

A Test and Assurance for Gideon

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] all this morning to our morning service and thank you for joining us if you're joining us online as well we wish you God's blessing as we worship him together. There are quite a number of things on the bulletin sheet today as you can see. I'm just going to pick out one or two that I want to highlight and just leave you to read through the rest for yourselves. You can see the monthly prayer meeting tomorrow evening. I want to give a special focus in this prayer meeting to the situation in Ukraine. It's alarming to see how things have developed there so quickly and with such devastation and we want to give as much time as possible to pray about the situation and to seek the Lord's intervention, the Lord's blessing, the Lord's guidance for those who are immediately involved especially. So we're encouraging everyone to attend. It's on Zoom using the usual Monday monthly prayer meeting, Zoom ID and passcode. If you don't have that just get in touch with Lizzie and she will give you the passcode. But we are encouraging good attendance just so that we can focus our minds prayerfully upon this situation in our troubled world.

The congregational meeting as you can see has been appointed by the Kirk Session. That's to take place on Wednesday the 16th of March and that'll be at 7.30 and that's to elect a minister to fill the vacancy in the assistantship. Again that meeting will be held over Zoom just to try and maximise attendance because one of the things that will be asked of us when we come to the presbytery to ask for them to moderate in a call will be how many attended and what sort of support there is for it. So again it's important that there's a good attendance for that Zoom meeting.

So that'll be on the 16th of March at 7.30. Again the Wednesday meeting details apply to this meeting as well. The usual Wednesday meetings for Zoom you can use these and if you don't have these again just contact Lucy or Marianne for these details. You can see the detail there about Blytheswood's Ukraine emergency appeal. The church, the Free Church are encouraged centrally, they're encouraging congregations and individually to give through Blytheswood because they have wide experience of emergency appeals especially in Eastern Europe. So we're encouraged to channel our donations if you want to donate to that through Blytheswood. You can do that online of course but anyone who wishes to put an envelope in the plate if you can't do it online please just leave an envelope in the collection plate and mark it clearly Ukraine appeal and if you are paying by cheque make the cheque payable to Stornoway Free Church and as in the past the treasurer will translate that into the finance necessary for the appeal. Slavic Gospel Association as well. Many representatives of Slavic

Gospel Association have been visitors to the island over the years and we've had them ourselves here and they are keen to establish a broader prayer base. They also have of course many of their representatives working in Ukraine and we are asking for prayer as well for them and for the situation in Ukraine too. So please read through the details there. There's a Slavic Gospel Association prayer time on the first Saturday of each month. Details for the login are actually given there so just please follow that through for yourselves. Now on the back page let me just go through these as well before we start the worship. Stornoway Street pastors are doing an amazingly important work and they are looking for new street pastors to take on new ones this year. If you're interested in that and I would encourage anyone to who is actually thinking of this just to pray about it and to offer yourself if you think it's something you would want to do. For more information if you can just contact Janice Brand in order to obtain an application form for that. Training is going to begin later this year and the forms need to be in by the first of May. So again it's an important work and the last meeting we had of the committee we were told that there is an increase in problems amongst our young people especially involving drugs more so than alcohol which is a concern for us all of course. Street pastors are there to try and make sure people are safe as they go about the streets at the weekends so they're doing an important work in that respect as well and of course they have contact with people and are able to speak to them as they as they meet them on the streets. And then there are a number of uh intimations there regarding the WFM. Please just go through these. I'm not going to go through them all.

Tuesday 22nd of March we're planning to have a meeting via Zoom. Speakers are going to be Kathleen McSween and Catherine Lamont from a new group. Their mission is to provide a safe space in Edinburgh. So please just read through the rest of these. There are many of them are just addresses many of them just details for dates that you can put in your diaries and you can actually just read through these yourselves. Local meetings plus main committee meetings nationally as well. So thank you for your patience with that.

[5 : 45] Let's begin our worship now we're singing today firstly from Psalm 18. Psalm number 18. That's in the Sing Psalms version. Page 19 if you're using the books. I love you Lord you are my strength. A fortress is the Lord to me. My rock and my deliverer for refuge to my God I flee. Psalm 18 verses 1 to 6. I love you Lord you are my strength.

Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord.
Thank you Lord.

Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord.

Phonation of ■■■. Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord.

Oop Mow. He burns my foes to dry. The courts of death entangled me, His crush shall lift me like a wind, And circle by the stairs of death, I face the terrors of the king.

[8 : 04] When I distress, I call on God, I cry not to the Lord for aid, He from His temple heard my voice, He listened to the fear I made.

Let's now join together as we call upon the Lord in prayer. Let's pray. Our gracious and mighty God, we give thanks for the encouragement you give us to pray, when from your word we can sing these words of praise, He stole the Lord's name because He hears our prayers, because He gives us an answer in His own way and time, and because we are assured, O Lord, that your ear is ever open to the cry of your people.

And we thank you that we can cry to you out of all our circumstances. The psalmist was describing as we have been singing, O Lord, his own circumstances of destruction and death surrounding him, and of the distress that he knew within his own soul.

And yet that he could cry out to you and you heard him, and he got to his encouragement from the fact that God was there for him. We thank you today that that is true for ourselves, and for everyone else in our world who would seek to cry out to you.

Lord, our God, we thank you for this. We thank you that you have made yourself available to us. You need not have done so, for we rebelled against you, and you rightly dealt with us accordingly.

[10 : 05] But you made a way of access, O Lord, into your presence for us, through your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And you did so through sending him into this world and his coming willingly to give himself to be a ransom for his life.

To bear in himself the sufferings that were unto death, the death that we deserve to die. Lord, we thank you today for the victory and the assurance that we find in him, and for the way that in our troubled world we are led as your people to contemplate all that you have done for your people in him.

And we thank you today that we worship you on the basis of what he has done. And on the ground of your mercy, once again we can come and call upon you and seek your blessing.

We thank you today, Lord, for our life as a congregation. We thank you that you bring people together to form a congregation for yourself in this world. And we thank you for all the congregations of your people throughout this whole world today.

And congregations like our own who meet in similar circumstances, who can give you thanks as we do for the peace and the freedom that we enjoy. And congregations too, Lord, that meet in very different and opposite situations to ours.

[11 : 28] Congregations that today are scattered that cannot meet together as they used to. We think especially, Lord, today of Ukraine, for it is always before our minds in these days.

We pray, Lord, for congregations that have been scattered, even though small groups may still remain to meet. And we give thanks, Lord, that they are still concerned to worship you even in these circumstances.

When we find videos being set up of your people as they gather together, even in subway stations and underground and in basements.

Yet, nevertheless, their desire is, Lord, to worship you, even in the midst of the devastation that is being wrought upon their cities and their land.

And, O Lord, we give thanks that today we can remember them before you. And we do so seeking that you would bless them. We ask, Lord, that you would in mercy turn your face towards them and towards those who have left their country and have sought places of safety in other neighboring countries.

[12 : 37] O Lord, what can we say when we see such terrible destruction and such powers of evil ranged against these people? And our concern, Lord, is that you would bring an end to the war, to the terror, to the destruction, to the loss of life.

And you have also asked us, Lord, and commanded us indeed to pray against evil, and to pray that your kingdom come, that evil be dealt with in such a way that establishes righteousness in its place.

We pray today, Lord, against evil. We pray against Putin and his helpers, as they have brought such destruction upon these people. O Lord, we pray that in your own way and as you see fit, that you would remove him from power, that you would bring to an end that destructive force that is now unleashed on the people of Ukraine.

And we pray that you would help those people of Ukraine to continue to resist and to continue, O Lord, to look to you. For we know that many of them do. And we ask that you would continue to encourage them, even as they see so much of their buildings being destroyed, so much of their resources being cut off.

And Lord, we ask that you would bless the countries in the world, too, that receive them. We know that some of them, too, have so few resources. We think especially, Lord, of Moldova, with whom we as a church have so many connections.

[14 : 09] We pray for that country and for your church there. And we pray that you would give them, Lord, the necessary resources as they seek to help those who come to them from Ukraine.

Remember them, Lord, we pray in your great mercy. And extend to them the blessings of your covenant. And help us, we pray, as we would seek to, in some way, materially especially bring relief to them.

Help us to continue to do so and to do so even more fully and more gladly than before. Lord, we commend this whole terrible situation to you.

And the knowledge that you are God, that you are sovereign over all these things, that you have a purpose. And Lord, when we cannot penetrate through to see the exact nature of your purpose in such things, Lord, that you, nevertheless, help us, too, to continue to trust in you and to continue to trust to your wisdom and to your power and to all that you have in your own resources as God.

Remember us here locally, we pray. And grant to us, O Lord, that we continue to serve you and to trust in you. We pray that you bless us in our situation as a congregation.

[15 : 24] We give thanks for the way that you have enabled us once again to increase our numbers as we come to worship you. We pray today for all those things that were mentioned in our bulletin sheet today.

We pray, Lord, as we read through these and as we will do so afterwards, help us to carry them forward into our prayers. And we ask that you bless the street pastors and their work.

We pray that you bless them as they seek further help and new street pastors to be established. We pray that you will bless those of our own number here and those of help from other congregations, Lord, who go out as street pastors week by week.

We commend them to you and pray for their safety. We pray that you would bless their testimony. We pray, O Lord, that many will come to benefit spiritually but also physically and mentally from the support that street pastors give.

We ask that you bless also, Lord, those who are ill today. We pray for those of our number who can't be with us for that reason, at home or in hospital, for those recovering from surgical procedures, for those who know of illness mentally as well.

[16 : 36] O Lord, bless them all, we pray. Bless them with your own presence and bless them in a way that would provide for them at this time. And especially spiritually uphold them in spirit, we pray.

We pray for those who have lost employment and for those, Lord, who find difficulty thereby in terms of providing for their families. We ask that you would bless them and help them to continue to trust in you, to look to you.

Help us to remember them too, Lord, in every way we can practically as well as in our spiritual way of praying for them. Remember them, Lord, we pray, and continue to provide for them abundantly as families.

Remember, too, those who mourn the passing of loved ones. We know that there are many, Lord, who can look back over the past two years or even more and know that grief has struck them in their own hearts and their families.

We pray for them today and ask that you would bless them, Lord, whether they are at services here or elsewhere or elsewhere. We pray, Lord, that your blessing will reach them.

[17 : 44] And we ask that you would continue to watch over them as they seek to recover from grief and from sorrow. And we ask, oh God, that you would continue to bless us now throughout this day.

As we pray to you now, help us to continue to do so even as we turn to other aspects of our worship. Lord, help us to sing with prayer in our hearts as well as praise.

Help us to read and to declare your word and to hear your word, praying that it will be blessed to us and praying that it will indeed lead us further into the knowledge of your truth and of your will.

Bless us then, we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's read God's word as we find it now in the book of Judges. The book of the Judges in chapter 7.

I'm going to read verses 1 to 18. Judges chapter 7, it's page 248 in the pulpit Bible, so it will be around that in your pew Bibles as well.

[18 : 54] So chapter 7 of the book of Judges. Then Jerubal, that is Gideon, and all the people who were with him, rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod.

And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh in the valley. The Lord said to Gideon, the people with you 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.

Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained. And the Lord said to Gideon, the people are still too many. 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 any one of whom I say to you, this one shall not go with you, shall not go.

[19 : 59] So he brought the people down to the water, and the Lord said to Gideon, everyone 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 mouths, were 300 men. 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 into your hand, and let all the others go, every man to his home.

So the people took provisions in their hands and their trumpets, and he sent all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent. But retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

The same night the Lord said to him, Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Pura your servant, and you shall hear what they say.

[21 : 02] And afterwards your hand shall be strengthened to go down against the camp. Then he went down with Pura 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.

And 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 it 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, a man of Israel. God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp. And as soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped.

And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, Arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars with torches inside the jars.

[22 : 19] And he said to them, Look at me and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, For the Lord and for Gideon." And so on down through to the end of the chapter, recording that incident for us.

May the Lord bless his word to us again today. Let's again read to sing God's praises in Psalm 44. Psalm number 44, that's in the Scottish Psalter, page 265.

Singing verses 1 to 6. O God, we with our ears have heard, our fathers have us told. What works thou in their days had done, even in the days of old.

Thy hand did drive the heathen out, and plant them in their place. Thou didst afflict the nations, but them thou didst increase. Psalm 44, verses 1 to 6.

O God, we with our ears have heard. Our fathers have us told. O God, we with our ears have heard, our fathers have us told.

[23 : 48] What works thou in their days have heard, our fathers have heard, our fathers have heard. Our fathers have heard, our fathers have heard, our fathers have heard, our fathers have heard.

In their face, The wrists feed nation, The men but 400 feet, On either rock, O perspore the land, nor did the land and sea, but by white hand and brown genius, for thou let them favor give.

The march by King, for King, O Lord, deliver us this command.

Through thee we shall wish on our hold, and do against us stand.

[25 : 45] With truth thy name shall dread and lose, that risk against us stand.

For in my hope I shall not trust, nor shall my sword be saved.

Amen. Now will you turn with me please to that passage we read in Judges chapter 7. I want to look at the passage we have there, verses 1 to 18, rather than any verse in particular.

And just to see this incident in the life of Gideon, one of the men raised up to be a saviour of Israel at that time when they were contending with the Midianites.

Now Gideon learned from various incidents in his life, not least the incident in the previous chapter, that famous incident of the fleece, where in a mysterious way God had answered Gideon's request.

[27 : 05] First of all, by putting the fleece on the ground, and the fleece actually being on, the dew being on the fleece alone, and the ground around it being dry.

And then the opposite, the ground around it being dry, and the fleece actually, the ground around it being wet, and the fleece being dry. What was that for? A lot of people have used that passage to really find some way of saying that Gideon was, in a sense, testing God.

Was that what he was doing? Or does this fit into the prayer experiences of God's people? Well, there's so much you could say, really, about it. So much you could spend time looking at the various ways in which Gideon did this.

Was he right in doing this? Was he right in asking God to do this, and then to change it around to the opposite? Was this right of Gideon? Was it a sign of failure on Gideon's own part?

I think that really brings us away from the main purpose of that particular incident. And what God was teaching Gideon, and what Gideon came to learn, was that whatever the conditions God brings about, God is able to deal with.

[28 : 19] In other words, if the fleece being wet represents one thing, and the fleece being dry represents something else, they're different conditions. They're opposites, really. God is telling Gideon, it doesn't matter what circumstances you're in.

Even if they're very different, if they're very opposite to the circumstances you had yesterday, I can deal with it, God is saying. That's important for your life and for my life as well.

And Gideon carried this with him into this chapter 7, where we read that he's there taking on the Midianites with 300 men. It doesn't matter. The circumstances have changed.

He set out with 32,000 men. And God said to him, that's too many. I'm going to change it so that instead of 32,000, you'll have 300. And you'll have to take on the Midianites with the 300 rather than 32,000.

So this is really a test for Gideon, having seen what God did with the fleece, having carried that experience with him, having learned from that, that God is trustworthy, however our circumstances change in life, however much different today is from yesterday, however much different tomorrow may be from what it is today.

[29 : 34] God is God. God will still be the same. God will be as trustworthy today, irrespective of what he has brought about in his providence into our circumstances.

That's important to carry that with us too. And that's what Gideon carried with him, as we'll see. So let's see, first of all, how God tested Gideon here in this incident.

And secondly, we'll see how God assured Gideon of success. Because the two things go together. The testing of Gideon is accompanied by the assurance God gave him that he would indeed be successful in what God had given him to do or set him to do against the Midianites.

Now, Gideon's name was changed. In the previous chapter, we read that he was required by God to destroy the altar of Baal.

And his father had actually been in charge of the altar of Baal. And when Gideon was required to take his father's bull, you find chapter 6 there, verse 25, the Lord said to him, Take your father's bull and the second bull seven years old.

[30 : 46] Pull down the altar of Baal that your father has and cut down the asherah. That's the kind of pole that was used in the worship of Baal. Build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the stronghold there.

And then offer the second bull as a burnt offering with the wood of the asherah. And so Gideon took ten men, and this is what he did. And since that time, Gideon was renamed Jerubal.

Because you read through the chapter there in verse 32 of chapter 6, Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubal. That's to say, let Baal contend against him because he broke down his altar.

So this really was Gideon really in obedience to God coming into the open as the leader of the people against the worship of Baal, against the Midianites now, but against everything that stood against the worship of Israel and the God of Israel.

He had come into the open as on the side of God, and therefore he attracted opposition, as always is the case, to himself. Jerubal let Baal contend.

[31 : 54] Now we're not told who gave him the name. Was this the Midianites? Did they actually give him the name of Jerubal? Was it the people who had the Asherah, the people that were worshiping Baal at that altar?

Or was it, in fact, the people who still were true to God that gave him the name Jerubal? It means, let Baal contend. And if it came from the side of those who were worshiping Baal, then obviously what they were seeing was somebody who was standing up to the worship of Baal, standing up for those who were opposing God.

He was standing up for God. So they're really calling the forces of Baal, if you like, against this man. Or if you take it that it was those who were true to God that gave him the name Jerubal, then what it's really saying is, well, let Baal contend.

This man is chosen of God, and therefore he's guaranteed of success if God has chosen him. So let Baal contend. Bring it on, in other words. Whatever we say, it was this name that was given to him, just as an indication that here he was, God chosen him against the forces of Baal, and now he's going to be in conflict with them.

And so he comes here to face the Midianites. And reminds us that whenever we come to stand for God, this is, in fact, what happens.

[33 : 20] We expect opposition. We expect that those who stand for other ideologies than the Christian religion and Christian faith will actually show themselves to be against us.

And you have to expect that. It's there all the way through the Bible. It's there all the way through Christian experience. And it doesn't catch us, therefore, by surprise. But you see, at the beginning of chapter 7 there, let's get down to the chapter itself.

Jerubal, that is Gideon. It mentions it there, that it's Jerubal, that is Gideon. In other words, the writer is here saying to us, this is the man that went out to face the Midianites.

This man that's chosen by God, this Jerubal, this one who has attracted the opposition of the Baalite worshippers against himself because he is true to God. That's the man that went to face the Midianites.

The man who is now in God's hands a champion of obedience to God. But it's not just the change of name that you find mentioned in this context.

[34 : 25] There is, in chapter 7, a change in the numbers that accompany Gideon to the fight. What God emphasized there in verse 2 is important.

The Lord said to Gideon, The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, My own hand has saved me.

That was a perennial problem for the people of Israel. God had said to them before they ever went into the promised land, Be sure when you come and occupy the land, and enjoy the goodness of the land, that you don't think it's your own ability, it's your own strength, it's your own worthiness that's got this.

Remember, it's the Lord who's provided this for you. And here is the Lord again saying to Gideon, This is the tendency of the people. If I send them the 32,000 against the Midianites and they win, they're going to almost inevitably come to the conclusion, Well, we are the people.

We have it in ourselves. Look at how good we are. Look at our forces compared to those of the Midianites. Look at our strength. Look at what we can do. God is saying, I won't have that, because that's taking away from my name and from my glory and my praise.

[35 : 41] Lest they boast over me, saying, My own hand has saved me. And that's something that you find all the way through the Bible, because God always does the unlikely in terms of human wisdom, doesn't he?

That's why all the way through the Bible into the New Testament, you find that what the world sees as most unlikely, what the world sees as most unfitting, what the world sees as completely against what you would really expect by way of success, that's the way God works.

Who would have said salvation would come by way of an individual being crucified and put to death, but then rising again from the dead on the third day?

Who would have said, as Paul said, to the Corinthian church, that it's by people who are despised, people who are looked down on by those in great positions of authority, that God establishes His kingdom, and God pursues with His kingdom's construction.

Not many wise after the flesh. Not many that go by mere human philosophies or ideology. These are not the people that God actually uses as He changes them.

[37 : 05] It's those who are despised and those who are really counted as nothing. ordinary people like yourselves and myself. That's what God uses. That's what God uses to actually bring praise to His own name.

So that's why God was saying to Gideon, I'm going to reduce the numbers. There are too many for me. And so the first dismissal, and that's important in your own life too before we go on, it's important in my own life and your life as well, that we see that God's concern for us is always for our well-being.

For these people of Israel, despite all their rebelliousness and all their failures and all their ways that they had departed from God, even down through the years, God is still concerned for their well-being.

God is still concerned for their blessing, for their progress spiritually. And because of that, He knows that this is the best way to go about things.

And it will be so in your own life as well. Things that we wouldn't have chosen for ourselves, events and episodes, that we would rather not be in our experience.

[38 : 20] But God is saying to us, you can't measure my wisdom by your mind.

You have to leave it with me because I have my purpose. And because I have my purpose, I have your well-being in mind.

And because I have your well-being in mind, I know the best way to go about that, even if it seems to you that it's not the best way. And to me. That's really what God is set on, as far as His people are concerned.

What He's really demonstrating here is the need to depend upon God Himself. If they go out with a 32,000, God is saying, they're not likely to depend on me.

If I send them out with 300, it's much more likely they're going to say, Lord, what can we do with 300? Please help us. And so it is with your life and mine. It's dependence upon God.

[39 : 19] You know, if we don't come into situations being dependent on God, we're already defeated. We're already defeated if we try and manage by our own ingenuity or our own wisdom or in our own strength.

But when we come to depend upon God, when we come to continue with our dependence on God, then we are in a position of strength. The victory is inevitably going to follow it at some point.

Really, that's what God is demonstrating to Gideon here and to his band of 300. So the first dismissal there, you can see 22,000 of the people returned, leaving only 10,000.

You might say, well, that's a pretty poor start. Here is God saying, whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.

So immediately, 22,000 of the 32,000 turn and go back home. How would that, how would Gideon feel, how would you feel if you're in charge of a group that were going to take on the Midianites, far superior numbers?

[40 : 28] How would you feel when you said to them, look, if you're afraid, you better just go back home. Their 22,000 disappear. You'd feel disheartened, would you? You'd feel, well, how am I going to manage if 22,000 have gone home?

What kind of thing, what am I left with? How am I going to manage now that all these people have gone home? If they were afraid, if they didn't want to go into the fight, what am I left with?

See, Gideon is being tested as to his dependence upon God. He's being tested all the time about whether he thinks God himself is sufficient for his needs.

And so it goes on, and God gives him another test, and that results in the 300. You can see how, as we read through it, and only read through it again, all those who knelt down and drank the water, that way, again, God said to him, we don't want them.

Why was that? What was it that was shown by those 9,700 rather than 300 who took up the water and lapped it with their hands?

[41 : 37] Well, I think it's probably that God was indicating by that that those who actually took up the water by their hand and were lapping it from their hands, from their cupped hands, were still being watchful.

They were still able to see around them as to what was happening, and they were aware of any danger that came near. Whereas those who bent down and just lapped it up, they weren't aware of what was going on.

The enemy could come on them all at once, and they'd be caught out and surprised and defeated. And so he narrowed it down to 300.

Well, here's the question. Is Gideon still going to go ahead with 300? Instead of 32,000, you've got 300.

What are you going to do? How can you take on the massive forces of the Midianites ranged in the valley down below him? How are you going to take that on with 300?

[42 : 39] Well, because God is on his side. And it doesn't matter whether he's got hundreds or thousands or just one. If God is on his side, the victory is assured.

That's what God is assuring him of. That's what God comes to demonstrate. And, you know, verse 8 keeps things alive as the narrative continues. He sent all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men.

And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. And there was such a massive number in the camp of Midian that God is reminding us as we read this passage, Gideon was aware of this.

It wasn't as if Gideon didn't know the strength of the Midianites. When God was narrowing down the number of those who were going to fight them to 300, it wasn't as if Gideon was saying, well, I don't know how many are down there, but maybe we'll manage with the 300.

He knew they were vastly outnumbered even when he had the 32,000. And now he's just got the 300 and he sees the camp of Midian down below him. What's he going to do? Is he going to turn home as well and give up?

[43 : 45] Well, of course he's not because God is assuring him that victory is his. I have given the Midianites already, verse 9, I've given them into your hand.

And I couldn't but think about our brothers and sisters in Ukraine as I was going through this passage, preparing the sermon. Because that's really essentially what they're up against as well.

The latest message I had from one of my colleagues there in Ukraine was that he's left in Kiev. He wants to remain in Kiev. He wants to remain to be the pastor of however many want to stay with him in Kiev and minister to them.

His wife and his children have gone to the west, to Lviv, and that's where they are presently. So few.

So few in numbers compared to the masses of the Russian army are closing in. What are they going to do? Who are they going to put their trust in? What he keeps coming with are texts from the book of Psalms, especially.

[44 : 57] Our strength is in the name of the Lord. And if it was ever real to anyone, it's real to that man in Ukraine, in Kiev, who's actually facing this desperate situation.

What is he going to put his trust in? What is he and his church going to put their trust in? What is he and his people going to put their trust in? Where are they going to find their strength? How are they going to take on and continue to face the vast numbers that outnumber them and the resources that outnumber them in the Russian forces?

Well, as far as he's concerned, if the Lord is on their side, and he's convinced the Lord certainly cannot be on the side of evil, but if the Lord is on their side, whenever it will come, it will come that they will be victorious.

And I'm sure he would say even if Ukraine as a nation is wiped off the face of the map, which is what the forces of Putin seem to be intent on doing, the Lord is still in charge.

The Lord's people are still the Lord's people. Friends, we have to remember that's the situation that they're facing in Ukraine. Very similar, in essence, to what Gideon was facing here against the Midianites.

[46 : 22] And what God was testing him by was looking at the numbers that were left that were committed to actually serving the Lord. Vastly outnumbered, and yet, Gideon comes to face the test.

And we see, secondly, how God assured Gideon of success. Now, I'm not suggesting that I've actually put this together just by thinking about Ukraine. What I'm saying is that the situation in Ukraine inevitably made its way into my mind as I was going through this passage itself.

So I'm not saying I took this just because of the situation in Ukraine, but it does fit in in some ways with what Gideon is facing here. So God assured Gideon, first of all, by an amazing combination of things.

In verse 9, the same night, the Lord said, Arise, go down to the camp, for I have given it into your hand. You see, there's God saying, it's already yours. It doesn't matter if they're numbers. You're outnumbered.

Of course you are, but I have given it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Pura, your servant. Now, there's an amazing combination there, a combination of God saying to him, I have given this into your hand.

[47 : 37] I've given these. The victory is already yours. And then amazingly, God says, but if you're afraid, go down to the camp with Pura, your servant, and you will hear something that will strengthen you for the fight.

Now, for me today, and for you, that's an amazing combination, a hugely comforting combination of God assuring His people of victory, and at the same time saying to them, I understand if you're afraid.

I understand your fears. And because I understand your fears, I've provided assurance for you. And here is the way that you can get assurance. Go down to the camp with Pura, your servants.

You will hear something. I have arranged things so that you will come to be strengthened. What an amazing God we serve. God is saying, the victory is certain for Gideon, and yet God is at the same time saying, I understand you may be afraid.

And because you may be afraid, I'll come with you and I'll make provision against your fear as well. You see, when we trust in God, and even God comes to assure us that our victory is guaranteed in Christ, not necessarily victory in whatever circumstances we have in our daily life, but ultimate victory, victory in Christ, victory over sin, victory over death.

[49 : 13] God is assuring us that's absolutely safe. It's impregnable. It cannot actually be otherwise. But there's still much that makes us afraid.

There's still much that makes us afraid in facing ourselves even, and facing all that's at enmity with us in the world. And God's saying, I understand that.

I've given you a Bible. I've given you prayer. I've given you God's people with you. I've given you resources by which you'll be strengthened. Use the resources I've given you so that I'll feed strength into your soul.

You know, if you were going to come to a huge chasm or a gorge, deep gorge with a roaring stream or river underneath you, and there's a rope bridge across that gorge, and somebody comes and says, I've actually built this bridge.

I'm an expert bridge builder. And I've gone across this to test it myself, and I've come back, and I can guarantee you it's absolutely safe. And if you knew that person and knew that he was indeed an expert bridge builder who had built this rope bridge, you would say, well, that's almost certainly going to stand the test of anybody walking over it.

[50 : 34] He's been over it himself. He's come back, and he's assuring me it's safe. So he says, on you go. You can easily and safely make it to the other side.

Well, you would step out onto that bridge, and then you'd look down, and you'd see that huge roaring torrent of the river down below you. Are you going to say to me that you wouldn't have a spark of fear in your heart?

Of course you would. You'd still look down there, and you would, well, especially if you've got a fear of heights naturally, you would say, well, I know what he said, and I believe what he said, and I'm absolutely persuaded of the truth of what he said, but I'm still afraid.

That's what life is like, friends. You are assured that God is true to his word, that God gives his people victory, that God is on your side, that God has made all the provision that you need.

That doesn't mean there'll be no circumstances in your life where you will not be afraid, where God will not come alongside you and said, I know you're afraid, I understand you're afraid. You're a human being, you're still in this life, but look at what I've given you, you know, to meet with your fears, to give you support, to give you strength, to give you assurance.

[51 : 54] And that amazing combination leads us to an amazing conversation. Because they went down, Gideon and Pura, his servant, they went down to this camp, and what he heard was quite remarkable.

Again, it's emphasizing the sheer, vast scale and numbers of the Midianites helped by the Malachites. They lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, camels without number, the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.

You see, it's emphasizing that for us. That is what Gideon faced. Just like you look out over that world today and say, well, here we are as Christians, how many are there of us? Certainly less than Gideon's 300.

And that world out there that doesn't want to know God, that is against God, that is opposed to God, at least some of it is. You're going to face that from day to day. You face it at every single layer of human society in our own land as well.

And you just take in the sheer scale of the operation, the vastness of the opposition that you face as a Christian. But here is Gideon, having taken that in, and behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade.

[53 : 16] 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 it upside down. And his comrade answered, this is no other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Jorah, the man of Israel.

God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp. What a remarkable conversation. At that precise moment that God had said to Gideon, go down and you'll hear something, this is what he heard.

At that precise moment, this dream had come about and this interpretation of the dream, this man telling about his dream and his comrade telling, this is the meaning of the dream. Every single detail of that precisely timed by God so that Gideon would hear it.

See, God is so exact, is so precise, that in coming to confirm Gideon and give him further strength and assurance, he arranges that this will happen exactly at this time.

Even the dreams of Gideon's enemies prove to be to his advantage. What a remarkable God you and I have that we serve. There is no possibility of not being victorious when this God is with you in your life, when this God is on your side, when right is on your side, when justice is on your side, when righteousness is on your side, when love is on your side.

[54 : 41] And of course, the dream was quite remarkable in itself. It was about a cake of barley bread tumbling into the camp of Midian and striking a tent, would be a large tent, so that it fell and turned it upside down and the tent was just flattened.

Just imagine that as quite amusing, really. A cake of barley bread, something that would very easily crumble, even in your hands. And yet here is the dream, this cake of barley bread comes rolling and tumbling into the camp of Midian, hits this tent and flattens the tent.

Normally, that cake of barley bread would just be immediately smashed up and you'd pick it up and feed it to your chickens or whatever. But it's the opposite. That cake of barley bread smashes into and destroys this tent in the camp of Midian.

The little barley cake. has flattened the large tent. And here is Gideon being assured, the little band that's with you, the little group, the 300, that's enough if God is on your side to smash the might of the Midianites.

And that's what he took his encouragement from. Because the man who was giving his friend the meaning of the dream, which Gideon also overheard, was convinced this is nothing other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash.

[56 : 19] This is our defeat. We're done for. Because God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp. And you can just picture that scene, that man hearing the interpretation of his dream, the blood draining from his face when he realized, we're done for.

We're not going to get out of this alive because God's come out against us. Don't think that all the bravado you see in the world in its opposition to God is not intimidated by God's truth.

Don't think that this gospel in your life and the life that you live in obedience to God doesn't make an impact at all on that world. Don't think for a moment that nothing is disturbed in the thinking of the world as they hear about God's work in your life or in this congregation or whatever.

It does, especially when God is behind it and when the power of God applies it, of course, it makes more than a dent. It makes people think of eternity and of God and of themselves and of judgment.

Don't ever lose sight of that. If that wasn't the case, we might as well pack up and go home and close the Bible and never preach again because we believe in God's truth.

[57 : 51] We believe in the power of God's truth. We believe in the power of God's truth through His people and by His people and in the testimony and lifestyle of His people. God is revealing Himself through that to people in the world.

today. And I believe with all my heart that God is doing that in Ukraine. That God is doing that even to some, perhaps, of the Russian forces that have invaded Ukraine.

That the obedience and the testimony of God's Ukrainian people, God's Christians in Ukraine, that that itself ultimately will lead to many people coming to realize they need this God.

That Putin is not God. That he's not the master of the situation. That there is a God in heaven who cares for His people.

You see Gideon's immediate response and how telling, how important that is for yourself and myself too. as soon, in verse 15, as soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped.

[59 : 15] You see, he didn't say, now I know that success is with me, guaranteed. God had said that already, but this is now further assurance. He didn't say, well, let's go home and we'll gather the people together and we'll have a worship, we'll have a prayer meeting.

He immediately worshipped. As soon as he heard this, he worshipped. How unlike myself that is. And I'm sure too, some of you may be saying, that's unlike me as well.

Because there are times when my heart is moved and I would say, well, it's time to worship God and then something else comes in and I never get back to that worship that I intended.

whenever your heart is drawn in the direction of worship and praise to God wherever you are, even the silence of your own mind, supposing you're in the supermarket, follow it through.

Follow it through. Because the thought of worshiping God or ascribing praise to Him in a moment, it can't come from any other source but from God Himself.

[60 : 28] God tested Gideon but God assured Gideon of success. God will test your life and mine as well in different ways for different people because He knows us so well.

And as He tests us on the way through life, He also brings us assurances that with God on our side, we are guaranteed success.

We're guaranteed ultimate victory whatever may happen in this world. And as we take that on board today, let us be Gideons.

Let's be bold for God with God's grace and power. Let's take up that challenge that this passage sets before us to face the might of the world with the strength of Christ, small in number or in stature though we may be.

And let us worship God every single opportunity we have because He is worthy of it.

[61 : 39] Let's pray. Lord, we thank You today for Your provision that You provide so abundantly for us and for the way in which You so equip us spiritually especially.

We pray today that You would hear our prayers, that You would receive and accept our worship. We present it to You, Lord, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. We thank You for the assurance that is brought to us in Him that You have already overcome evil and sin and opposition.

We pray that we, as we fall in with those, O Lord, who follow You and have been in the footsteps of faith before us, we pray that You would continue to encourage us in the way of serving You.

Graciously accept us now and pardon all our sin. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Now we're going to conclude our worship singing in Psalm 54.

Psalm number 54 in the Sing Psalms version. That's on page 70. We'll sing Psalm 54. Let's sing the whole psalm, just the five verses. Save me, O God, by Your great name.

[62 : 54] With power deliver me. Hear, O my God, the words I speak and listen to my plea. For strangers are attacking me and ruthless seek my life. For they have no regard for God and always stir up strife.

You can see how significant the psalms are for Christians in the likes of Ukraine today when such words as these can be so comforting and assuring to them and to ourselves.

So we'll sing the whole psalm. Save me, O God, by Your great name. Save me, O God, by Your great name.

With power deliver me. Hear, O my God, the words I speak and listen to my plea.

O changers are about having me, a ruthless seed in my life.

[64 : 14] For they have no regard creation of heaven and oyun■ In faithfulness destroy my foes, Let slander your free game.

I'll bring the sacrifice to you, A free will offering.

Because your name, O Lord, is good, Your precious I will sing.

For you, O Lord, have rescued me From my distress and woe.

My eyes have looked in victory Upon my cruel hope.

[66 : 12] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.