

Judges 7:1-23
Pastor Gerad Hall
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This morning I wanted to start with the story. There's a famous commentator named J. Vernon McGee, and he had this experience when he was a lad, where he was at a famous parade in Pasadena, California. Anybody familiar with that parade is the Rose parade. That's right. And so as he's watching the Rose parade, there was this beautiful float coming across that had these amazing American red roses.

The sponsor of that float, the Standard Oil Company.

Can you imagine being the guy driving that float? Would you not feel just totally weak? I mean, just completely helpless. Like, when did you just want to, like, slide out of that trunk and slither through the crowd, not to show your face? I mean, that's a terrible, terrible feeling. Now, I've never jammed up a float before, but kind of my equivalence of feeling particularly weak is the moments in time at which I've been stranded on the side of the road with a flat tire.

Another time I was leaving downtown Chicago. Right as 1994 splits east and west, there's a little triangle there, right there. I changed that tire so fast, I could have qualified for a NASCAR pit team. I mean, it was impressive. The most recent time, a couple of years ago, it was early in the morning, about 530 in the morning, I was driving out to Cole Valley on Interstate 80 to host a morning show for Moody Radio.

[illegible]

morning. It's a dangerous thought. And so when I thought to myself, okay, this is it, this is how I go, I'm going to die.

I'm going to pull over to the side of this road. It's 530 in the morning. This is it. It's over. Done. And then I noticed to my left there's a vehicle pull through. And I said, oh, thank you, Lord. And I pull over there. So I jack up the car and I go to pull the tire off. And it's not coming off.

It's seized on there. And the last flat tire, I had pulled the car off of the jack and rolled onto my cousin's foot. So I was that's a different story for a different sermon. So as I was trying to pull that off, I was like, oh, this is this is tough. So I did what any millennial would do.

I started googling solutions for how to get a cease tire off on the side of the road. And I was trying all these things and nothing was working. And then a state trooper pulled up behind me and he gets out. Everything okay? Yeah. Have you tried this? Yeah. Have you tried that? Yeah. And he goes, okay, this is what I want you to do.

Put the lug nuts back on but loose. And then what we're going to do is you're going to get back in the car and you're going to drive. And I want you to like this. Go like that. Put in reverse. Go like this, go like that, and then we'll see if it loosens it enough. I said, okay, now, I'm not sure if you've ever had the pleasure of having a state trooper watch you drive.

But I was a little timid, you know, and there's not a lot of space, but I'm giving a little gas and I'm going like this, and I'm going like that, put in reverse, going like this, going like that. Get out jacket back up. Still seized on there. And then he goes, May I drive your car? And I don't know if you've ever had a state trooper ask you if they can drive their car before, but I was like, yes.

I mean, do I even get to say no to you? So he gets in my car and I promise you, he guns it. I mean, he takes off, he goes down through the ditch, back up, whips it around, and I was like, oh, like this are still seized on there. So then he gets out this gigantic pipe, this big hammer on one.

Then he gets under the car and he just starts beating on that tire until finally comes off. And I was like, sir, you're amazing. I mean, state troopers do not get enough credit. This is definitely not your first time. And he goes, I can tell it's not your first time either.

But in that moment I felt completely weak. And there's two observations I want to share. One is this weakness is a state that we live in as a result of the fall in the world. Because sin is in the world, weakness is the present. And we don't like it. We don't like it. Nobody's like, oh, did you see that weak man competition on TV?

Jimmy barely made it across the room carrying that feather. That was amazing. So exhilarating. Right now we spend billions of dollars in trying to be strong. I mean, look at Pastor Chris. I mean, look at that guy, right?

I should have approved that with him before I said that. I should have definitely need to talk to him between services. But we do all kinds of things, go to doctors and we go to counseling. We do all kinds of things to try not to be weak, but we are, but we are. So what does God want to do with that?

And the second thing is this when we are weak, we need someone who can help. When I got to the radio station that morning, Jeremy, who was running the board, said, hey, did you have that flat tire on Interstate 80? I did, yes. He goes, I saw you, but I figured they needed me more here. And I was like, you know what, Jeremy, could you have gotten a cease fire?

Off he goes, no, and I go, you went to the right place. You went to the right place because he could have tried to help. But could he actually have helped me in my state of weakness? No. And so when we need help, we need someone who can actually help. Right. And so with those two thoughts in mind, I want to open up the scriptures together.

Would you grab your Bible and open up to judges chapter seven, judges chapter seven, which would be an Old Testament this morning, judges chapter seven. We're going to be in verse one. We're going to walk our way through it. And as you're turning there a little bit of background where we're at, we're looking at the story of Gideon.

And if you don't remember, in chapter six, Gideon has this moment where he's being called into battle on behalf of the Lord, and he is a little bit concerned. He's apprehensive about obeying the Lord in this moment. It seems pretty risky to him. And so he has this test. Maybe you remember this test. He sets out this test before the Lord.

He says, okay, Lord, if you're really with me, you really want me to do this? I'm going to put this fleece on the ground, this piece of fabric. And when I get up in the morning, if you're really with me, then may the fleece be wet with dew, but the ground around it be dry. And he gets up the next morning, and it's just like that.

The Lord answered, affirmed him, and he did something that was pretty bold. He goes, oh, thanks so much, Lord, but can we do it just one more time? Just to make sure at this time I'm going to put the fleece out and it'll be dry, but the ground around it will be wet. And it happens just like that.

So keep that in mind as we go through this passage that Gideon is the guy who tested the Lord not once, but twice.

Which really shows a robust faith. Right?

All right. So follow along with me. We'll read a few verses, make some observations, work our way through the passage. Verse one says this then drivable, that is Gideon. And all the people who were with him rose early, and it can't, beside the spring of road. And the camp of Midian was north of them by the hill of Moray in the valley.

The Lord said to Gideon, the people with you are too many for me to give the many nights into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, my own hand has saved me. Now therefore claim in the ears of the people, saying, whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and her away from Mount Gilead. Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remain.

Let's pause there for a second. Few observations one I want to make two notes about the geographical location of where this is taking place. At first the spring of Herod. This is a place that has been identified, like many, many locations in the Bible have been, and this is a place that you can actually go to. And the reason why I share that is sometimes when we're reading the Old Testament, it feels a little bit like a long, long time ago in a place far, far away.

But our scriptures are rooted in real places, in real time, in space, and you can actually go to the spring of her road. You can put your feet in this spring. It's easy to get to. I would highly encourage you to do it because when you do it, you begin to read the Bible in 3D instead of 2D.

It goes from black and white to living color. It's just amazing. The second thing I want to say about this geographical location Herod. In Hebrew the word means tremble. That's what the word literally means. And what happens to these 22 out of the 32,000 soldiers? What happens to the 22,000? They tremble. Right. And so there's this geographical foreshadowing that's taking place here.

And I think it goes a step further as well, that what we have is a spring. So a spring is an above ground source of water that you can come to and you can drink that is different than a well, which is an underground spring that you have to dig to, to access. Right. And so if we were to extrapolate out this analogy, a spring is just simply God's provision.

Here's water, which you want in a place that has an arid climate like Israel, versus a well which is an underground spring which requires man's effort with God's provision to access it. Right. And what we're going to see in this passage is there's a reason they're not at a well, because it has nothing to do with man's effort.

And then this 32,000 soldiers already outnumbered, and the Lord says, hey, if anybody is scared, just grab your bag and go home. Now, as Americans, and especially if we have any veterans here, can you imagine anybody ever doing that? That's crazy, right? I mean, this is like the most unpatriotic thing ever. I mean, can you imagine a commander saying to a US soldier, hey, buddy, if you got some shaky knees, just go on home.

It's okay buddy.

Never happened, right? I mean, even if they invited you to do it, you'd be like, I'm not taking that bait. Not a chance. But there's something interesting happening here that the Lord has already made provision for in his word. It's so important for us to have an understanding of the

Torah, of Genesis through Deuteronomy, because the Lord lays so much foundational work for the rest of the scriptures there.

This passage in Deuteronomy chapter 20, verse eight says this I'll read it for you, and the officers shall speak further to the people and say, is there any man who was fearful and faint hearted? Let him go back to his house, lest he make the heart of his fellows melt like his own? Isn't that interesting that the Lord in His Word has already made provision, that he never, ever wants one of his soldiers representing him, going into battle, not trusting him.

Isn't that interesting? Because he knows that the lack of faith will spread to the others.

Trust is a requirement for serving the Lord. And so 32,000 goes down to 10,000. Pick up with me in verse four. And the Lord said to Gideon, the people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I'll test them for you there. And anyone of whom I say to you, this one shall go with you shall go with you.

And anyone of whom I say to you, this one shall not go with you shall not go. 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 set by himself. Likewise everyone who kneels down to drink, and the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths was 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 them many nights into your hands, and let all the others go, every man to his home. So the people took provisions in their hands and their trumpets. And he said, all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, but retain the 300 men.

And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. Let's pause again. So what's happening here is, is remember, the Lord does not want the Israelites to think that they're going to win this battle in their own life, right? The whole goal of what's happening here is for Lord to receive the glory that he deserves. And he doesn't want Israel to get a big head about it.

Right? That's the goal. And so here you have this lapping of water scene. And a lot of pastors and commentators, they've speculated that the reason why the 300 was chosen is because of their posture, that the way that they were kneeling and drinking, they were able to keep their eyes up on the battlefield and to be prepared if the Midianites was to have a surprise attack.

But in that interpretation, where does all the credit go?

To the man, right? It goes to the soldiers. And what is the Lord's whole point in this? It's not the man, it's him. Right. And so what's really happening here is, is the Lord is using a completely obtuse way of dividing the men to make the point. I'm doing it. It's like if you were watching a boxing match and in between rounds the commentator was like, oh, look at how he put that water bottle in his mouth.

He is going to win. That'd be crazy, right? It has nothing to do with the way that they drink. He's just picking an obscure way to make this point to separate it down to 300. So what's the point?

Point one seasons of reducing are to increase dependance. Let me say that again. Seasons of reducing are to increase dependance.

Gideon has 32,000 soldiers and then 10,000 soldiers and now 300 soldiers. And how do you think the guy who did the fleece testing and feeling terrible. Right. And you and I, we've been through or maybe are going through seasons of reducing where we have to do the same thing or even more with less. Maybe it's with your budget where you're feeling like, Lord, I'm feeling thin, I'm feeling strapped.

I don't know how to do this. Maybe it's with your health. You've been going through some things, and you don't have the strength and the ability that you had before. I know a gentleman right now who had perfect vision up until a couple of years ago. Young man, young father. And he's been going blind.

Some of you have lost someone. You've lost a loved one. You've lost a spouse, and you're trying to figure out, Lord, how do I go through this? Seasons of reducing our to increase dependance. This is what the Lord wants to do in us, is he wants us to learn to rely and trust on him more and more. And it's so hard for us because it's the opposite of our human experience.

For most of us, we're going from infant to childhood to teenager to adults trying to move in this trajectory of independence. Right? That's why I told my child I was going to buy a mini house when he turned 18, so he couldn't live in my basement in abandons. But with the Lord, it's the opposite. Now we come to faith in Jesus in its to grow us in our dependance upon him, and he wants to receive the credit, and it's hard for us to give it up because we have an addiction to an illusion, and that's called control.

You and I, especially my type A brothers and sisters. We love the illusion of control. And guess what? We don't have it. And so the Lord is trying to draw us to a point where we do this palms up, open hand living before him. So I just want to ask you this question one if you've never put your faith in Jesus, what is keeping you from doing that?

Because in my experience and I came to faith later in life, the Lord continue to break me down until finally I said, I don't know where else to go. I'm yours Lord. And so if you're in that spot today and you've yet to put your faith and trust in Christ, I invite you to believe that God sent his one and only son, and that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, and all you have to do is believe and trust that he died for your sins and rose from the grave, and you will be saved, and you will be restored into a relationship with your heavenly father.

And that is what you are designed for. That's right. To believer Saint, whether you've been walking with the Lord for a day or for 70 years, if you're in this season, you can trust him. That's what he's calling us to. Seasons of reducing are decrease dependance. Pick up with me in verse nine. What we're going to see here, I think, is one of the greatest examples of grace in the Old Testament.

Blows me away. Verse nine. That same night the Lord said to him, arise, go down against the camp, for I've given it into your hand. But if you're afraid to go down, go down to the camp with your servant, and you shall hear what they say. And afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.

Then he went down with Pura, his servant, to the outpost 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 in all the camp.

As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. Let's pause there. What's happening? Gideon? Middle of the night, woken up by the Lord, says now is the time to go into battle. Gideon is the guy who tested the fleece not once, but twice. And he's gone from 32,000 soldiers down to 300 soldiers.

So how is he feeling about rushing down into battle? Probably not. Great, right? I mean, just imagine if I was like, okay, we're all going to go do street evangelism in the hood right now.

You'd be like, I mean, that's not even war, right? And you guys would be like, oh, I got this thing going on. The quiche is going to burn.

But look what happens before the Lord can say anything else. I'm sorry. Before getting can say anything else before getting says wait one more task before he can say anything else, the Lord says, but if you're afraid, think about that. Gideon doesn't have to say anything. The Lord just says, but if you're afraid, I'm going to give you this.

And what does he give him? He sends him down to the front line, and he overhears a man describing a dream. Think about the providence and the sovereign hand of God to line up these moments. The Midianites, a non Yahweh believing, pagan hating Israel, had a dream. And who gave him that dream? God? God gave him that dream.

And then the other guy, the other many and night the other anti-Israel, Yahweh hating pagan has the correct interpretation. He doesn't go like, oh, it sounds like you have an allergy issue, brother.

Who gives him the right interpretation.

God, think about that before getting can even say anything God says. But if you're afraid, go down. And I've orchestrated a dream to this pagan and a correct interpretation to this pagan, and you're going to be there right when they have the conversation, is that not the amazing, sovereign, providential hand of God?

This brings me to my second point. Encouragement comes in moments. Encouragement comes in moments. But here's the thing we don't want encouragement to come in moments. We want to live in seasons of encouragement, right? With moments of reduction, right? It's the opposite. We want long seasons where everything is up into the right and everything is going so good.

And we look at our savings account and we're like, yay!

But in reality, encouragement just comes in moments. But because we have this expectation that we want or deserve seasons, these long periods of time, because we have that expectation, the wrong expectation, we are often living in disappointment of the Lord. Lord, why did you not give me enough? Lord, why did you not answer that prayer? And it results in us to be grumbled and complain.

We're like, you're on steroids.

But if we grab hold of the moments of encouragement, then when we go through these storms, we can look back and go, oh, the Lord had me. The Lord did this. The Lord provided the Lord is with me, and it gives us certainty and confidence. Think about when Israel came into the land. They set up these rocks to represent the 12 tribes as it came through the Jordan waters.

Why? So they looked back at those rocks and go, the Lord brought us here. And if you and I don't grab hold of these moments, we don't ride them down. We don't put them in the calendar. We don't share the testimonies. If we lose sight of them, then as we go through the trials and the seasons of reducing, we get disoriented and lost and frustrated and discouraged.

And we use this bogus language that God feels distant. But if you're in Christ, it's impossible for God to be distant, regardless of how you may feel, because you are always in the grip of your heavenly father.

So, saints, take note of these moments of encouragement where God has his sovereign hand upon you, where you experience his grace, have the milestones, have the markers. Now let's go into the last section. The second half of 15 be so after Gideon has had the proper response of worship, this is what happens. And he returned to the camp of Israel.

And he has said, arise, for the Lord has given the host of minion into your hand. And he divided the 300 men and the three companies, and put trumpets in the hands of all of them, and empty jars with torches inside the jars. 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 trumpet also on every side of all the camp, and shout for the Lord and for Gideon. So Gideon, in the hundred men who were with him, came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch, and they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands.

Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars they held in their left hand the torches, and in the right hand the trumpets. The blow. And they cried out a sword for the Lord and for Gideon. Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. When they blew the 300 trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade, and against all the army.

And the army fled as far as Beth shita, towards as far as the border of a mohalla by Tabitha. And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali, and from Asher, and from all eminence. And they pursued after Midian. So here we go. It's the battle. 300 men dividing up into three groups of 100. They surround the Midianites, and they have torches and jars.

They've got trumpets. What? Do they not have weapons, right? They're going into battle. They got no shield. They got no sword. They got no bow and arrow. I mean, kind of the basics of what you would expect them to have going into battle. And so they break the jars and they blow the trumpets. And in the United States, median knights die.

Who kills the median knights?

They do. Right. The Lord turns their sword against each other. What in the world is happening here? Go back to Torah. Deuteronomy chapter seven says this. Chapter seven, verse 22 and 23.

But the Lord your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed.

The Lord is true to his word. The Lord had promised, hey, if Israel, you're going into battle on my account in the right state of heart, you're not going to have to do the fighting. I'll do the fighting for you, and I'll do it where they're going to turn on each other. And that's exactly what happens here. The Lord's word comes true.

That brings me to our third and final point this morning.

You and I are responsible for obeying. The Lord is responsible for the results. Let me say that again. You and I, responsible for obeying the Lord, responsible for the results. But going back to that control factor, that holding it in our hand factor. What do you and I like to pay attention to? The outcomes. The results. We like to get fixated on how things should go.

We like to be prideful about when things go really well for us. But that's not the way the Lord is designed or walk with him. The Lord is designed so that you and I would obey the Lord. That's it.

Take him at his word to trust him. His word is sufficient for life and practice. If you want to know what God's voice sounds like, if you're saying, Lord, I need to hear from you.

Just read the Bible out loud.

We don't need a fresh word. We need to be in the word. We need to attend to obeying the word. The Lord has given us what we need. But you and I have to shift our focus. We have to start paying more attention to the obeying instead of how things are going.

So weakness.

What's it there for? Well, I think it's to help us understand that we need to depend on the Lord, that we need to grab hold of moments of encouragement, and that we need to focus more on obeying than the outcomes. And the Lord loves us enough to pry open our hands from control.

And we need someone who can help. And that's the Lord. So we need more of we need to please the audience of one. And there's no substitute for being led by the Holy Spirit. And maybe you're going, Jared, that's fine. But this is the Old Testament. I'm not Gideon. There's no Midianites. Let me share with you the words of Paul that he wrote in Second Corinthians chapter 12, verse nine and ten.

But the Lord said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me for the sake of Christ. Then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I want to finish with the story. This gentleman by the name of Hudson Taylor, famous missionary who went to China, and he was there at the end of the 19th century, and he really changed the game in terms of global missions. Up until that point, a lot of missionaries were trying to bring their culture along with the gospel.

But Hudson Taylor went to China and said, I'm going to embrace Chinese culture, and I'm going to leverage it to present Jesus to them. But what a lot of people don't know that was written about in his journal is that on the way to China, the ship that he was on lost power. And what was the power wind?

And how much control do we have over the wind? None. And the ship began to drift in towards a bay of inhabitants who were known for having a taste for human flesh.

The sailors were like, this is how it ends. They felt how I felt at the side of the road. This is it.

And Hudson said there are three other believers on board in addition to me. May we retire to our quarters and pray that the Lord would save us. And the captain went. Sure.

So Hudson goes down and he prays along with the three others, and not long after he's praying, he comes back up and he says, put the sails up. And the captain says, there's no wind. He said,

please just put the sails up. And so he orders the sailors to put the mass up. And as the sails go up, a wind comes and pushes them safely out of the bay, and they arrive on the shores of China.

And the reason why Hudson writes us down in the takeaway that he had was, is that he realized the Lord gave him that experience so that he would know that he must bring everything to the Lord in prayer.

Everything must come before the Lord in prayer. And years later, decades later, towards the end of his life, at the end of his ministry, he was at this gathering, and he was being celebrated for all of these people who had come to faith. And somebody said, Hudson, how'd you do it? How did you go into a country so hard and so unexposed to the Word of God, and win so many souls to the Lord?

And Hudson said, well, I imagined.

That the Lord looked throughout the whole earth for someone weak enough to do his work. And he came to me and thought, Hudson, you're weak enough. You'll do.

And so maybe, maybe the weakness is the very thing that the Lord wants to use. So that way he receives the glory instead of us. Would you pray with me?

Father, I want to pray for the man or the woman here this morning who may not yet have placed her trust in you.

And I pray, Lord, that you would prompt them to yield themselves and give it up to you, and place, or hope and faith in Jesus and Lord, for the saints who are going through it right now.

Whatever it may be. I pray, Lord, that today would be a moment of encouragement, and that, Lord, that they would take hold of it, that they would lean heavy on you and on your word and Lord, that through your spirit and your Word in Jesus they would find strength and hope and courage, and that they be able to persevere.

And Lord, as a church, I pray, Lord, that this would always be a church that's about obeying. Trusting you with the outcomes. And so, Lord, as we leave this time together, Lord, may we be willing to walk according to your word. Walk in step with your Son and His Spirit, and trust you fully. So in Jesus name that we pray.

Amen.