

Text: Judges 6-8

Theme: I Will be With You

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Healing and Anointing Service on 30/10/2016 at 10:30am

Have you ever doubted God's promises? Have you ever questioned His work in your life? Of course, you have. It's easy to do this, isn't it?

In Judges 6–8, we will study Gideon—a man who doubts God's promises and questions His work. You could say Gideon is a lot like you and me (James 5:17). Although Gideon eventually becomes a great hero, he is also filled with fear. In fact, he is one of the most fearful and doubtful individuals in the entire Bible. No biblical character requires and receives more divine assurance than Gideon. Yet, at a specific point in Gideon's life he becomes the man God wants him to be.

Gideon's story begins like the other judges of Israel.

God wants you and me to be faith-filled believers who overcome our doubts and obediently trust Him. This story demonstrates that He will do whatever He can to bring us to the place of obedience. The word for today is: Believe God's promises and move from fear to faith.

The introduction and setting before Gideon's debut (6:1–10).

This new section begins with a familiar refrain: "Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years" (6:1). Now remember, Israel is coming off forty years of peace after God's deliverance over Sisera's nine hundred iron chariots (5:31). One would think Israel would have learned her lesson by now. But this generation, like the previous generations, falls right back into idolatry. What is the principle for us today? Remember, remember, remember! Remember the times God has delivered you in the past out of or through a difficult time. It is so easy to forget God's faithfulness.

In 6:2–6, God uses the Midianites to break the Israelites so that they will call out to Him. They come each year during harvest season, enter the land just as the Israelites are harvesting their crops, plunder the land, take the harvest, get on their camels, head out of town, and then stay away until the next year's harvest. Then they come back in and plunder the harvest again.

In the midst of Israel's distress, God does something unexpected. He sends an unnamed prophet to rebuke His people (6:7–10). This is like a stranded motorist calling a garage for assistance and the garage sending a philosopher instead of a mechanic. Israel needs deliverance and the Lord sends a prophet; Israel asks for an act of God's power and He sends them a preacher who rehearses His grace (6:8b–9) and repeats His demands (**6:10**). The Lord sends a prophet because Israel needs more than immediate relief; they need to understand why they are oppressed. They must see that "the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years" (6:1) because they refused to obey Him (6:10b). Likewise, in many cases we need understanding before we receive relief. **We may want to escape from our circumstances while God wants us to interpret our circumstances.**

The commissioning of Gideon as Israel's deliverer (6:11–32).

God once again shows them His great grace by raising up another deliverer. In 6:11–16 we read, 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."* This is some kind of dialogue! The angel of the Lord pursues a

scared farmer from an idolatrous family. He even calls Gideon “valiant warrior.” What a joke, looking at the circumstances from a physical perspective! I now see these words as prophetic.

- **Gideon was anything but a warrior.**
- **He was an incorrect candidate.**
- **He had the wrong attitude**
- **He came from the wrong family _ idol worshippers.**
- **Gideon expressed a lack of faith**
- **Like Gideon, God chooses unlikely people to serve Him today.**

After much protest on Gideon’s part and a spectacular sign on God’s side, Gideon is convinced that the One speaking to him is truly the God of Israel. At God’s instruction, Gideon tears down his father’s Baal altar and Asherah pole. Adding insult to injury (to Baal and his consort, Asherah), Gideon offers a sacrifice to God at this place, using a bull (the symbol of Baal) for the sacrifice and the wood of the Asherah pole for the firewood.

Although Gideon’s actions were done in the cover of darkness, the morning light revealed the destruction of their idols and Gideon’s newly-discovered devotion to the God of Israel. The people of his hometown were furious and demanded that his father turn Gideon over to them to be put to death. Joash, Gideon’s father, came to his son’s rescue, but more importantly he joined his son in his rejection of Baal and Asherah. The events of the previous night brought something into very clear focus for him. Baal and Asherah were the “gods” who were supposed to give their worshippers fertility, prosperity, and victory in battle – all of which Israel had forfeited because they worship them (as the prophet had indicated). If Baal was so all-powerful, then why did the townspeople need to come to his rescue? Wasn’t he the one who was supposed to rescue them? No, let Baal take up his own offense with Gideon. Joash threatened to kill anyone who sought to defend this worthless god. And to underscore his defiance, Joash renamed Gideon “**Jerub-Baal**,” which means “let Baal contend.”

This section makes it clear that two altars cannot coexist side-by-side. In other words, you cannot have an altar to Yahweh and an altar to Baal. They are mutually exclusive. The demand placed on Gideon is meant as a paradigm for Israel. Yahweh is preparing to deliver them. But Israel must be properly prepared for such deliverance. God cannot safely trust His good gifts to those not fully given to Him.

Another insight that comes from this section is: Many of our biggest spiritual battles will be fought in the home. Knowing that Gideon is still afraid, God assigns him a task right at home to show him that He will see him through. We must always recognize if we don’t practice our faith at home it is unlikely that we will practice it anywhere else.

The preparation for the battle (6:33–7:18).

The focus of this entire passage is found in this section in which the theme of deliverance is momentarily suspended to allow for another development. The primary matter in the Gideon narrative is not the deliverance itself but rather something more personal, namely, Gideon’s struggle to believe God’s promise. Before Gideon believes God’s promise, he asks for reassurance. What is troubling about this is three times prior the angel said, “You are the man” (6:12–16). Then Gideon asks for and receives a miraculous sign that he is the one (6:17–21). After all that, he is still unsure. “Lord, I know what you want me to do, but I still have my doubts. I’m insecure. I feel inferior. I don’t feel up to the task.” So, Gideon does the unthinkable, he “fleeces” the Lord not once, but twice.

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In 6:36-40 the narrator records an unusual episode. Gideon said to God, *“If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If*

there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.”³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.”⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

Obviously, this account is not the ideal. Like Gideon, when you know God’s will, you are to do it. Period. End of discussion. It is a weak form of Christianity that says to the Almighty, “You must meet my conditions before I will do your will.” A better way to discern God’s will is to say “I will” to God. In 2 Cor 5:7 Paul writes, “We live by faith, not by sight.” You can say it another way: “We walk by faith, not by fleeces.”

In 7:1–8 we move into battle preparations.

Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh.² The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, ‘My own strength has saved me.’³ Now announce to the army, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

⁴ But the LORD said to Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go; but if I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”

⁵ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, “Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink.”⁶ Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

What an astounding account! This is one of the more inspiring (and potentially frightening) accounts in the Bible. God uses some amazing odds to teach Gideon to believe His promises and move from fear to faith. In 8:10, we discover that there are 135,000 Midianite troops vs. 32,000 Israelite troops (7:3). This amounts to four Midianite troops for every one Israelite soldier. I don’t know about you, but I don’t like those odds. But God shrinks the odds further. Gideon has to say, “If anyone is afraid, you can go home.” The army shrunk by 2/3—from 32,000 to 10,000. This means there are thirteen Midianite troops for every one Israelite soldier. But God isn’t done leveling the playing field. In one last seemingly sadistic cut, God shrinks the army from 10,000 to 300.

⁷ The LORD said to Gideon, “With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home.”⁸ So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites home but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Gideon and his army are now outnumbered 450 to 1. Whoa! This seems outrageous and sublime. Nevertheless, now it is clear that if Israel wins, the battle really is the Lord’s. As Zech 4:6 says, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.” God wants there to be no doubt that He fights for Israel and He wins her battles.

After all the false starts of the previous chapter, Gideon is finally ready to confront the Midianites—or at least mostly ready.

But God knew Gideon. He knew all his weaknesses and his hesitation, so he adds these words in 7:10–11a: If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah¹¹ and

listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.” So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp.

Is our God a God of grace? Do you believe it? The story continues in 7:11b–14: *“So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp. Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, ‘Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.’ His friend replied, ‘This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.’”*

This is remarkable...God speaks through a Midianite soldier! What are the odds of this? Two enemies of Israel are discussing a relevant matter that the Lord allows Gideon to eavesdrop on. God Himself orchestrates the dream, the interpretation, and the conversation. Once again, God’s power and sovereignty are clearly evident.

The key to the Gideon narrative and the entire Book of Judges is found in 7:15–18: “When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. [Gideon doesn’t wait to get back to the camp where he will be safe and sound. He immediately prostrates himself and worships the one true God.] He returned to the camp of Israel and said, ‘Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.’ [The “valiant warrior” FINALLY lives up to his name.]

He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. He said to them, *‘Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”* Gideon and his men moved forward in faith because they were bent on fulfilling God’s promise. **This is a powerful reminder that you cannot be too small for God to use, but you can be too big. If you want the credit for what God is doing, God will not use you. He says that He alone is Lord and there is no other and that He will not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8).**

The defeat of the Midianite army (7:19–8:21). Gideon and Israel storm the Midianite camp in the middle of the night. They blow trumpets, smash pitchers, and shout, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” (7:20–21). Then something amazing happens: In all of the commotion of the attack “the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army” (7:22). In other words, God turns the Midianites against themselves and they kill one another.

Israel’s obedience results in God fighting their enemies for them! In 7:25, there is an obscure phrase that ties everything together for us: “...they [Gideon and Israel] killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb.” This refers back to the start of the Gideon narrative (6:11) when the angel of the Lord visits the frightened Gideon while he is threshing wheat in a winepress, but it ends with Gideon executing the enemy prince at a winepress. What a pilgrimage for Gideon. Although he started slow he matures in his faith, slowly but surely. We must remember that God is patient with us in our spiritual growth. He permits Gideon to take baby steps and bears with him through it all.

The apostle Paul likely has Gideon’s military conquest in mind when he pens 2 Cor 4:6–7: “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure [the gospel] in earthen vessels [clay pots], so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”

In the battle against the Midianites, the Israelites broke their jars so that the light can shine as they ransack the camp. Similarly, you and I are clay pots that are fragile, imperfect, and weak. Yet, we contain the treasure of Jesus Christ in our clay pots. At our best, we are no more than clay pots. But when we are broken the light of God shines out of our weakness. Today, acknowledge your weakness and allow God to shine in and through you. When you believe that God is your first, last, and only option, you are right where God wants you to be. Brokenness precedes victory. In your doubt, weakness, and faithlessness, will you believe God's promises and move from fear to faith? If so, God will accomplish His purposes in and through your life.