

Encouragement in Weakness.

Judges 7:9-15.

Sunday afternoon, May 8, 2011.

I. The necessity of weakness reviewed.

- A. Gideon was naturally a man of weakness.
 - 1. We see it by his hiding his wheat from the Midianites in the winepress.
 - 2. We see it from his station in life; he was from the weakest clan of Manasseh. Furthermore he was the least, or the youngest in his family.
 - 3. We see it from his tearing down Baal's altar and cutting down Asherah's image; he does so in secret, by night.
- B. Yet even a man of a naturally weak constitution can get full of himself. The success Gideon had in the removal of Baal's altar and Asherah's image would have boosted his self esteem. Now he found himself at the head of an army of 32,000 men; maybe Gideon was someone after all, and he had reason to feel good about himself and his accomplishments.
- C. Right about that time the Lord finds it necessary to visit Gideon with a new dose of weakness: "Gideon, the people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel (and Gideon) claim glory for itself against Me, saying, my own hand has saved me." Judges 7:2.
- D. So Gideon allows all the fearful men to return to their families; 22,000 of them; only 10,000 remain. But there still is not enough weakness on the part of Gideon for the Lord to give him the victory. Strange how the economy of the Lord's kingdom works, isn't it? We do well to bear it in mind, for the Lord is the same still.
- E. The Lord Himself will do any further selecting as to who stays and who goes home; 9,700 of the remaining 10,000 are sent home, and Gideon is left with a mere 300 men.
- F. The departure of those 9,700 men meant the departure of any remaining carnal confidence in the heart of Gideon as well. No doubt Gideon was left with a profound sense of his own weakness and his being inadequate to the task before him.

Applications:

- 1. The New Testament sheds greater light on the Kingdom of God operating this way. It does so principally in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus where the Lord God defeats the "hosts of the Midianites" by the foolishness and weakness of the cross. That the Lord operates out of the same principle in the lives of His servants is shown us in the life of the apostle Paul, who was "made weak," and who prayed to the Lord for deliverance of that weakness. In answer to his prayer the Lord pointed him to the sufficiency of His grace, and He reminded him that His strength is perfected in our weakness.
- 2. An honest look at the life of Gideon, and many other heroes of the faith recorded in Scripture, should inform, and often alter, the way we look at our heroes of the faith. Rightfully does Hebrews 11 inform us that these were men and women "who out of weakness were made strong." Hebrews 11:34. This means that they were men and

women who were intimately acquainted with their own weakness.

From the lives of men like Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Peter (in denying the Lord), and Paul, and many others, we begin to see that an intimate acquaintance with our own weakness is something of a prerequisite for usefulness in the Kingdom of God.

3. For this reason also we should not be overly discouraged when the Lord brings us face to face with our own inherent weakness, and with situations where He alone is going to have to make the difference and win the victory.

II. Encouragement in weakness.

- A. In the midst of Gideon's newly discovered weakness comes the command of the Lord for Gideon to go up against the camp of the Midianites. "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand."
- B. The Lord is finally ready to give Gideon the victory, but He understands that Gideon is not as ready anymore as he once was; that was prior to the Lord stripping him of 99% of his army.
- C. Perhaps striking is the absence of any kind of rebuke, shortness or harshness on the Lord's part in His dealings with Gideon. "He knows our frame; He understands that we are dust" says the psalmist in Psalm 103:14.
- D. The Lord meets Gideon in his newly acquired weakness and upon announcing that He is ready to give the 300 men the victory, He says to Gideon, "But if you are afraid, go down to the camp (of the Midianites) with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say, and afterwards your heart shall be strengthened..." Judges 7:10,11.
- E. Our hero Gideon readily admits his own weakness, and his fear, and that he needs to be strengthened. He does not dismiss the Lord's suggestion as unnecessary because he is already "full of faith" and fearless, and needs no further reassurances.
- F. So he and his servant go down to an outpost of the Midianite camp, and there Gideon overhears a conversation between two guards regarding a dream one of them had. A loaf of barley bread (the lowliest of all breads usually reserved for slaves) tumbled down the mountain and struck and overturned a tent in the Midianite camp. The guard's companion supplied the interpretation: This loaf of bread is nothing but Gideon; God has delivered all of the Midianite camp into his hand!
- G. In response to these words Gideon's heart rises up to the Lord, and he worships the Lord who strengthened his heart by the mouth and the words of His enemies. Gideon too is now ready to do the Lord's bidding with his whole heart.

Applications:

1. Does not the Lord, who understood Gideon's newly found weakness, understand the feelings of your weakness as well? And will He who did not rebuke Gideon for his weakness rebuke or reject you for it? Remember that in the economy of the Kingdom of heaven this weakness is an essential ingredient.
2. Will not the Lord, who came alongside Gideon with new encouragement and strength, come alongside your heart as well with new encouragement and strength to accomplish all His good pleasure in you?