**Gideon, Mighty Warrior**

July 28, 2013

Judges 6:1-7:25

Key Verse 6:12 “When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, ‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.’”

In today’s passage, God calls a man named Gideon to deliver his suffering people. Gideon was reluctant at first to respond to the call of God. He did not always possess strong faith and like all of us he had many weaknesses. And he made all kinds of excuses as to why he couldn’t do what God was calling him to do. God had to patiently work with him and put up with all his fears and excuses to prepare him for leadership. Let’s pray that through this passage we may also accept God’s calling and vision for us so that we may be mighty spiritual warriors for this generation.

Look at verse 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.”Alliedwith the Amalekites and other eastern people, the Midianites came every year at thetime of harvest and devastated the land. They stole everything that had been grownduring the year and drove the Israelites into the mountains. The Israelites were forced toretreat to caves with only small portion of food that they could carry with them. TheMidianites and their allies destroyed everything in sight and left, only to return at thefollowing year. These repeated invasions brought the Israelites into not only materialbut also psychological ruins. They were physically and psychologically living in caves.Even during the months of the year when no enemy could be seen, the Israelites knewthat attack and defeat were coming. Finally they cried out to the Lord for help.The first response of the Lord to the cry for help of his people is to send aprophet.

Look at verses 7-10. “When the Israelites cried to the Lord because of Midian, 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. 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. 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.’” Through this unnamed prophet God reminded them of the wonderful way he had delivered them from Egypt. He also reminded them of his generosity in giving them the land and helping them overcome their enemies. Verse 7 says that the Israelites cried to the Lord because of Midian, but the prophet said their problem was their worship of Baal. The reason that they are weakened before their enemies and unable to deal with their problems is that they chose to worship and put their faith in something other than the true God.

After helping his people to know what their real problem was, God called one person to deliver his people. Look at verse 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.” The angel of the Lord came to Gideon when he was hiding down in a winepress to thresh wheat. Normally people use an open space to thresh wheat where the winds would blow away the chaff. Then why was Gideon hiding in a winepress and threshing wheat in such an uncomfortable way? Was it some kind of new technology to thresh wheat so that he didn’t want anybody to see it? Verse 11b says that it was because he was afraid of the Midianites. He was desperately trying to save a little bit of food that he had hidden from the Midianites. This is not the picture of a courageous hero; it is the picture of a defeated, discouraged man, filled with doubts and fears. The repeated invasion and defeat made this young man hopeless and visionless.

But how did God see him? Let’s read verse 12 together. “When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, ‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.’” Gideonmust have looked up and looked around, “Where is this mighty warrior?” God didn’tlist the sins of Gideon and itemize his failures. He didn’t start with any negatives atall. Rather he called him, “You, mighty warrior!” Who are the mighty warriors? They arethe people who are not afraid of death. They are the people who can fight againsthundreds and thousands of enemies and win the victory. “You, Mighty Warrior!” This wasGod’s hope and vision for Gideon. In spite of his current weaknesses, God saw greatpotential and possibility in him.Here we learn that how we see ourselves is very important. Gideon thought hewas a hopeless and ordinary man, but God said he was a mighty warrior. When Godcalled Abraham, he was an ordinary old country man without any children. But Godhelped him until he finally accepted vision to become a source of blessing and father ofmany nations through his babysitting and encouragement and even sometimes throughrebuking. God even changed his name from Abram, which means “noble father,” into“Abraham,” which means “father of many nations.” How other people see us or even how wesee ourselves are not that important. The real important thing is to know how God seesus and how we live a life according to God’s vision for us. If you think you are justordinary salary man or housewife, then you will live such an ordinary life. But if you acceptGod’s vision and hope for you, then you can live according to God’s vision and God will make you great.

Then how did Gideon react to the angel’s greeting? Look at verse 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 father 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.”When Gideon looked at his and his people’s current situation, he couldn’t believe Godhad been with him. But how did God answer this question? Look at verses 14 and 16. “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?’ The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.’” God never forgot nor abandonedhis people. He was always with his people and looking for a person who could humblyaccept his call and save his people. When God was with Gideon, no matter what kind ofhumble background or human weakness he had, he would be a mighty warrior andstrike down all the Midianites. In verses 17-24, Gideon asked for a sign to assure him that it was really the Lord who was speaking to him and the Lord was gracious to accommodate himself to Gideon’s unbelief. Gideon prepared a sacrifice, which was a costly thing to do at a time when food was rare. God waited for him to return and then consumed the offering by bringing fire from the rock. The sudden appearance of the fire and disappearance of the visitor convinced Gideon that indeed he had seen God and spoken to Him.

Look at verses 25-32. That very same night, God gave Gideon his first assignment. God told him to destroy the altar dedicated to Baal, build an altar to the Lord, and sacrifice one of his father’s valuable bulls, using the wood of the Asherah pole for fuel. Obviously, this was a tough assignment, especially in light of the fact that Gideon’s own family was involved in Baal worship. The tearing down of the Baal altar and the pagan idols was more than just an “act of courage.” It was a very real step of spiritual renewal, repentance, and recommitment to the Lord. That is evident the next morning when the townspeople, after an initial outburst of anger, decided to renew their commitment to the Lord. Look at verse 31. “Are you going to plead Baal’s cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.”Joash and the other townspeople realized that they had been worshiping not a god but a human construction. Gideon’s first step in battle had been one of spiritual renewal, for himself and for his townspeople. How did you begin today? Today is your battlefield as a Christian. How did you begin your battle? Did you begin by worrying about all things that you have to do today? Did you begin by wondering how you’ll get it all done? Or did you begin by turning to God for direction and renewal? Ephesians 6:10 says, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” Let us pray that we may allow the Holy Spirit to prepare us spiritually, mentally, and emotionally for the battle that is ahead of us every day.

The Midianites and their allies made their annual invasion about that time as more than 135,000 men moved into the Valley of Jezreel. It was time for Gideon to act, and the Spirit of God gave him the wisdom and power that he needed. Gideon blew the trumpet first in his own hometown, and the men of Abiezer rallied behind him. Then he sent messengers throughout his own tribe of Manasseh as well as the neighboring tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Thus at Gideon’s call, 32,000 men responded. But compared with the 135,000 enemies, the 32,000 men looked too small. So, before he led the attack, Gideon asked God to give him two more signs. Gideon set out the fleece the first night, and it came back exactly as he has asked. But still he was not so sure. So he made a second request of God: “Will you reverse the process--make the ground wet and the fleece dry?” During his two days of struggling to believe, Gideon developed an increased fear of God. And his faith grew as a result.

Look at verses 7:1-7. What was God’s instruction as Gideon and his men prepared to fight against the Midianites? The Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her” (2). Thirty-two thousand men appeared to have no chance of winning a battle against the Midianites and their superior weapons. But God told Gideon that he had too many men. What did God want to teach Gideon and his people through this battle? First, he wanted to plant faith. Probably Gideon thought he needed more soldiers to win this battle. But God cut his army by two-thirds, from 32,000 to 10,000, later 10,000 to 300. God wanted them to know that deliverance didn’t depend on the number of soldiers but on God. Faith is exercised when we don’t have any tangible things to depend on. People tend to depend on something else such money, ability, knowledge than on God. So God often puts us in a situation that we feel overwhelmed, so that our fear is exposed and our dependencies are revealed. This is the way God helps us to depend on him instead. Second, he wanted to reveal his glory through this battle. The only interest of Gideon and the Israelites was to win the battle and live a peaceful life. But God knew that they would be proud and immediately go back to their old idolatry and sinful lives if they won the battle with big army and their strength. By delivering them with his mighty power, God wanted his people to remember his grace and mercy and live holy and faithful life. This battle was not only forthe nation of Israel but also for the glory of God. Compared with the 135,000 enemies, 300 lookedsmall. But they were chosen people and committed people. God wants such courageousand committed men and women of mission.

Look at verse 9. During that night the Lord said to Gideon, “Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands.” But after he got hisfirst glimpse of the numerous Midianite armies, Gideon’s heart began to tremble again.So God gave him another sign. God told Gideon to go down against the Midianite campand overhear the conversation of two soldiers. God had given one of the soldiers adream, and that dream told Gideon that God would deliver the Midianites into his hand.Gideon was a new man when he and his servant returned to the Israelite camp. His fearsand doubts were gone. He returned to the camp and called out, “Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands.” (7:15)Gideon’s plan was simple but effective. He gave each of his men a trumpet toblow, a jar to break, and a torch to burn. They would encircle the enemy camp, with thetorches inside the jars and their trumpets in their hands. At Gideon’s signal, the menwould blow the trumpets, break the pitchers, reveal the lights, and then shout, “Thesword of the Lord and of Gideon!” Finding themselves surrounded by sudden light and loud noises,the Midianites assumed that they were being attacked by a large army, and the result was panic. The Lord intervened and put a spirit of confusion in the camp, and theMidianites began to kill each other. Then they realized that the safest thing to do wasflee. That day 120,000 of swordsmen of the Midian fell and the Israel won the greatvictory.

In today’s passage, we learned how God raised up a fearful and hopeless young man named Gideon as a mighty warrior and great leader for the Israelites. May God raise up many spiritual soldiers who are willing to trust God to do great things for his glory.