

Weakest, Least, Yet Mighty

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Preacher: Lee Roberts

[0:00] So you know the Old Testament documents a repetitive cycle for Israel.

! Israel would serve God for a while and then they would rebel.! Then God would discipline a nation and Israel would repent. and then God would come and rescue his people. And that cycle repeated over and over several times in the Old Testament.

Judges chapter 6 begins with the rebellion period. So let's read Judges 1-6 to set the background for tonight's lesson. It says, Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.

So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains.

So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up. Also Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey.

[1:13] For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts. Both they and their camels were without number. And they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites.

And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. So think about the scene here. Every harvest after the Israelites had done all the work, the Israelites had to hide in caves because other nations would come in and plunder their crops.

And verse 6 says that the people cried out to God, but it makes no mention of any sign of repentance. And perhaps because of that, we see God's response in verses 7 through 10.

Those verses say, And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, Thus says the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of bondage, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you, and gave you their land.

Also I said to you, I am the Lord your God. Do not fear the God of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell, that you have not obeyed my voice. God makes it perfectly clear why Israel is being punished there.

[2:30] Instead of rescuing them, God sent a prophet to rebuke the nation for disobedience. Just when we thought things might look hopeless, that's when we see God's mercy instead, because Judges 6, 11-40, document how God began to rescue Israel from this situation.

We are going to focus on those verses tonight, plus the first two verses of chapter 7. The first thing that we are going to notice tonight, is God's pattern.

And we see God's pattern over and over, as we go through situations like this. And God's pattern is to use unlikely people to accomplish His purposes. And the Old and New Testaments are full of examples of how God uses unlikely people.

I've listed a few on the handout there. Just think about those folks. Abraham was a pagan whose family worshipped false gods. God made Moses into a great leader, even though Moses complained that he wasn't a good speaker.

And of course, David was the youngest of his family, and he was a lowly shepherd boy when God first called him. Rahab was the harlot when she protected the Israelite spies.

[3:43] Then Mary was a young girl when God chose her to be the mother of the Messiah. And going over again to the New Testament, Paul persecuted Christians before God chose him to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

Can you think of some other unlikely characters that we've seen in the Bible? You know, when you think about it too, you could list Samson in there probably, because he's not exactly the model of what we'd expect all the time, but yet God still was able to use him.

There's several others that we could probably think through there. But we're going to focus on another unlikely character tonight, in Judges 6, 11, and 12, introduces to Gideon.

And we'll find out why he's another unlikely person that fits God's pattern really well. So let's read those verses. Here are verses 11 and 12. It says, We're going to take those two verses in reverse order.

How does the angel of the Lord greet Gideon? He's always looking at him hiding up behind the white dress and told him a mighty man of valor.

[5:11] Exactly. He's indoors hiding the thresh's feet. So the first glimpse we get of the mighty man of valor really doesn't fit that picture. We're also going to see that his first words to the visitor don't fit the picture very much either.

Look what verse 13 says. It says, Gideon said to him, O my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?

And now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hand of the Midianites. Gideon actually questioned the divine promise in view of the present circumstances. He did correctly conclude, though, that the Lord had put them into the hand of the Midianites.

So it is kind of interesting that he noticed that. But Gideon's language here really indicates a weak theology because he should have known that the Lord's chastisements were actually proof of God's love for them and his presence with them.

We shouldn't be too hard on Gideon, though, because likely all of us here have probably thought the same question that Gideon dared to ask. And of course, that's the question of, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?

[6:21] So you can see why Gideon is not that different from us as we start noticing him here. And look at something else about what the angel said and how Gideon responded.

The first words that the angel said to Gideon were, The Lord is with you. But then when Gideon replied, he changed the word slightly. Gideon said, If the Lord is with us. So Gideon reacted just as we probably would in the same situation.

His reaction was one of disbelief because he had to be thinking, Surely the angel of the Lord couldn't be addressing those words just to him. And you notice he even tried to deflect some of the responsibility there, too, when he said, The Lord is with us.

So let's pick up the conversation in verse 14 and look for the change in how Gideon's visitor is identified in verse 14. Verse 14 says, Then the Lord said to him, Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.

Have I not sent you? So he said to him, O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

[7:29] Do you see the change in how the visitor is identified? He's been identified as the angel of the Lord up until now, but then in verse 14 we see that the angel of the Lord is really the Lord himself.

And the Lord makes it clear that he's chosen Gideon to save Israel. Gideon, though, wasn't quite ready to acknowledge that the Lord really was the Lord because if your Bible has capitalization like most, notice that verse 14 says, Then the Lord turned to him and said, And Lord is in all caps, and that signifies the holy name of God.

When Gideon responded, he said, O my Lord, which was not in all caps, it was just capitalized as a title of respect. So Gideon wasn't quite ready to admit that he was really talking to God.

So how do you think our mighty man of valor responded? What did he say when the Lord talked to him? You see, he said, How can I save Israel?

Indeed, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. So those are your two blanks there. Twice already, God has referred to Gideon's might, and in verse 14, the Lord even added the comment that Gideon is sent by God, yet our valiant warrior refers to himself as the weakest in the least.

[8:52] That's why Gideon really fits God's pattern well of using unlikely people to accomplish extraordinary results. So as the conversation between God and Gideon continues, we're going to see the second major item to notice from the text, and that's God's patience.

God's patience is evident in how God responds to Gideon's doubts. Instead of being angry, God responds by giving Gideon even more assurance. So look at verse 16.

It says, And the Lord said to him, Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man. So pay particular attention to the phrase, Surely I will be with you.

That in itself should have rung several bells with Gideon, because God used very similar wording whenever he called Moses and Joshua. So we're just going to take a quick detour here and look at what he said to Moses and Joshua when he called him.

Listen to God's reply to Moses in Exodus 3.12. So this is God speaking here in 3.12. And he says, So he said, I will certainly be with you, and this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you, when you have brought the people out of Egypt who shall serve on this mountain.

[10:09] Then compare that wording to what God told Joshua in Joshua 1.5 and Joshua 1.9. Here's Joshua 1.5. Again, this is God speaking here.

And he says, No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

And then here's Joshua 1.9. It says, Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

So notice in all those instances, God is saying the same thing that he told Gideon. And he's saying that the Lord is with him. And Gideon would have known his history, being the Israelite that he was. But he still has the doubts. And that's why we call this section God's patience. I thought about calling it God's presence. But really, when you think about it, God's patience really is shown in that he's willing to be with us even though we may not deserve it.

[11:09] So it's because of his patience that he's with us. So let's return to the conversation between God and Gideon in verse 17. Starting in verse 17, Gideon says, If now I have found favor in your sight, then show me a sign that it is you who talk with me.

Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to you and bring out my offering and set it before you.

And he said, I will wait until you come back. So God agrees to wait on the doubtful human here.

So that's another example of God's patience. The text doesn't tell us how long God had to wait. But from the amount of food Gideon prepares, Gideon must have been gone at all.

Because look at verses 19 and 20. It says, So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, an unleavened bread, from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot.

And he brought them out to him under the terabith tree and presented them. The angel of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock and pour out the broth.

[12:11] And he did so. So just to give you an idea of how much food that is, an ephah of flour is approximately 20 pounds. So Gideon made a lot of bread to go with the goat.

You know, we'd be pretty sure that Gideon didn't have his refrigerator fully stocked and he probably didn't cook it in the microwave. So that's why God must have waited a while for Gideon to get all this stuff ready.

So look what happens next. This is picking up again in verse 21. It says, Then the angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread.

And fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. Now Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord.

So Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God, for I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face. Then the Lord said to him, Peace be with you. Do not fear. You shall not die.

[13:07] So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord is Peace. To this day, it is still in Ophrah of the Abbeah's rites. So Gideon finally realized that he was speaking with the Lord.

It took quite a sign for him to get the message, but he did. And notice what happened. The sign itself and being in the presence of God scared him even more than the Midianites did. That's fairly typical when you think about it because most places in the Bible when somebody is confronted with the presence of God, you become really conscious of how unholy and how sinful you are in the face of God.

And when Gideon saw that he was talking to the Lord, he actually feared the death that all sinners should die before the Holy God. But instead, God graciously promised life to Gideon.

And so that's why we can see God's patience in that as well. So far we've seen God's pattern and we've seen God's patience. As we move on to verse 25, we're going to see God's protection. And it will take us just a little bit to set the stage for God's protection. So let's look at the background in verses 25 through 27. Those verses say, Now it came to pass the same night that the Lord said to him, Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, cut down the wooden image that is beside it, and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down.

[14 : 45] We're focusing on Gideon here tonight, but I wanted to take a minute to look at the symbolism because Gideon is instructed to use a bull to topple the altar of Baal. And you may know that the symbol of Baal was a bull.

So ironically, Gideon's sacrifice of the bull was to be offered using the very wood of the image that he tore down. So he used a bull to tear down the image of the bull, and then he took that bull and sacrificed the bull.

So that gives you a little bit of an idea of how God felt about the false god whose symbol was the bull. And Gideon obeyed.

This is a real good sign for Gideon here. Look at verse 27. Verse 27 says, So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Lord had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night.

When we read that Gideon and his servants tore down the altar at night, we can be tempted to say that it shows even more evidence of Gideon's weakness. And that may be the case, but we really should give Gideon the benefit of the doubt because the verses do tell us that Gideon did exactly as God had commanded.

[15 : 59] And Gideon's fear and his decision to tear down the altar at night just shows some basic common sense. Because even though God is with his people, he still expects us to use the intelligence that he's given us.

And Gideon no doubt knew that if he tried to do it during the daytime, he would be stopped and he might not be able to carry out the mission. So, in this case, you know, real human fear that he had also played with wise precaution, but he still carried out the message and the act that God wanted him to do.

So then, let's read on to see how God uses this event to demonstrate his protection of Gideon.

Verses 28 and 29 say, And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal torn down, and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar which had been built.

So they said to one another, Who has done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon, the son of Joash, has done this thing. Then the men of the city said to Joash, Bring out your son that he may die because he has torn down the altar of Baal and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it.

But Joash said to all who stood against him, Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him plead for himself because his altar has been torn down.

[17 : 25] Therefore on that day he called him Jeroboam, saying, Let Baal plead against him because he has torn down his altar. Let's talk about how that shows God's protection of Gideon.

Because verse 25 told us that the bull Gideon sacrificed and the altar Gideon destroyed belonged to Gideon's father. So we know from that that not only has Gideon's father lost a prized possession in the bull, he also was a Baal worshiper too.

And we're not told why. Maybe he was repentant and maybe he was inspired by what his son did that he wisely proclaimed that Baal is a god and Baal can defend himself.

So perhaps this implied that the people shouldn't overstep Baal's prerogative of self-defense. But regardless, the wise advice actually appealed to the people who threatened Gideon. And that name, actually, that they gave him, Jeroboam, means let Baal contend.

So that's the next piece on your handout. The name that Gideon got was let Baal contend. Some people think they applied the name as an insult, but then every time Gideon was called by that name, it would actually be a reminder that Baal hadn't contended with Gideon because Gideon was still alive.

[18:44] So the name actually became a witness that Baal was unable to defend himself. Just think about it a little bit here. God providentially used a Baal worshiper to protect Gideon from other Baal worshippers.

And he even gave Gideon a name that would always remind those Baal worshippers that Baal didn't do anything. So that's why we can say that the protection of Gideon there is from God because it demonstrates God's sovereignty in coordinating all the events to make sure that nothing happened to Gideon.

As we move on to verse 33 we're going to learn that the invaders are coming again. So obviously the crops are ready to go again and the invaders think they're going to come in and get the crops just like what they have done in the past.

But God is going to use this invasion as proof of Gideon's calling. So God's proof is the next thing that we need to see. And verses 33 and 34 set the background for that proof.

Those verses say that all the Midianites and Amalekites the people of the east gathered together and they crossed over and encamped in the valley of Jezreel.

[19:57] But the spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon then he blew the trumpet and the Abiezrites gathered behind him and he sent messengers throughout all of Manasseh who also gathered behind him.

He also sent messengers He sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun and Etthali and they came up to meet him. As the invaders got closer Gideon began to muster the troops but he also began to have his doubts again and in verse 36 we learn that Gideon heard what God said he just wasn't quite sure whether he should believe it or not.

So let's read verses 36-38. So Gideon said to God If you will save Israel by my hand as you have said look I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor if there is dew on the fleece only and it is dry on the ground then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand as you have said and it was so.

When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together he wrung the dew out of the fleece a bowl full of water. So the first test that Gideon asked for was to have the dew on the fleece but to have it be dry on the ground.

You know from one perspective we can understand Gideon's fears because the task that he's been asked to do is difficult and it's not only difficult it's dangerous but on the other hand think of what Gideon has seen so far he's seen the angel's appearance and promise he had the confirmatory miracle where the angel devoured the food that Gideon set out and then Gideon had already begun to obey and when he started obeying God he saw God's protection but even with all of those doubts and the fact that Gideon probably was disappointing God still granted Gideon's request for proof and even after that first request for proof Gideon had the doubts maybe Gideon thought that the floor around the fleece simply dried faster than the wool so he asked for more proof look at verse 39 this time it says then Gideon said to God do not be angry with me but let me speak just once more let me test

[22:10] I pray just once more with the fleece let it be now dry only on the fleece but on all the ground let there be dew so Gideon reverses the sign here and he obviously knew that his desire to test God was in direct violation of the Mosaic law because he said do not be angry with me when you ask God and just as a cross reference there if you want to see where testing God is prohibited that actually comes from Deuteronomy 6.16 so Gideon knew that he was doing something minimum unwise but probably sinful but Gideon still had that second request even though he already knew what God wanted him to do but despite this lack of faith God accommodated both of Gideon's requests because check out verse 40 God gave Gideon the proof that he'd requested so this also demonstrated how compassionate God is verse 40 says and God did so that night it was dry on the fleece only but there was dew on all the ground it's interesting to note here that God nowhere reprimanded

Gideon whenever he was going through all of this instead God was real compassionate about giving Gideon what he needed to bolster his faith you know he'd already volunteered the sign once to boost Gideon's faith and Gideon should have believed that from the start but God graciously gave him more signs without chastising Gideon instead so you know you could also say that this proof itself is evidence of God's patience like what we talked about earlier so after getting the promise and the signs from God Gideon finally obeys and in Judges 7 1 and 2 we'll see one more thing about God we'll see God's purpose so let's read the first two verses of Judges 7 1 and 2 and

we'll see God's purpose there says then Jeroboel that is Gideon and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Herod so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Morah in the valley 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 so God has one purpose in what he does and that purpose is to bring himself glory so those are your next blanks on the handout God wants to bring himself glory for everything that he does and notice how verse 2 shows us that God will do whatever it takes to glorify himself even if he has to use the unlikely people like Gideon because he says the people are too many for the people to realize that God gave them the victory he needs to have fewer so that the people will realize that God was behind the miracle I've listed a few cross references there for you just to show you that God's purpose is to bring himself glory listen to a few of the verses from Isaiah chapter 43 here's Isaiah 43 7 it tells us that we're all created to glorify

God Isaiah 43 7 says everyone who is called by my name whom I have created for my glory I have formed him yes I have made him that verse God Lord that I am God indeed before the day was I am he and there is no one who can deliver out of my hand I work and who will reverse it in God God even reduce the number of men in Gideon's army and we've already talked about how God did it so that Israel won't be tempted to claim the glory he deserves so that too is consistent with what we see in the Isaiah cross references where God orchestrates everything to bring himself glory let's consider a little bit what we seen tonight then in the verses we've gone through Gideon provided an example of God's pattern of choosing unlikely people for his task then we saw God's patience as Gideon tried to comprehend what God was asking him to do we saw God's protection when Gideon faced the opposition and then we saw God provide even more proof when Gideon had doubts then we saw God's purpose in using Gideon and of course we just talked about that purpose is to bring God glory so Gideon might have been the weakest and the least and he was the weakest and the least by his own admission but he really did become the mighty warrior that the angel of the Lord called him when he obeyed God so that's the next piece on your handout [27 : 25] Gideon really did become the mighty warrior when he obeyed God Gideon didn't have first Peter whenever this happened but Gideon actually was an example of what Peter later talked about in 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 10 and 11 those verses say as each one has received the gift minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God if anyone speaks let him speak as the oracles of God if anyone ministers let him do it as with the ability which God supplies that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever amen notice how that verse ties or those verses tie with what we've talked about over in the new testament you see the consistent purpose that God's goal is to bring himself glory the application tonight is really simple it's simply that if God can use someone with the fears and weak faith of

Gideon if we're obedient to God then God is going to equip us just like he did Gideon consider what happens when God asks us to do something we experience the same cycle that Gideon did because when compared to a holy God all of us are inadequate so that means God's choice of us fits the pattern then God patiently protects!

us usually while he waits for us to accept the God gets the glory so that accomplishes God's purpose it's real easy to fall into the trap of thinking that Gideon had an easier choice to obey because God gave Gideon the signs certainly the signs had to be impressive but when it came time for Gideon to make a decision about what to do the signs didn't really matter that much because Gideon had to rely on God's word so the key piece there is that even with all the signs Gideon had to rely on God's word and believe that God would do what he said he would do and we actually have more of God's word available to us than Gideon did because we have God's word in both the Old and New Testaments and we have many more examples of God's faithfulness for that so the same promises that God made to Gideon apply to us as God's people today in Judges 6.12 and 6.16 God said he was with Gideon God promises to be with us when we do his will and we saw this just on

Sunday morning remember Matthew 28 19 and 20 those say go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo I am with you always even to the end of the age so the weakest the least and the mighty like Gideon we can be all of those things and

they're not contradictory the key is that we just have to obey God and bring him glory!
Thank you.