

Reduced for Victory

Text: Judges 7:1-22

Introduction:

1. The Midianites had oppressed Israel for 7 years due to their disobedience against God (6:1).
2. God raised up Gideon, a man obscure in the eyes of man from the tribe of Manasseh. Gideon said of himself, “behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” (6:15)
3. God used Gideon to bring about a great victory against the enemy but it was a victory secured through the power of God alone.
4. Israelites faced a formidable foe of 135,000 Midianites (8:10). The numbers are always greater on the side of sin and error. The enemies of God enjoy numerical superiority over God’s servants. But God’s way of securing victory is not necessarily to increase our numbers but to demonstrate His Almighty power in the situation.

I. The Preparation for the Victory (Vs. 1-8)

God’s method of preparation was to reduce Gideon’s army. Totally the opposite to the wisdom of man!

A. The Purpose of the Reduction (Vs. 2)

1. To prevent the pride of man and to ensure the glory of God.
2. “The people are too many” = the oft repeated saying, “there is strength in numbers” is not always true.
3. Isaiah 42:8 *“I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.”*
4. Man’s method is to increase self-confidence, God’s method is to increase our God-dependence. Man works on the principle of self-promotion but God works on the principle of self-reduction. Man focuses on self-glorification, but God works for His magnification. *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”* (John 3:30)
5. “my own hand hath saved me” = the natural tendency of the human heart is to lay claim to glory that only belongs to God. This is why God’s Word says that no one will be saved by their works (Eph. 2:8-9)
6. You can never be too little for God to use, but you can be too big for God to use. We are often too strong for God to use. He reduces us so that He might then use us.

B. The People of the Reduction (Vs. 3-8)

1. The Fearful (Vs. 3)
 - a. Based on Mosaic law. Deut. 20:8 *“And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there*

that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

- b. From a human standpoint, losing 22,000 soldiers from the army would greatly weaken its strength. But in fact, from a spiritual standpoint, it would actually strengthen those that remained.
 - c. Maclaren: "Why were the 'fearful' dismissed? Because fear is contagious; and, in undisciplined armies like Gideon's, panic, once started, spreads swiftly, and becomes frenzied confusion. The same thing is true in the work of the church today. Who that has had much to do with guiding its operations has not groaned over the dead weight of the timid and sluggish souls, who see difficulties and never the way to get over them? Cowardice, dressed up as cautious prudence, weakens the efficiency of every regiment in Christ's army."
2. The Flippant (Vs. 4-8)
- a. The area of their testing (4-6)
 - i. 'try' = word used for the refining of metals by separating the dross from the pure ore (Butler)
 - ii. The test was in an ordinary, seemingly routine activity of life – drinking!
 - iii. Very often the flaws in our Christian life reveal themselves in the small things of life.
 - iv. Luke 16:10 *"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."*
 - b. The approved after their testing (7-8)
 - i. 9,700 soldiers bowed down upon their knees to drink water and were subsequently removed from the army. They revealed by their actions that satisfying the appetites of the flesh were more important to them than being on duty as a soldier of the Lord.
 - ii. 300 men cupped the water in one hand to drink. Their posture was one of alertness, watchfulness and readiness concerning the nearby enemy. It was these men that God would use as vessels to bring victory.
 - iii. M.F. Unger: "The vigilant and watchful were separated from the less alert and those who were concerned about natural comforts and less fired by faith to spot the enemy and press on to victory. Evidently they bent over, but kept their heads erect to see any possible movement of the enemy."
 - iv. At first the army numbered 32,000 which was a ration of 4 to 1 in favour of the enemy. Then it was reduced to 10,000 making it a ration of approx. 14 to 1. Now it is reduced to a staggering 450 to 1 ratio! "...there is no

restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.” (1 Sam. 14:6)

II. Promise for the Victory (Vs. 9-15)

A. Divine Affirmation of Victory (Vs. 9)

1. “I have delivered it into thine hand” = note the word ‘delivered’ is in the past tense. God’s purpose already established concerning this battle. The outcome of the battle was pre-determined!
2. God had previously given Gideon two other assurances of victory (6:14, 16)
3. Illustration: Hudson Taylor, pioneer missionary in China, believed God knew his needs and that God would meet his needs. On one occasion when Taylor’s assets were down to 87 cents he wrote this to a friend, “We have all this and all the promises of God.”
4. Note: Evil may seem to have the upper hand but we know that ultimately God will have the victory. Read the end of the Book!

B. Divine Assurance of Victory (Vs. 10-15)

1. God in His grace gave Gideon further assurance of victory to strengthen and fortify his faith for the task. God had already given Gideon 3 assurances of victory (6:14, 16, 7:7) and three tokens of victory (6:17, 37, 39) but He grants a final and greater token as a foothold for Gideon’s faith.
2. God’s sovereign hand clearly seen in the unfolding of these events and the dovetailing of the circumstances. A Midianite dreamed a dream and God so timed Gideon and his servant’s arrival into the camp so that they heard this man relaying the dream to another soldier who was given insight to understand the meaning of the dream! Those who follow the Lord in faithful, trusting obedience, experience the privilege of seeing Rom. 8:28 being fulfilled before their very eyes.
3. The dream itself conveyed a clear picture of the battle
 - a. Cake of Barley – represented Gideon and Israel. Barley was the food of the poor and the beasts. Gideon, being from a poor family (See 6:15) in Manasseh, probably grew up eating barley cakes like these. Compared to a large tent, it was small, weak and insignificant.
 - b. Tent – represented Midian (likely the tent of the general). Large, strong and powerful compared to the cake of barley.
 - c. Lesson: Weakness overcame the strongest! When the odds are overwhelming, God overwhelms the odds. Our weaknesses are not limitations on God’s power but are rather occasions for a demonstration of His power. 2 Cor. 12:9 *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in*

weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." See also 1 Cor. 1:26-31

III. The Performance of the Victory (Vs. 16-22)

A. The Strategy for Victory (Vs. 16-18)

1. Ordered – God had guaranteed the victory but that didn't mean that Gideon wasn't to do the very best with the resources he had.
2. Unified – there was to be a careful and deliberate working together for the cause
3. Submitted – they were to follow Gideon's lead. No place for autonomous action!

B. The Weaponry of Victory (Vs. 19-20)

1. A trumpet to Sound
 - a. This was the Shofar trumpet made of ram's horn. Not primarily a musical instrument in Israel but an instrument for the purpose of assembling the people, announcing special days and alerting of war.
 - b. Speaks of victory. Joshua 6 – the battle of Jericho also included the blowing of trumpets and the shout of victory
 - c. Speaks of the Word of God. The trumpet in Israel was used as an audible means of directing the people in the will of God. (See also Isaiah 58:1)
2. A vessel to Shatter
 1. These were simple earthen vessels used for things like the drawing of water. It was in these simple vessels that the light was housed. 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. **But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.**"*
 2. These vessels had to be broken in order for the light to shine forth. God uses broken things!
 3. F.C. Jennings: "Man as such is but a poor pitcher, an earthen vessel, and what can God do with such? Break him, that is all. As long as the pitchers were unbroken they were worse than useless. They only hid the light within them, and prevented its outshining. The pitcher must be smashed, and now the hand that held it – the confidence that is still lingeringly attached to the earthen vessel – changes its hold to the lamp or torch – in absolute dependence, it is true, for it is the left hand which speaks of realised weakness, but the light shines out unhindered."
 4. "At the cross I see that I'm ended, not mended." (Roy Hession)
3. A light to Shine
 1. Picture of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 8:12)
 2. Picture of the believer's testimony (Matt. 5:14-16)

4. A voice to Shout
 1. A declaration of victory from a position of victory! There was not literal sword used. Just the sword of the Spirit, the spoken word.
 2. The Midianite soldier who interpreted his fellow soldier's dream referred to the sword of Gideon. Since the name of Gideon was being used of the Lord to strike fear into the hearts of the enemy, it was used in the shout but Gideon was sure to put the Lord first and himself last – “the sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.”

C. The Activity of Victory (Vs. 21-23)

1. Standing in their place (Vs. 21)
 - a. Much of the Christian warfare is standing.
 - b. Illustration: Exo. 14:13-14 *“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, **stand still**, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”*
 - c. Eph. 6:13-14 *“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand**. **Stand** therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;”*
2. Seeing God work (Vs. 22)
3. Striving in service (Vs. 23)
 - a. Our striving is an outflow of our standing.
 - b. Our warring is empowered by our resting.

Conclusion:

1. Is our faith for the battle entirely in the Lord or are we viewing things from the perspective of the natural man?
2. Are we approved soldiers of the Lord, alert and watchful for the enemy?
3. How is our approach to the battle? Are we warring with the armaments of the flesh or the Spirit?