

THE MIGHTY WARRIOR - JUDGES 6:1-24

STUDIES IN JUDGES #5

The day started out innocently enough for Brian Wolfe, but by evening, it had turned out to be the most remarkable day of his life. Brian had the day off, so he had planned to relax a bit. Since target shooting was one of his favorite hobbies, Brian decided to drive outside of the city of Sugar Grove where he lived, down a dirt road beyond Beaver Pond, to some State land that he often went to - it was a safe place to do some target shooting.

A hollow tree stump sawed off about 5 feet high attracted Brian as the perfect set-up. He could stand up his tin cans on the stump and knock them off with his pistol, one at a time. He plunked the cans off several times, thoroughly enjoying the beauty of the day and the solitude of being out in the woods, alone with his gun. As he was moving back up to the stump after firing another round, he noticed that one of the cans had fallen down inside the tree instead of flying off like the others had. Brian leaned down into the hollow stump to grab that can out. He could almost reach it. . . just a little bit farther. Then, all of a sudden he slipped. I mean he slipped head first down into that hollow tree.

Now you have to picture this scene. Here is poor Brian Wolfe, all alone, miles from anywhere, stuck upside down in a hollow tree with his feet sticking out the top. He can't work himself back out. It doesn't do any good to yell for help. He is totally helpless.

It was 6 and half hours later that an Oregon forestry officer happened by the site. He first noticed the parked car. But then he saw these 2 feet sticking

out of the top of the stump. Maybe it was to reassure himself that he hadn't gone crazy that he called for help so that someone else could witness this too. But probably it was because the officer instinctively knew that he would need help to pull the hapless man out of his predicament. When help arrived, the two men pulled poor Brian out of that hollow stump.

Within a couple of days the swelling had subsided. Within a week the minor cuts and bruises were gone. But I don't think Brian Wolfe will ever hear the end of his day-off adventure from his colleagues at work.

It's a fearful feeling to be helpless, isn't it? Nobody wants to be in a position where he can't help himself. Nobody wants to be in a position where he is at the mercy of the elements surrounding him. We all want some measure of control over our lives - but we sometimes find ourselves in a position where we are totally helpless. And when this happens, all the exhortation in the world to get ourselves out of our predicament doesn't matter, because we need some outside help to free ourselves.

We find Gideon in such a position as we turn to Judges 6. He is in a helpless position. He is a farmer in the fertile Jezreel Valley. But he has no practical control over his land now. For a foreign power has been raiding his land during the harvest season for the past 7 years, stealing his crops from him. Gideon is a hard worker. He has continued to till and plant and cultivate his crops. But he has felt helpless before the power of these raiding Midianites. So here we find Gideon. Hiding from the enemy. Trying to thresh a little bit of wheat so he can feed his family. But fearing all the time that some Midianite

raiders will find him. And along with the other Israelites, Gideon is crying out in his heart to God for deliverance - Oh, to be saved from this helpless condition.

We have been studying the 6 major judges that are found in the book of the Judges. We have already looked at Othniel, Ehud and, last week, Deborah.

We come now to the 4th major judge, a man by the name of Gideon. Gideon is somewhat different from the other three because much more space in the Bible is devoted to him - more than all of the former judges to this point combined. 3 full chapters are devoted to Gideon's deliverance. As we might imagine, much more personal information is given about Gideon. Gideon's weaknesses as well as his strengths are clearly revealed. So most of us can much more readily identify with Gideon than with some of the other judges who are listed. We are going to take several weeks to look at this 4th major Judge. And this evening, we begin with his call to be a judge by God. For Gideon's story is unique among the judges for it is the only one that includes his personal call to service and the struggles that he had accepting that call of God.

Every Christian knows in his or her heart that God has a purpose for his life and wants to use him to build the kingdom of God in some way. The enemy seldom attacks this theological premise because it is so obvious from the word of God. But most Christians struggle with their abilities to serve the Lord - and this is where the enemy has a heyday in the life of the Christian. For he can play on these insecurities and render a believer neutralized in his service for

the Lord.

Let's read the account of Gideon's call found in Judges 6:1-24:

JDG 6:1 Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. ² Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. ³ Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. ⁴ They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. ⁵ They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. ⁶ Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.

JDG 6:7 When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."

JDG 6:11 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

JDG 6:13 "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."

JDG 6:14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

JDG 6:15 "But Lord, " Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

JDG 6:16 The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

JDG 6:17 Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. ¹⁸ Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you."

And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return."

JDG 6:19 Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

JDG 6:20 The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And Gideon did so. ²¹ With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. ²² When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"

JDG 6:23 But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die."

JDG 6:24 So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

There are 3 common struggles that Christians have that prevent them from being used of the Lord in service. It comforts us to realize that Gideon faced these same struggles. I want to address these 3 in the call of Gideon and show God's answer to each of them.

1. The first struggle that we each have is the feeling that God is not with us, that God has deserted us. But we need to realize that GOD IS WITH US, EVEN WHEN WE DON'T FEEL THAT HE IS - READ VS. 12,13a

"When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." "But, sir, Gideon replied, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?"

Now we have to understand just a bit about the setting to realize the significance of Gideon's feelings of being deserted by God here. This 4th oppression was mainly by the Midianites. The Midianites were a nomadic type of people who lived east of the Jordan River. For 7 years, the Midianites had oppressed the children of Israel. Now their oppression was especially severe because it affected the food supply that was absolutely necessary for the survival of the Israelites. Let me summarize how this Midianite oppression worked.

The Midianites, being basically nomadic in lifestyle, would just choose to do their roving in the most fertile part of Israel's bread-basket, the Jezreel Valley, right at harvest time. The Israelites would have to run for their safety to the caves of the mountains while the Midianites lived in their houses and ate their crops. Then, when the harvest season was over, the Midianites would move on to another area. So this was not a permanent occupation, but it was rather a constant robbing of the crops. For 7 years, this pattern had occurred. It was very humiliating and demoralizing for the Israelites. Here these farmers had worked hard all season to raise a healthy crop only to have a foreign power

come in and harvest it for them. It really is an evidence as to how weak the nation of Israel had become. The Midianites were not a mighty, stable military power. They were basically just a nomadic, roving tribe. But the Israelites had degenerated to the point where even the Midianites were able to bully them to have to leave their houses and lands during harvest time. And we can imagine what the loss of 7 years harvests had done to the economy and lifestyle of the children of Israel.

Now in this setting, it's easy to understand Gideon's objection, "If God is really with us, why is all this happening to us?" In an economy that is collapsing, in a world where families are struggling just to get enough to eat, in an environment where people have to run from their homes to the caves and dens of the mountains just to feel safe, how can God really be with us? If God is really with us, then why are we suffering like we are?

Now while we can understand something of what Gideon was feeling for we all have felt deserted by God when times have become extremely difficult, we need also to see clearly the words of the angel of the Lord, "The Lord is With You." For despite how Gideon felt about the situation at hand, God was still with him. In fact, there are several dramatic ironies in this scene. And the first was the fact that Gideon would doubt the presence of the Lord with him when the Lord was in fact standing there, talking with him. For whenever "the angel of the Lord" appears in the O.T., it is a theophanic appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ. In other words, the angel of the Lord is the second person of the triune godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ in a bodily form. We know that from

this passage because the angel of the Lord is called "Yahweh" or Lord in verse 14. Only the true God of heaven is called Yahweh in the bible, never a mere created angel. And also the angel of the Lord uses the personal pronoun "I" in speaking as God to Gideon in verses 14 and 16. There is no question from the text that this is God himself speaking with Gideon. Yet Gideon questions him as to whether or not God has deserted him.

A biblical truth that is absolutely essential for each of us to realize if we are to maintain consistency in our Christian lives is the fact that God never changes - he is immutable. That means that God is always with us, he is always loving, he is always faithful, he is always good - whether we feel like he is or not. The reason why this is such a critical truth is that the alternative is to base our faith upon our feelings. God is only with us if we feel like he is. God is only loving if we sense his love. God is only faithful if we see his hand working. God is only good if we are receiving his blessings. The enemy would love to trap us into basing our faith upon our feelings. For our feelings vacillate. And if our faith is based upon our feelings, then our Christian life is going to be a rollercoaster - up and down all the time. The Bible tells of a God who is immutable. He is a God who never changes. Therefore, he is ever present whether we know it or not. He is always loving whether we feel it or not.

There is a true story in a missions video entitled "When Things Seem Impossible" that was produced by the New Tribes Mission. It tells the true story of a New Tribes Missionary who was taken hostage by South American

Guerillas, and how God brought about his deliverance without harm.

Paul Dye, who was a airplane pilot, was taken hostage by barbaric Drug Lord Guerillas. He was taken deep into the jungle and isolated in a tent with armed guards all around him. As we can imagine, being ripped away from his family and friends, Paul's mind was spinning as he faced an uncertain future. What was going to happen to him? Were the guerillas going to shoot him? Would he ever see his family again? By his own testimony, he couldn't even think straight for that first night that he was imprisoned way out in the jungles of South America. But then, the following day, an amazing thing happened in his mind. As he began to think about his circumstances and God's sovereign hand of control, Paul began to realize that just because he had been taken captive did not mean that God was not in control - God was always a sovereign God. And just because he wasn't feeling it didn't mean that God wasn't there with him - God was always omnipresent. And just because he wasn't feeling it didn't mean that God wasn't concerned for his welfare - God was always good and loving. According to Paul Dye's own testimony, that single truth began to change his whole situation. Suddenly, his mind began to think very clearly. He was overwhelmed with a sense of God's care. And God began to lead him so that within 4 days he was able to make his escape, flying out of the jungle in the middle of the night and landing safely in another part of the jungle without making a scratch on the plane at 3:00 in the morning. But according to his own testimony, what made the difference was his refusal to allow his feelings to dictate reality about God.

Gideon had to learn that lesson. Just because he didn't feel God's presence did not mean that God wasn't there. God was right there talking with him while Gideon was questioning his care and presence.

2. A second struggle that we each have is the tendency to look at ourselves as we are now without taking into account the potential that God has given to us. Most people do not see themselves in light of their potential, what they can become, but they rather see themselves in their unfinished state and have the tendency to compare themselves with others whom God has developed. And this brings a sense of spiritual inferiority and discouragement into our lives. We need to remember the fact that **GOD SEES US NOT ONLY AS WE ARE, BUT HE ALSO SEES US AS WE CAN BECOME BY HIS GRACE.** A second ironic statement is found in the Lord's greeting - "The Lord is with you, Mighty Warrior."

Now, I must confess that the first time I ever read this greeting, I laughed right out loud. I remember it clearly. I thought the Lord was kidding here. I thought this must be some kind of sarcasm. Here is a man who is hiding from the enemy, threshing his wheat in a winepress to keep the Midianites from finding him, and the Lord calls him a Mighty Warrior. Gideon appears to be anything but a mighty warrior here, doesn't he?

But as I have studied this passage many times over the years, I have come to realize that the Lord wasn't kidding Gideon or being sarcastic at all. The Lord was just seeing Gideon's potential and what he would become by His grace. And that potential was as good as reality in the mind of the Lord,

because he knew the mighty warrior that he was going to make out of this hiding coward. Gideon never dreamed that he could become a mighty warrior. But God knew of the great deliverance that Gideon would lead and that Gideon's name would come down in history as one of the courageous leaders of God's people. And so he calls him a mighty warrior.

Someone has said, "Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the apples in a seed." There is great truth in that statement. The difference between counting the seeds in an apple and the apples in a seed is the difference between seeing things as they are now and seeing what is to become in the future. Our focus is on the here and now. God in his omniscience is able to see what will happen in the future.

Nobody paid much attention to that young man named Dwight Lyman Moody who was a salesman in that little shoe store in Northfield, Massachusetts. Those who did pay attention to him did so because he was often in trouble, and they wanted to keep their eye on him to protect themselves. But nobody seriously thought that this troubled young man would one day make the impact upon the world that he would. But God knew the potential that was found in this rough and unpolished stone. So God burdened the heart of Edward Kimball, who was a Sunday school teacher with no formal Bible training at all, to witness to Dwight and lead him to faith in Christ. And God knew that D. L. Moody would become a preacher and one day when he would be preaching in a service, that a young man named Mordecai Ham would be sitting in the audience, and that young Mordecai would give his life to

the Lord that night. And God knew that Mordecai Ham would be faithful to the calling that God had given to him, and Mordecai would become an evangelist. And one day when Mordecai was preaching in a service, another young man named William Graham would be sitting out in the audience, and young Billy would give his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ that night. Most of us have seen televised campaigns of Billy Graham literally preaching the gospel throughout the whole world by satellite, with millions professing faith in Christ - and God knew how many apples were in that seed when he first moved Edward Kimball, that uneducated and unknown Sunday School teacher, to lead Dwight Lyman Moody to faith in Jesus Christ.

As God looks at each one of us here this evening, he sees not only what we are today, but he also sees what we are going to become by his grace. And God's knowledge doesn't stop with our lives here on this earth, but God also sees us in our glorified state - for that is our ultimate destiny. We need to see ourselves and each other through God's eyes as well.

3. A third struggle that we each have is to doubt whether we have the capabilities to be used of God. We see inside ourselves. We see our weaknesses. And we each have the tendency to think, I am just too weak to be used of God. I just don't have the abilities. But we need to realize that when we see our own weaknesses, we are just in the position where we can be of greatest use in the kingdom of God. For GOD OFTEN USES THE WEAK TO DEFEAT THE STRONG IN HIS STRENGTH.

Gideon struggled with his own inabilities. READ vs. 15.

"But Lord, Gideon asked, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family?"

Of all the people in this land, I should be the last one chosen to be a judge. That was how Gideon viewed himself. But notice the Lord's answer found in verse 16. "The Lord answered, I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

You see, the issue was not how strong Gideon was. The issue was how strong God was. For God would be with Gideon, and God would do the conquering. Gideon would just need to be a willing channel through whom the power of God could flow. True, the task that God was challenging Gideon to do seemed to be impossible. And if any person in his own strength would have attempted it, he would have failed miserably. Certainly, if Gideon would have tried to muster an army and revolt against the Midianites in his own power, he would have been crushed immediately. So, Gideon was being realistic when he doubted his own capabilities. But the point was not how capable Gideon was. The point was how powerful God was. For with God, there is no such thing as an impossibility. And Gideon was in the perfect position to be used by God. For Gideon didn't have any self to get in the way of God's flow of power. You see, when we try to fight spiritual battles in our own strength, we get in the way and hinder the flow of God's power. But when we realize our own inabilities, we then are in the perfect position to be used as a channel of God's power.

I remember one time when our youngest son, Hudson, was just an elementary student. Gatorade had just come out in those new squirt bottles that

are rather commonplace today. Hudson had seen his older brothers drinking out of them and asked me to take him down to the corner store to buy one of those new squirt bottles of Gatorade for himself. Well, we walked down to the store and bought a squirt bottle of Gatorade. Then as we were walking home, he couldn't wait, but had to take the bottle out of the bag and drink it along the way. But after a while I noticed that he was trying and trying to get it to work, but he wasn't getting any juice out of it. Finally, in desperation, he gave me the bottle, complaining that this bottle didn't work - we needed to go back and get another bottle. Well, you know what I did, don't you? I took off the top, and sure enough, there was a foil protection seal over the mouth of the bottle. You couldn't see it with the lid on, but it was stopping the flow of juice. Once the protection seal was removed, the bottle worked fine.

We need to realize that attempting to fight spiritual battles in the strength of the flesh is like putting a foil seal over the lid of the bottle. And, in this way, we are most often our own worst enemies. For we see what needs to be done, we see what God wants us to do, but then we often are tempted to try to do it in our own strength. If Gideon would have tried this, he would have failed miserably. Happily, Gideon realized his own inabilities. And we need to realize our own inabilities as well. For removing the foil seal of self allows the divine power of God to flow freely through our lives.

3 common struggles that we face that prevents our being used by God in service as we could be.

*feeling that God has deserted us, that he is not with us anymore

*failing to see our potential by the grace of God

*becoming obsessed with our own weaknesses and inabilities.

Are these struggles that you have? Gideon had them, and he was still used to deliver an entire nation for the glory of God. Will you allow God to work in your life so that you too will experience His delivering power?