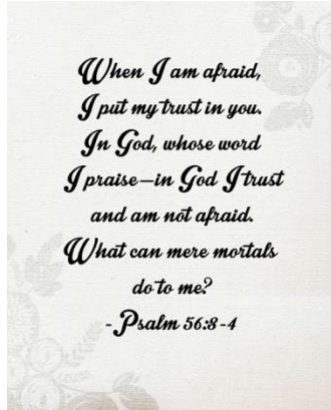


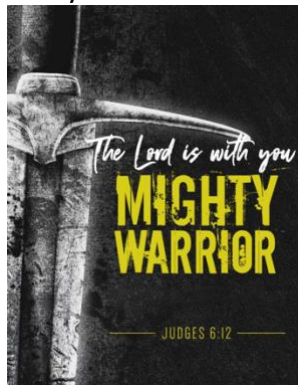
08 Judges Chapter 7 – Against Overwhelming Odds



Last Sunday I shared with you the verse that God has given me as a verse for our congregation this year. It is Psalm 56:3. It reads, ³ *Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. (NKJV)*. The scripture then reads in verse four something equally powerful. ⁴ *In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? (Psalm 56:4, NKJV)*.

During the holiday season this year I saw several people become overwhelmed with the difficulties of the problems in their lives. In early December, an acquaintance of mine wrote a note to several friends and sent it by email. He mentioned me in the note as a person who might be able to help with some of the mess that would be left in the aftermath. He entitled it, “NOTES TO HELP HANDLE MY AFFAIRS AND THE HOUSEHOLD.” He started the note, “**I can no longer handle everything** that is on my plate: my legal work; restitution; help at home for my wife Annie; Sammy and Gretchen (my sweet doggies); and my addiction of collecting old books. I do not blame anyone. I am the one who took money from clients and used it for my overhead and myself and Annie.” Seven pages later he ended the note, “For Annie, I have always loved you and none of this is your fault. **I didn’t put enough faith in God to advise me on financial matters long ago.**”¹ The fears of life overcame him. He started the note with the problem and ended it with the problem. He began saying, “I can no longer handle everything on my plate.” He ended it saying “I didn’t put enough faith in God to advise me on matters long ago.” We get into great trouble when we don’t learn the beauty of casting our cares on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7).

This year has started off with another Covid scare and all kinds of social chaos and upheaval.

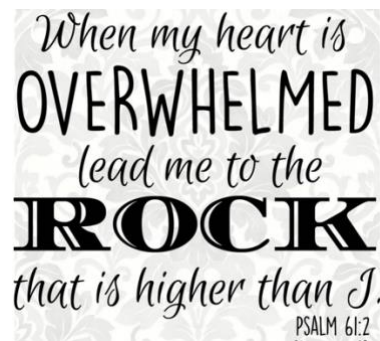


Headlines are front and center saying that inflation is back. We are warned that our incomes will stay the same or go down, but everything is going up in price. If we are not careful, listening to such talk can breed intense insecurity, doubt, and fear. I don’t think it is any mere chance that we’ve started out the year looking at Gideon. Like us, Gideon was a sheep. He was a person filled with all sorts of doubts and fears, but God still used him mightily. God revealed to Gideon who he really was in spite of his human failings. In chapter six last week, we read that, “***...the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!” (Judges 6:12, NKJV)***.

We are also told that the Spirit came upon Gideon. The Hebrew text actually says that the Spirit of the Lord “clothed Gideon.” (rua Yahweh lobasah) I think when we’re really operating

¹ The names have been changed to disguise the person

in the spirit, people see the Holy Spirit of God on us. We disappear as more of the Spirit is present in our lives. I've also heard people say, "Lord, we just want more of Your Holy Spirit." We don't need more of the Holy Spirit. We have all of the Holy Spirit there is to have. The Holy Spirit needs more of us. That happens when we die to self. Now concerning fear, Wednesday night one in attendance reminded us that there are 365 verses in the Bible that tell us "Fear not." God must remind us DAILY that we have nothing to fear. Why? "When I am afraid, I will trust in you" (Psalm 56:3).



When my heart is
OVERWHELMED
lead me to the
ROCK
that is higher than I.
PSALM 61:2

When Israel was surrounded by Midian, the situation was overwhelming. The Israelite army began with 32,000 men and the warriors of Midian numbered 135,000 men. Gideon was outnumbered. The odds were against Him. God's people were toast without a miracle. We too are often outnumbered. We would be toast without God's deliverance, but He delivers us again and again. There will always be more unbelievers than believers. We cannot find safety in numbers. We find safety in the Lord. The events of life can overwhelm us if we try to handle them all on our own. David speaks to this feeling of being overwhelmed, **"From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. (Psalm 61:2, NKJV).** Guys, when our hearts are overwhelmed, there is only one answer: "to be lead to the rock that is higher than us!" That rock is Jesus.

Wednesday night we read the passage in which Gideon destroyed the altars to Baal and the Asherah pole that were in his own family's yard. Gideon's name means "one who cuts down" and that's exactly what he did. He cut down and destroyed the wicked place that his father Joash had created. Gideon and his group of 10 men did this at night because he was afraid, but he still did it. He obeyed. We shouldn't be too hard on Gideon because there's a whole lot of Gideon in each of us. It's interesting that God called Gideon to liberate Israel, but God had Gideon start in his own home with his own family. His father then gave him the name Jerubabaal that means "Let Baal fight for himself." Let's take up in chapter seven.

Gideon's Valiant Three Hundred

*7 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. 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.'" 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. (Judges 7:1-3, NKJV).*

So right here we see that God is going to change the odds so that no one in Israel will be able to claim the victory for themselves. All will know that it is God alone that has done the work and

gotten the victory. So now instead of 32,000 against the Midianites there are only 10,000 people left (against 135,000). Back in Deuteronomy chapter 20 it says there are a four reasons



that allow a man to stay away from a battle: (1) a vineyard planted that needs to be harvested, (2) a house is built that needs to be dedicated, (3) a person recently engaged who hasn't married, AND (4) a man being fearful and fainthearted. The passage tells us that the person who is fearful and fainthearted will have a negative effect on the other warriors. Faith is contagious and so is fear.

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." ⁵ So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Everyone who lapped 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." ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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." ⁸ So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. (Judges 7:4-8, NKJV).

There are many interpretations about all this lapping of water like a dog etc. I'm not going to try to make a big interpretation of what it's about. I just think this was a test of urgency and readiness. I think the 300 who kneeled down and cupped their hand and drank were battle ready. They remained standing and were alert for a fight. If you were a soldier and bent all the way over kneeling on the ground to drink, you just aren't immediately ready to fight. Regardless of what it all means, God used this process to winnow down His army to a mere 300 men.

⁹ It happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. ¹⁰ But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, ¹¹ and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp. ¹² Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude. ¹³ And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed." (Judges 7:9-13, NKJV).

Barley is what the poor ate. Israel was impoverished by what Midian had been doing to them. This was an affirmation given in a dream that God was going to strike down the Midianites (Goliath) with small, impoverished Israel (David). The victory to be had was going to be God's victory.

¹⁴ Then his companion answered and said, "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp." ¹⁵ And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. (Judges 7:14-15a, NKJV).

I have told you all repeatedly that public victories are the product of private worship. If you want to be a warrior, be a worshiper. Whenever Joshua engaged in worship and spent time before the Lord, he was given the victory. Whenever he tried to do it in his own strength, he was defeated and he ended up flat on his face.

He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand." ¹⁶ Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: ¹⁸ When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!'" (Judges 7:15b-18, NKJV).

If you feel overwhelmed, remember that God often stacks the odds against us. Elijah was one person against 300 prophets of Baal. Here Gideon and his men are now 300 against 135,000. Sometimes in the church we think we need more people. We feel like it will be stronger if there are more of us. God started with 7 people right here 6 years ago. Maybe we don't need MORE people. Maybe what we need are the RIGHT people. I think that God has been building this congregation to be exactly who and what it is in His timing. He has made us strong in our weakness. We need the people that God brings here. Let's don't ever get too impressed with numbers. I think God is more interested in whether we are each growing in faith than whether or how much we are growing in numbers. Don't get me wrong. I love preaching to a full house, but let's never give too much importance to whether the place is packed. Let's be intent on helping all who come to grow in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

¹⁹ So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. ²⁰ Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers—they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing—and they cried, "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!" ²¹ And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. ²² When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the

border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath. ²³ And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites.

²⁴ Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan." Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. ²⁵ And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan. (Judges 7:19-25, NKJV).

So, Israel won the victory, and they won the victory against all odds. You may feel overwhelmed at the start of this year. I would close with two pieces of advice.

- 1 When you are afraid, trust in Him. Learn Psalm 56:3 and repeat it each and every time that you are afraid.
- 2 Understand that being fearful is not who you are in Christ. Just like the Angel of the Lord told Gideon in the winepress, YOU are a person of valor. The Apostle Paul wrote the timid young pastor Timothy telling him, **"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."**(2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV). So, if God has not given you a spirit of fear, you must ask from whence does it come? It originates from the world, from within your own flesh, and the devil. Paul is clear that our new nature is righteousness, but we carry the flesh within us which still must be repeatedly dealt with (Romans 7:14-20). This is what Paul calls the "old man." The fears generated from without are generated by the world and the devil which tell us that God is not sovereign in our lives and that we somehow must take control and worry about the details of life which come our way.

Claim who you are in the name of Jesus. You are "super victorious" in Him. Recite these verses and meditate on them. We learned in Ephesians chapter 6 that our one offensive weapon in spiritual warfare war is the Word of God. Learn it. Speak it. Live it. Breath it. Eat it. Be it. That is your inheritance. If you exercise these truths, this will be the greatest fear-free year of your life.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.