

Week #4 | “Man’s Weakness and God’s Strength”

I. INTRODUCTION (JUDGES 7:1-7)

- A. Gideon’s been in what some might say, “*a prophetic swirl*”. Surrounded by the Midianites, terrorized for 7 years, left living in the cracks and caves of the mountains, food shortage, a crippled economy, a demoralized people, and God’s chosen nation, is once again rife with idolatry.
- B. But in their pressure, the people of God cry out because of their pain, and instead of sending them a deliverer right away, God sends them a prophet, with a condemning message of their sinful decisions, largely that they haven’t obeyed God.
- C. Well, throughout Biblical history when God gives a condemning message like He gave through this prophet in **Judges 6:8-10**, judgment on God’s people follows it. But not this time. Instead of judgment, God Himself in the form of the Angel of the Lord visits Gideon in the winepress.
- D. Like us, Gideons a little slow up the uptake. In this winepress God gives Gideon precious promises that through him, God will bring about a great victory for Israel as they defeat the Midianites. Gideons so caught up with this mysterious Figure he tells him to wait, while he goes and makes a feast.
- E. When Gideon returns to deliver this meal, the Angel of the Lord has different plans. Suddenly it becomes clear, this isn’t a meal, it’s a sacrifice to the Almighty. And when it’s consumed, the Angel of the Lord disappears, and Gideon realizes that he’s been in the presence of God! This is Gideons OH CRAP MOMENT. But God assures Gideon, “*I’m not here to kill you, I’m here to help you!*”
- F. But that same night God shows up to Gideon again, and says, “*Son, you’ve gotta head out and tear down your fathers idols.*” Well, do to the fact that everyone will want to kill Gideon, he says, “*I’ll do it, not during the day, but during the night.*”
- G. When the sun rise’s that following morning, everyone comes out and see’s that their beloved idol has been torn down. This enrages the city and calls for Gideon’s death become the only important thing. But suddenly, Gideon’s dad steps in and marks his son Gideon as god-fearing man, much different than the rest around him.
- H. It’s seems here that the Midianites get wind the Israel might be returning to God, so they get underway and cross the Jordan to come near them. But at the same time, Gideon gives the war cry for every able-bodied man to join him in this God-mission. Folks gather from all over.
- I. But, Gideon’s still nervous about this task ahead of him (*the Midianites are as many as the sand of the seashore—Jud. 6:5;7:12*). And because of this, he lays out a fleece before God trying to get the final assurance that he needs to step out in faith. And twice in a row, God meets Gideons request with the fleece.

II. GIDEON’S ARMY LOSES SOLIDERS (JUDGES 7:1-7)

- A. Well, this is an interesting transition as **Judges 6** closes and **Judges 7** starts. The interesting part is that we don’t really get to hear Gideon’s response, not at least until we start **Judges 7**.

- B. It seems as if God meeting Gideon in the second fleece, gives him all that he needs to move forward, almost as if Gideon is saying to God, “*I’m all in.*” Gideons risen in the morning (*which is good, because most people who are terrified or depressed, don’t get out of bed*). Gideon’s changing, he’s becoming a different man. God’s presence and nearness is transforming him.
- C. Like John Maxwell rightly said, “*If you think your leading people, but then look behind you and don’t see anyone, you’re just taking a walk.*” Gideons leading because piles of people are gathered to him.
1. This doesn’t mean that Gideon is no longer fearful. The place he’s chosen to camp, is near the “*well of Harod—the spring of trembling.*” He’s still got the jitters, and rightly so.
- D. But it seems that Gideon now has a plan, and it’s a good one. They are camped above Midian giving them the tactical advantage putting the enemy below them.
- E. The place he’s chosen to camp is intentional, near water in order to keep his soldiers refreshed.
- F. He’s got a plan, and it’s a good one. Gideon and his army are camped above Midian, giving them tactical advantage, the enemy is below them.
1. **Judges 7:2** *And the Lord said to Gideon, The people who are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, My own hand has saved me.*
- G. In all honesty, this is quite unthinkable. We might consider God saying, “*Hey, the Midianites are way too many for Me to give them into your hand.*” But instead, God says, “*Hey, Gideon, you have too many people for Me to give Midian into your hands.*”
1. The issue at stake is not CAN GOD DO IT OR NOT, but what will it do to the heart of God’s people? This is the question.
- H. This is a shocker for Gideon. The troops seem ready for battle. Ready to fight. But God thinks otherwise.
1. Friends, it’s here that we get a glimpse into the deviously depraved nature of humanity.
 2. This is something that we have to continually keep before our lives as disciples of Jesus; God alone does the saving, both in eternity, and here in this age.
 3. **Judges 7:3** *“Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead. And twenty-two thousand of the people returned and ten thousand remained.*
- I. Wow, for a guy who was as scared and uneasy as Gideon, this had to feel like a massive blow to his army. He’s reluctant to begin with, but now this? God says, “*Gideon, tell them to go home if their scared.*” And to Gideon’s surprise, they don’t need to be told twice.
1. **Judges 7:4** *“But the Lord said to Gideon, The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, this one shall go with you, the same shall go with you, and of whomever I say to you, this one shall not go with you, the same shall not go.”*
- J. You can only imagine how Gideon is feeling. He’s just a day or two away from feeling emboldened.

- K. 22k have walked away, leaving him with 10k, and God still says, “Gideon, you have too many.” The idea is that, “God is going to refine the army even further down at the water.”
1. **Judges 7:5** “So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink. And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the Lord said to Gideon, By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place.”
- L. It’s here that Gideon sees God’s refining process, “whoever lap’s water like a dog, set them aside.” 9,700 men got down on their knees and drank water directly out the spring, but only 300 cupped the water in their hands, lapping it up like a dog.
- M. At this point, Gideon’s desiring everyone to be a lapper...but it’s not the case, only 300 of the remaining 10k are left to be apart of Gideon’s army.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. It’s interesting what people have done throughout Church history with the kneelers and the lappers. Many folks have made the lappers out to be the strong valiant soldiers who weren’t kneeling because they were watching for the enemy.
- B. But the irony here is these folks are doing the opposite of the story itself is doing. God isn’t wanting us to walk away feeling great about the lappers. This is a picture of God cutting across the grain, not building up. For example, look at what this one commentator says about them:
1. “God saw how untrustworthy would be those thousands who carelessly indulged under the lure of the flesh, over against the 300 who exemplified a spirit of vigilance and disciplined life in the Spirit. thus were selected the strong and resolute, the men who could be trusted under rigorous conditions, those who did not think of themselves before the enemy is unexpected assault. this is ever the divine principle of selection for service. As Gideon, so the church in this day is served well by the minority group ready and vigilant.” -Dale Ralph Davis, Judges, Pg. 104
- C. Look, the simple idea is that this water drinking even is God’s mechanism to further reduce Gideon’s army. The 300 lappers are to be a sign of Israel’s weakness, not her strength. This is God’s point, “Gideon, now that I’ve reduced you, you won’t be able to take credit for what I’m about to do, through you.”
1. Look again at **Judges 7:2**, “And the Lord said to Gideon, the people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, My own hand has saved me.”
 2. Here’s the modern translation, “Because of our tendency to glorify our own efforts, to trust in our proven methods, to credit ourselves with our own contributions, to think well of our cleverness, God insists that His people be reduced to utter helplessness, so that we recognize that our deliverance can only be chalked up to Yahweh’s power and mercy.” Dale Ralph Davis, Judges, Pg. 104

- D. This is because God’s power is made perfect in weakness. We don’t like play weak, and then God plays strong. When you in your true state, it’s weakness, and this is the place where God’s strength can be made perfect (**2nd Cor. 12:7-10**).
1. This also means that apart from us embracing your true state, weakness, God’s power can never be perfected in you, through you, or around you! **THIS IS WHAT GOD IS WORKING TO DO IN YOUR LIFE.** He’s working to reduce you, so that He can display His power, His glory, His grace and His great name, through you!
- E. Beloved, this is a large part of the challenge of our day. We desire to be strong, as Westerner’s we’re bred to be strong, we’re raised to be courageous, and anything less than supposed strength and courage, is not only despised, it’s despicable, it’s deplorable among our culture, largely among the Church.
- F. This has always been present, we just didn’t know how present this was in the Church until covid called our bluff, and forced us to show our hand! Instead of repenting, instead of humbling, instead of listening to our minority brothers and sisters, instead of weeping on behalf of our cities, instead of gathering together before God, we became proud, we became defiant, we weren’t gunna be lambs, we were gunna be lions. Instead of listening, we talked. Instead of praying, we posted to facebook, insta, snapped it out, tiktoked it away. Instead of gathering for prayer meetings, we gathered our guns, our ammunition and headed out to the courthouse...not to repent, but to protest.
- G. Beloved in times of national crisis, God’s family isn’t mostly called upon to stand up, as if we have the answer, as if more of what we’ve been doing is gunna get us outta this jam. Beloved, it’s always been about surrender, it’s always been about humility, it’s always been about acknowledging our part in the equation, it’s always been about taking personal inventory.
- H. But God has a cure for our sinful nature, and it’s called dependency, admission of weakness, confession of inability.
- I. **GOD DOESN’T HAVE HEROS. GOD DOESN’T CALL FOLKS WHO ARE INTO THEIR IMAGE.** He calls servants, those that He cuts cross grained from the way culture cuts boards.
1. God’s methodology of reducing human strength is clearly seen throughout the whole of the scriptures;
 - a. **Moses**—*40 years in the wilderness the first-time strips him of everything.*
 - b. **Jacob**—*Walks with a limp for the rest of his life.*
 - c. **Abraham and Sarah**—*They long for a kid, unable to have one, and for a long time, into their late years with so much pain, disappointment and hope deferred, God works to move Abraham’s strength from himself to God.*
 - d. **Joshua**—*About to take Jericho, God says nope, not like that great warrior, I have a different plan.*
 - e. **Paul**—*So smart, so learned, so experienced, so gifted, and God places him in prison, writing letters—this is God’s best use of Paul’s strength—maybe because Paul simply would’ve never taken time to write had God not stopped him.*

- f. **Peter**—*Publicly denies Christ and lives his entire ministry with the clear understanding that He publicly denied Christ.*
 - g. **Mary and Joseph**—*Their whole lives, they lived under the shadow that they had sex outside of marriage, and Jesus was the product of their sinful act. In their culture, this was among the worst thing ever, which is why Joseph wanted out.*
 - h. **Jesus**—*So strong, so able, so willing, so kind, is now willingly led, stripped of His clothing, hung up naked, mocked, beaten, ridiculed, and crucified, in a violent, horrific death like a criminal.*
 - (1) If your God, are you using all your power to submit, and surrender, or to destroy, fight and overthrow?
- J. Beloved, God is reducing our nation, He's reducing the west, He's trying to reduce the Church, so that we see and the end of our independence, is dependence, at the end of our strength, is Gods, at the end of our wisdom and intellect, is the cross!
- 1. The Cross of Christ is FOOLISHNESS to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it's POWER OF GOD. The Cross, is powerful, why? Because it fully, totally, and completely reduces our life to nothing, so that Christ's power may be made manifest.
- K. Church, God has placed us in the Gideon position of reduction, He's trying to reduce our strength, to bring to our attention our stark independence, our lack of need to submit to others, our inability to listen to those around us or even ask for advice, to humble ourselves, and beloved, if 2001, 2008, and 2020, 2021 and 2022 haven't taught us, WHAT WILL? Beloved, God is trying to get our attention, He's trying to get our affection, and my fear is that we aren't hearing Him, and because we aren't hearing Him, we aren't responding to Him.
- L. **Revelation 5:1-6**
- M. God's cure for man's sinful nature, is to place him/her into situations where we're unable to do anything and have to lean and trust fully on Him! This is where MAN'S WEAKNESS IS CLEARER, and GOD'S STRENGTH IS STRONGEST!