

God Uses Cracked Pots

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[0:00] God's back. In prepping for this morning, must be proficient in leading large groups of fighting men and skilled in asymmetrical warfare.

No experience needed. Selected candidate will not be doing any work. Candidate interviews will take place at a time and place determined by the employer.

A couple of things just to point out. First of all, asymmetrical warfare. Symmetrical warfare is where, like in the Civil War, the Confederates would line up against the Union and they would shoot at each other.

That was symmetrical warfare. Whoever had more bullets or more guns or more people generally won. Asymmetrical warfare is something that's just totally different than a normal way of fighting. Something that you would not contemplate normally. during war. And now you're going, what is this all about? This isn't an actual help wanted ad.

[1:34] This was AI generated. Actual intelligence. And I put this together. My wife said, wait a minute.

It says no experience needed. How can that be? You want somebody who's skilled in all those things, but no experience necessary.

Well, who are we talking about? Gideon. Gideon is one of the judges in the book of Judges.

And what I find when I look into that book is that Gideon is awfully similar to me and probably to you in how he responds to God's call and how he responds to direction given to him.

However, Gideon is also in the hall of fame of faith. You don't get there by being just a guy who just shows up.

[2:51] There is reason for people to be mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11. And the writer of Hebrews says, and what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Those last two lines, made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. That is what Gideon did.

Judges, the entire book of Judges is not a happy book. So if you remember, and this is something somebody speaking on a Sunday morning never wants to say.

If you remember, I preached on Joshua several weeks ago. You probably don't remember that.

That's okay. Joshua leading the nation of Israel into the promised land.

And the book of Joshua is about victory. Woo-hoo! They make it to the promised land. The land is divided up. Things are wonderful.

[4:23] Now we come to the Judges, the book of Judges. The book of Judges is not a book of victory. The book of Judges is about defeat.

Not militarily necessarily, but more importantly, spiritual defeat and how the nation of Israel turns from God.

So even on our study this morning, we're going to look at Joshua and we're going to see some wonderful things that God did through Joshua, or excuse me, through Gideon.

He did wonderful things through Joshua, but we're going to look at Gideon. Did wonderful things through him, but spoiler alert, it doesn't have a happy ending.

We're going to be looking at Judges chapter 6 and 7. If you, you don't need to turn there just yet, but 6 and 7 are kind of the good part of the story.

[5:29] Chapter 8, it goes back and it's the start of the end of, or the beginning of what's called the Judges cycle.

In Judges, there is this progression where the nation of Israel, well, can you see that?

That's tough. Okay. Israel disobeys God and they're oppressed. God is trying to get their attention. Israel cries out for help to God and God raises up a deliverer. In our case this morning, Gideon.

Gideon delivers Israel, the judge, in any of the sequences throughout Judges, delivers Israel.

Israel enjoys a time of prosperity. Spoiler alert, they go right back to disobeying God and that cycle just continues and continues and continues.

[6:45] Some may, some may even look at it instead of kind of rolling forward as spiraling down. Whatever it is, it is not a good thing.

Another way to look at it, a simpler way to look at it is Israel sins, Israel suffered, Israel cried out for help, excuse me, supplication to God and God provided salvation.

So sin, suffering, supplication, salvation. And again, the cycle. I like this one because there's a couple of lessons here and this is not the end of the sermon.

But there's a couple of lessons here. One, suffering always follows sin. I look at the back, the banner back here.

Don't believe the lie, sin always hurts. Suffering will always follow sin. Sin may feel really good. I was reading an article earlier this week about why we sin and it can feel good at times.

[8:07] But it always hurts and it always eventually ends up in suffering. also for Israel when they would cry out to God in their suffering and change their attitude salvation always followed provided by God.

So sin, suffering and supplication salvation. Those things one naturally follows the other. So now let's take a look at Judges chapter 6 and I want to read the narrative Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges.

So just to help you find that. Chapter 6 keep in mind let's see if I can go back I do this at great risk keep in mind this cycle and you will see as we read how this plays out at least the start of this.

Starting in verse 1 of chapter 6 the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years and the hand of Midian overpowered Israel and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds for whenever the Israelites planted crops the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them they would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land as far as Gaza and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey for they would come up with their livestock and their tents and they would come like locusts in number both they and their camels could not be counted so that they laid waste the land as they came in and Israel was brought very low because of

Midian and the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord on account of the Midianites the Lord sent a prophet to the people of Israel and he said to them thus says the Lord the God of Israel I led you up from Egypt and out of the house of slavery and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you and drove them out before you and gave you their land and I said to you I am the Lord your God you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell but you have not obeyed my voice now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth or oak at Ophrah which belonged to Joash the Abizarite while his son

[11:34] Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press to hide it from the Midianites and the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him the Lord is with you oh mighty man of valor and Gideon said to him please sir if the Lord is with us why then has all this happened to us and where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us saying did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt but now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian and the Lord turned to him and said go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian do not I send you and he said to him please Lord how can I save Israel behold my clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house and the Lord said to him but

I will be with you and you shall strike the Midianites as one man and he said to him if now I have found favor in your eyes then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you and the angel of the Lord said I will stay till you return so here is just a great introduction to Gideon to his situation and

the person coming to him it says that the angel of the Lord if you read on in this narrative later on Gideon is terribly afraid that he will die why because he looked at the pre incarnate Christ Jesus Christ the son of God was that angel who came and visited him and Gideon was afraid that because he had seen God he would die he did not see God the father he saw God the son so we see the second person of the trinity alive and well in this story and what is interesting is here's Gideon and he is literally in the wine press wine presses are at the bottom of vineyards they carry the heavy grapes down they drop them they stomp them whatever they do crush the grapes and the juice flows out and they have a way of catching that Gideon is working in that wine press he's not up on the hill where you normally thrash grain by throwing it in the air and the wind takes the chaff and the heavier grain falls out and it's a fairly efficient system but it's also visible for miles around because now you have this chaff flying in the wind and the Midianites take all their crops then so here is Gideon in that wine press smacking barley or wheat or whatever the grain was trying to get something out and he is probably covered with the dust that is coming up from that work that he's doing he's doing it because he's so afraid of Midian and what they would do to him if they found him and the angel of the Lord says the Lord is with you oh mighty man of valor and I'm pretty sure at that moment Gideon did not feel like a mighty man of valor but God has a sense of humor God uses the weak and the willing you see in this encounter Gideon realizes fairly quickly who he is talking to and he also answers in a way that very certainly I would answer if God was standing before me saying I have a job for you in fact I can tell you from experience this is my answer why me why not someone else Lord my wife can attest to that Gideon does the same thing he says in oh my he says in verse 15 please

[17 : 25] Lord how can I save Israel behold my clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house indicating very probably Gideon is like the baby of the family not a first born son who would normally be thought of as being one in leadership position the other thing that we find a little later in the story it's also possible it's also possible that Gideon worshipped Baal and the reason I say that is we know that Gideon's father did worship Baal so Gideon is desperately trying to get out of this while at the same time he's having the realization that I am talking to the son of God here and through that God's answer was I will be with you I will be with you Gideon even goes so far as to say well if if the Lord is with us then why has all this happened to us the Lord has forsaken us you notice the angel doesn't really address that but the truth of the matter was Israel had forsaken God and that's why they were in this cycle they had turned their back on God and were worshipping other gods so we realized pretty quick God chose probably the least likely character to carry out his purposes that we could ever imagine and yet like I said I look at this and go man he's so much like me he is so much like us questioning God why I'm not qualified I don't you know I'm just beating out some wheat here trying to get something to eat why me God knows his purposes and why he does things Gideon also is full of questions he says if things are so good then where is God why has God brought us to this point and again I go back to the answers were not direct answers to his questions because he was asking the wrong questions God answers him by saying I will be with you in verse 16 and the Lord said to him but I will be with you and you shall strike the Midianites as one man so he was saying to Gideon you're not going to do this on your own I will be with you I the son of God will be with you in this effort you have to listen when you question God which is okay be very careful be very careful to listen to how God answers that question and then finally God is very patient with his people Gideon Gideon wants to know for sure who he is talking to I stopped in chapter 6 at verse 18 please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you that present was a grain offering and a goat and he brought that out and it became an offering to the Lord

Lord God was very patient with Gideon and said yes I'll wait for you to do that so that you will know that is me the next thing that happens is God asks him commands him to take some pretty drastic action remember I said that Gideon's father worshipped Baal so there was a Baal altar I don't know what that looked like and an Asherah pole again as I understand it it is simply a tall pole but it is to worship the goddess Asherah both of those have very disgusting practices and that's what Israel was practicing at the time and God said I want you to go cut those down and offer a bowl of sacrifice on the wood that comes from those and

[22 : 52] Gideon says okay but I'll do it at night because I'm afraid I'll do it at night so good at Gideon in chapter 6 verse 27 so Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had told

him but because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day he did it by night there's a lesson there there's a lesson there see being courageous is not the absence of fear in fact if you talk to people about rock climbing or base jumping or any of those things how did you conquer your fear of doing that and they say no it's not conquering the fear it's just having the confidence in everything else to take that step of faith or to go out and do it so they still have the fear but they're being obedient to what they want to do that was the case for

Gideon he was obedient he got the job done but he clearly still had fear the other thing that we see now in this story is actually a really exciting thing where we see the work of the Holy Spirit in verse 33 of chapter 6 this is after he has taken down the altars he has done all of that the people of the town want to kill him his father comes to his aid says nope let Baal contend for himself if he's really a god which was an interesting thing and probably a worthwhile study all on its own but in verse 33 it says now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together and they crossed the

Jordan and encamped in the valley of Jezreel but the spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon and he sounded the trumpet and the Abiezrites were called to follow him and he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh and they too were called and he sent messengers to Asher Zebulun and Naphtali and they went up to meet all of those are tribes of Israel but the interesting thing is it says that the spirit of God clothed him it was not something that Caleb did he was passive in this it was an active action by the Holy Spirit to clothe to come around Gideon and use him for his purposes so now we see the third person of the trinity active in this story and throughout we see the first person God the father active in the life of Israel well so now Gideon has performed marvelous things and he's been clothed with the Holy Spirit and what does he do he this this is just so good he has he has progressed on this timeline and yet I may be too old for some of you when I say this the TV show Columbo Columbo was a detective and he would go and interview somebody and he would go okay okay just one more thing just one more thing and he would ask a very pointed question turn away and go just one more thing that's what we find

Gideon doing here it's the same kind of thing Gideon now has been called of God he was consecrated when he offered that sacrifice in front of the angel of the Lord he has been cloaked with the Holy Spirit covered and he's he's got that power he's sent the trumpet call and all these different tribes answer the call and Gideon says just one more thing Lord just one more thing just so I know it's you if you will save Israel by my hand in verse 36 of chapter 6 as you have said behold I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor if there is a dew on the fleece alone and it is dry on all the ground then I shall know that you will save

[28:26] Israel by my hand as you have said and it was so did Gideon say okay I'm on board no Gideon questions again just one more thing God please please don't be upset Gideon said to God let not your anger burn against me let me speak just once more please let me test just once more with the fleece please let it be dry on the fleece only and on ground let there be dew and God did so that night and it was dry on the fleece only and all the ground there was dew again now you would think okay Gideon got this now now he is ready to roll and now comes a really interesting part of the story when he sent out that call to

Israel 32 thousand fighting men arrived 32 thousand now keep in mind we're talking about numbering or not being able to number all the Midianites it says they were like sand on the seashore if you've been to Hawaii or you've been to Florida or someplace where there's dry sand think about a handful of sand try counting all those well the whole seashore is what the word says it was beyond counting that's what the 32 thousand men were looking at like locusts they were everywhere and they could not be defeated in their mind and so 32 thousand men and God says to Gideon in chapter 7 verse 4 excuse me in verse 2 the

Lord said to Gideon the people with you the 32 thousand are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand lest Israel boast over me saying my own hand has saved me now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people saying whoever is fearful and trembling let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead 22 thousand people returned and 10 thousand remained I wonder about those 10 thousand were they not paying attention they were given the opportunity to leave but God says the people are still too many 10 thousand men take them down to the water and I will test them for you there and any one of whom

I say to you this one shall go with you shall go with you and anyone to of whom I say to you this one shall not go with you shall not go so he brought them the people down to the water and the Lord

said to Gideon!

who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps you shall sit by himself likewise everyone who kneels down to drink and the number of those who lapped putting their hands to their mouth was 300 but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water and the Lord said to Gideon with the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites to your hand so I can tell you growing up in Sunday school this story was about these warriors who were ready to fight they were so ready to fight that when they knelt down they drank the water like this looking for an attacking force they were the special forces of Gideon's time and the others paid no heed to that and put their head in the water and drank and that's a story we would all like to believe but

[33:18] I'm not sure that's true because look at how this story has developed God came to Gideon as he's threshing wheat and said mighty man of valor God's with you and he is covered in dust and he's scared and throughout the narrative then from that point forward Gideon wants assurances of what he is to do and who he's talking to and throughout God says I'm with you with these now 300 men that are left I am of the belief that God chose probably the 300 weakest men out of that collection that was 32,000 at one time that they weren't mighty warriors that they weren't skilled at battle they were willing but they weren't known for their fighting necessarily and so

Gideon has one more chance to go to battle against Midian and win the day and in chapter 7 again God gives him now God is totally recognizing who Gideon is he's afraid he's afraid of what's going to happen and in verse 9 chapter 7 that same night the Lord said to him arise go down against the camp that's the Midianites for I have given it into your hand but Gideon if you are afraid to go down go down to the camp with Purah your servant and you shall hear what they say and afterward your hand shall be strengthened to go down against the camp then he went down with

Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp and the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the east lay along the valley like locusts in abundance their camels were without number as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance when Gideon came behold a man was telling a dream to his comrade and he said behold I dreamed a dream and behold a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned upside down so that the tent lay flat and his comrade answered this is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash the man of Israel God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp as soon as

Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation he worshipped God had once more provided for Gideon a very clear statement of what he was to do and how he would be with him now we said earlier that Midian and the Amalekites would come into the land and they would take their food and their livestock they also took their weapons Israel had no weapons with which to fight it's one way that that an opponent like that make sure that you can't fight back and in this case we find asymmetrical war so we've already seen that he's reduced that fighting force you would expect 32,000 wouldn't be enough

God said it's too many it's still too many and gets it down to 300 Gideon was afraid and yet God gave him the answer that he needed to strengthen his hand and Gideon worshipped And now is the best part and this is the best part and you guys back there you kids I used to tell this story at cubbies and I would go to the local sky nursery and I would find a clay pot and then I would take a lantern and I would turn the lantern on and I would cover the little hole in the bottom and hold that and then I would have a trumpet plastic trumpet and I would walk in and I would tell this story and the story is that Gideon and his 300 men surround the camp of

[38:39] Midian they are on the hillsides the camp is in the valley Gideon breaks the pot the torch underneath it is now seen they blow trumpets and it causes chaos in the camp when I would break that clay pot in cubbies every cubby in there would go you broke something in church and you did it intentionally but that's that's what God used here God used 300 men with trumpets torches and pots pots to win the day what a great story what a great story how God won the day here there are there are some real takeaways in this story for us let me just say

God doesn't work this way with us we will not have an encounter where the angel of of the Lord comes and sits before us and calls us to a task we will not have the Holy Spirit surrounding us we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit now so there are some very clear differences and yet there are some very deep truths contained here remember I talked about God the Son God the Holy Spirit and God the Father those same three are the same today as they were when Gideon encountered them they never never change Deuteronomy!

You don't have to turn here Deuteronomy chapter 31 where Moses is giving Joshua instructions he says it is the Lord who goes before you he will be with you he will not leave you or forsake you that promise is true for us today he will never leave you he will never forsake you that is the same God that Gideon encountered also a lesson here if we would have been looking at the want ad that I showed at the beginning I can virtually tell you we would not have chosen Gideon he was not the guy that we would have chosen God chose because he saw something in Gideon that man does not see God listens to our cries for help at the start of this story it says that Midian oppressed!

Israel for seven weeks and oh seven months no seven years seven years that's important but more important it wasn't until seven years had gone by that they cried out for help you see as humans we always look at a problem and go how can I fix this problem what is it in my skills my ability my knowledge my experience will help me get through this and then when all of those things are exhausted we cry out to God we go to prayer prayer should be the first thing that is on our mind when we encounter problems God is very patient with us

[43:03] God was extremely patient with Gideon he let him question he knew he was fearful he knew he wasn't all that and a bag of chips and yet he still used him he was so patient with him he is patient with you and me sometimes we think in fact I've heard this I've done something that has God has now turned his back on me no God will never leave you he will never forsake you he is an extremely patient God that said in this story God watched Israel turn their back on him and he gave them into the hand of

Midian very patient but there came a point when he gave them into their hand into Midian's hands God finds ways to use weak vessels 2 Corinthians chapter 4 where it's talking about the gospel in verse 7 it says but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us it's not our qualifications it's not our experience it's not our knowledge it's God he wants to use us we are really jars of clay cracked pots he can use us

God does the work here's one I think I struggle with the most it's so easy to step in and get God's work done and not include God but to simply pray seek his face and listen to his answer and remember it's God that's going to do the work with Gideon it became abundantly clear from the time that he called that weak vessel beating out wheat in a wine press to the time that they defeated the Midianites and the Amalekites set them on the run and won the day it was not Gideon it was not the 300 it was not 32 thousand it was God who did the work we forget who really is doing that work and also to that

I would say that not only do we forget it but we like to take credit remember in Judges God said there's too many and there's too many because if that many go to war you'll take credit for defeating the Midianites and I won't get the credit 1 Corinthians chapter 1 starting in verse 26 it says for consider your calling brothers not many of you were wise according to worldly standards not many were powerful not many were of noble birth but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong

God chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God and because of him you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God righteousness and sanctification and redemption so that as it is written let the one who boasts boast!

[47:52] in the Lord! It's God who does the work it's God who should get the glory and earlier I said when we cry out to God we have to be listening for the answer but we also have to be ready and that's one thing that Gideon was fearful while unsure while asking for more confirmation he was still ready he was still ready be ready to cry out to God be ready to be used of God be ready to see the hand of God in what you do and what we do as a body and be ready to worship and acknowledge his person and his works that's my encouragement for you today give God the credit but be ready to be used by him that's close!

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