

Gideon, Pt 6. When Weakness is Not an Asset.

Judges 7:15-8:21

Sunday afternoon, May 15, 2011.

I. Gideon, out of weakness, is made strong.

- A. The Lord made good on His promise that Gideon's heart would be strengthened upon visiting the outskirts of the camp of the Midianites.
- B. The Lord used a dream which one Midianite had and told to his companion. The dream entailed a loaf of barley bread which tumbled down the mountain and knocked down a tent in the Midianite camp. The man's companion told his that this loaf of barley bread was none other than Gideon, and that the Lord had given over the Midianites into his hands.
- C. In response Gideon worships the Lord and he gathers his 300 men. He arms them, not with the traditional implements of war, but with a trumpet in one hand, and in the other a pitcher of earthenware, inside of which was a smoldering torch so as to conceal its presence until they all were in their respective positions around the encampment of the Midianites.
- D. Then the moment of truth would come. Gideon would break his pitcher, the fresh air igniting his smoldering torch into flame, and he would blow the trumpet; the 100 men with him would do the same, and they would shout: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" This would be the signal for the two other groups of a hundred men located on the other sides of the Midianite camp to do the same thing, and so they did.
- E. The Lord would have to do the rest. Armed with a torch in one hand and a trumpet in the other, Gideon's men could not put up much of a fight. They had bought into the theme of weakness; they willingly played the part, owning their own weakness, and making room as it were for the Lord to do His work of delivering His people.
- F. The Lord did do the rest; He set the sword of every man in the Midianite camp against those around him, causing a massive panic in their ranks. Those who are able flee the camp, back in the direction of the Jordan River, from where they had come.
- G. At this time it appears that all the troops that had been sent home had been watching developments from a distance. After all, this was a most peculiar thing that was going on; attacking a vast Midianite army with a mere 300 men.
- H. They spring into action, attacking the fleeing Midianites. Gideon also sends messengers to the neighboring tribe of Ephraim to enlist their help in cutting off the escape routes of the Midianites, and they do, collecting two princely heads of the Midianites in the process.

Application:

It ought to be instructive to us that the 300 men remaining with Gideon were brought to the place of owning their own weakness. They humble themselves before the Lord, laying aside their swords for a trumpet and a torch in a pitcher. They lay aside their own military courage and expertise to make room for the Lord to do His work in their midst.

This too takes a form of courage; courage mixed with humility. It leaves them nothing to boast about.

II. A different kind of weakness.

- A. Gideon, as it turns out, was called upon to fight three battles: The first was that of tearing down the altar of Baal and the image of Asherah. The second was the battle with the Midianites. Sadly, the third was a battle against his own people.
- B. First there was Ephraim; they were angry with Gideon for not consulting with them before attacking the Midianites. Ephraim was a large tribe which could boast that Joshua was from among their ranks. They saw themselves as being at the head of the other tribes. A sort of prima donna in the tribal sense; never tiring of exercising headship over the other tribes. See also Judges 12:1-6 on this.
- C. Gideon is able to lower their temperature by speaking a few calm and humble words. Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the whole harvest of Abiezer (Gideon's clan)? Gideon had blown a trumpet and lit a torch; Ephraim had caught and killed two princes of Midian. So they calmed down.
- D. Then there were the people of Succoth and Penuel. Gideon was still in pursuit of the two Midianite kings and their remaining troops, but he and his men were growing hungry and faint. He asks the men of these cities for provisions but gets none because he has not defeated the Midianite kings as yet and these cities feared Midianite reprisals should Gideon fail to kill those kings.

Application:

1. Was the decision these cities made one of unbelief or one of prudence? The difference between these two can be a fine line as it is here. Gideon does not doubt that the Lord will deliver these two kings into his hand, and he expects those who are his brothers to stand with him on the right side of history.

Is our safety and prosperity always the ultimate consideration? Could these cities not see that the Lord was working a dramatic victory over the Midianites; a victory that now needed to be clinched?

By siding with Israel's enemies they end up being treated as Israel's enemies.

2. Gideon would not be the last one to be criticized or rejected by his own people, even as he was in the process of delivering his own people from their enemies. In this Gideon was a forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As it was with the people of Ephraim, so also in the days of the Lord Jesus, pride and the pursuit of their own status kept Israel's leaders from believing and following the Lord; it led them to oppose Him. For others the cost of discipleship, following Gideon, was simply too high, and they too forsook Him, as did the People of Succoth and Penuel. When Gideon returned victoriously from defeating the two Midianite kings, the judgment he executed as a judge in Israel would begin with "the house(hold) of God" represented by the cities of Succoth and Penuel. So also in the days following the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ (a victory in weakness), the Lord's judgment would fall on unbelieving Israel within the time span of one generation.

Let us beware that we are not made weak by the pursuit of status or worldly security and so end up, like these, on the wrong side of history and of our own eternal blessedness.