for property, they're not even asking for more warriors, they're just looking for some bread. Gideon explains the soldiers are exhausted, that they've been engaged in securing the final rescue of these people from the Midianites. And the officials of Succoth and Penuel both treat these men worse than strangers. But that's a military setback no doubt but I just kind of wonder how Gideon saw this in light of the relationship with the God who had given him such a spectacular victory. These were setbacks, significant setbacks. And I think in many ways these setbacks mirrored the way that God grows faith in us.

If you were to put this in nautical terms you would describe it this way: See God's goal nautically speaking when it comes to faith is to turn us from a canoe into a battleship. I mean when we first come to faith in Christ, we are basically a canoe, we're easily tipped, it's easy for us to take on water and occasionally we get swamped. Well God has a plan for every one of us and God's plan for each of his children is to grow us. And as much as we hate it, his formula for us inevitably includes struggles, it

includes difficulty and it includes heartache. It simply doesn't work to grow faith any other way. And to continue the metaphor with the story of Gideon, we see him, he starts out as a canoe and we watch as God shapes and molds him into a battleship. And then at the very height of his strength and power he elects to open up one little ballast tank that slowly and surely over the course of many years takes on enough water to cause even that battleship to sink. You see when God first met Gideon he was that canoe. He was angry with God over the oppression that he was under by the Midianites and seemingly oblivious to the reason why he was under that oppression. It was because Israel had abandoned God and taken up idols. The story of Gideon is the story of a man grown from a canoe to a battleship who in the end winds up precisely where he started, dying only to be forgotten as his nation goes right back to the idols they had worshiped before he had come to battle.

And so we remember Gideon's days when his faith was like a canoe, when his faith in God was so shaky that he needed a whole series of miracles including two very separate fleeces to trust that God was actually behind the seemingly impossible task of taking on the Midianites. And we watch as his faith grows as God meets him again and then we see God telling him to sneak into the Midianite camp to hear a dream about what he's going to accomplish. And we see Gideon's boldness begin to grow as he assumes the role of a

faith-filled leader as God repeatedly tests him by diminishing the size of his army until we find him confidently instructing this tiny little army about to take on a military operation where they're outnumbered 450 to 1. God instructs Gideon to equip his soldiers with no weapons, just a trumpet in one hand and a jar with a torch in the other and the rest is history as we've seen over these last few weeks. Now by the end of the battle Gideon's faith is moved from that of a canoe to a cruiser. He's definitely improved, I mean, he's fully confident that God is empowering him not only in the heat of the battle but in the far more dangerous heat of this confrontation that he's had with the Ephraimites who were furious that they were not included in the battle plan from the beginning. We see Gideon employing the humility of wisdom that may well have given him the most important victory he ever had, I mean, warding off the potential for civil war that would have destroyed Israel. That's followed by his confrontations with Succoth and Penuel and I think here is where it is easy to simply see these as military problems that Gideon the military man solved. My guess is -- and it's just a guess -- my guess is that Gideon also saw them as we see them, as struggles, as difficulties, even as heartaches because that's the way that God grows us. I mean, God, how can I possibly deal with these Ephraimites who are furious with me for saving them? I mean God, why would you grant me this great victory only to steal it away by the Ephraimites threatening

the very nation of Israel simply because they're jealous of my victory? God, what are you doing to me? Why don't you help me, God? Why don't you answer me? I mean I think it's easy to see that attitude being part of the formula because that's the way human beings think. Think about his army. I mean the same goes for the reception his army gets after trying to track down this last remaining threat of the Midianites. Just picture what his army must have been thinking. God, we're exhausted. We've trusted you over and over again and now in the midst of our attempts to secure victory you've brought us face to face with our own people who won't even give us a loaf of bread? How could you do this to us, God? How could you do this to me? I think I can tell you how. Because that's the way that God grows faith in us. It is through difficulties, it is through struggles, it is through heartache. I wish there was some other way. But if we go by any of the examples in scriptures, we see this pattern not just occasionally but virtually everywhere in the lives of God's saints. I mean God meets us and he knows that we are merely these little tiny canoes subject to tipping and swamping and then he nurtures us for a while but then inevitably here come the Ephraimites and they're followed by Succoth and they're followed by Penuel and each time the overwhelming temptation is to say, God, you have abandoned me. God, somehow or other you've given me the shaft or God, I don't think I even believe in you because if God really loved me, he

would not allow A, B, C or D to happen like you've let it happen. But this is essentially the way God operates. And the amazing thing is that he is quite willing to absorb the blows that we rain and rail against him as he's growing our faith from canoe to battleship. I mean we see Gideon take risk after risk because we see his faith growing from canoe size to cruiser size by seeing God work in his life, and by the time Gideon is dealing with the rebellions at Succoth and Penuel, he's really become a battleship. Now mind you, he's still commanding this tiny little army of 300 who by his account is completely exhausted when he confronts these two towns. And yet when they refuse to help, his confidence is now obvious when he tells them what their rebellion is going to cost them. It says: *So Gideon said, "Well then, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." And from there he went up to Penuel, and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. And he said to the men of Penuel, "When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."*

See what Gideon assures the rebels is nothing more than this definition of faith that we have according to Hebrews, and we see it played out in real time on the battlefield. *Hebrews 1* says: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of*

things not seen. Well so convinced was Gideon for his "hoped for" outcome that the Lord he's convinced is going to give him that he tells the men of Penuel when, not if, but "When I come back in peace, I will break down this tower" which is precisely what Gideon did. He had gone from a canoe to a battleship and it was all by the grace of God. Like I said, it would have been absolutely wonderful to see Gideon's story end there with him refusing to become Israel's leader, insisting at that point that that's God's task and his alone, but as the text tells us in the same way that God very slowly and very surely builds up our faith through hardship, difficulty and heartache, so too does the enemy tear down that same faith to the exact opposite means through carelessness, through plenty, and through unguarded hearts. Deuteronomy 8:11 says: "Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God."

Sadly Gideon and the nation of Israel did exactly what God told them not to. They entered into a prolonged period of peace and prosperity that had exactly the effect that God warned them about.

They began to ignore his rules and his statutes. They began to expect the grace that they had accepted. They wound up forgetting their Lord and worshiping a golden ephod. It says: *And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family. So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon.*

Now to be sure the land had rest for forty years in the days of Gideon, that's a wonderful thing, but it was a rest that the devil took full advantage of, and we know that by what happened after Gideon died. You see the true test of a person's leadership is what type of legacy he or she bequeaths. Gideon's was a total disaster. *Judges 8:32 says: And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites. As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good*

that he had done to Israel.

So what is our take away from the story of Gideon? Well it's these three things: Number one, we, we all are Gideon. Understand, every one of us is at war and we too have been sent out as an army hopelessly outnumbered, hopelessly outgunned just like Gideon's army. Our task though is not to defeat the Midianites but to glorify God by sharing the good news that the enemy himself has been defeated and that by trusting in Christ, anyone, no matter how great their sin, can find forgiveness and new life in Christ.

Secondly, the other story that Gideon is telling us is that having found life in Christ, we should expect to still have hardship and difficulty and heartache because that's the way God grows us. That's the only way that we go from canoe to battleship. God has told us repeatedly that this is the way he works and we see it in Gideon's life. God wants us to see it in ours. *1 Peter 1* says: *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith -- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire -- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

And thirdly, never forget that we are at war and even though we may

grow weary, self-satisfied and careless, our enemy never, never does. And by far the most effective weapon he has is the weapon of incrementalism. You've got to understand it took forty years, forty years to realize the full effect of Gideon's disastrous decision to open up the hatch by seeking a golden ephod. Forty years for that idol worship to fully manifest itself, but God saw it immediately. He said: *And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.* You have to understand the devil's approach to taking us out is not by approaching us as believers with something that is blatantly and obviously sinful. That just doesn't work with us. What's far more effective is to move us into these positions incrementally. You don't take giant steps towards sin. You take tiny, little, barely perceptible steps that are designed to take advantage of your weariness or your carelessness so that before you realize it, instead of worshiping the one true God, you're worshiping a career or your family or wealth or health or prosperity just like Israel worshiped Gideon's golden ephod.

So we conclude our study of Gideon recognizing that Gideon is us, that we all having found new life in Christ can expect that life to still have hardship, difficulty and heartache because that's the way God grows us from canoe to battleship. And finally that we are at war against an enemy who will never rest and never sleep. So

let me conclude our study with God's word in 1 Peter. Again, he says this: *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you. Let's pray.*

Father God, I thank you for Gideon. It's sorrowful to read what a tragic story it is to see Gideon literally moved from canoe to battleship and then just tear it all apart, throw it all away by being careless, by being indolent, by not paying attention. Lord, I just again pray that each and every one of us would recognize that we are in a war and that we have an enemy who wants nothing more than to destroy us like he destroyed Gideon. Give us the wisdom and the insight to know that, to understand that, to allow other people in our lives to be accountable to other people who might point out the incremental ways we are moving in bad directions. I pray that you would give us that guidance, that insight and that wisdom, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.