

How Big Is Your God?
Judges 7:1-8
Wednesday, February 13, 2008

Hi Laurel, In paragraph 8 I underlined two words that I'm not familiar with, and a couple of words I couldn't hear in the 13th paragraph.

Well, how big is your God? I'm mindful of something I saw when we were in Disneyland a few weeks ago. It was 'Honey, I Shrunk the Audience.' You go into this thing and the audience becomes small because all the characters are enormous. They have giant dogs and giant vipers, everything is huge and by comparison and you feel small. It reminds me of the movie a while back called 'Honey, I Shrunk The Kids.' Sometimes you wish you could, right? In this case oftentimes we have to say, 'Honey, I shrunk God.' And I'll bet everyone of us can think of examples in our lives when we've made God too small -- as though He were incompetent, inept and incapable of giving us the kind of assistance we need.

There's a story in the Bible about a man who had a very small God too. The guys name is Gideon. Gideon's quite a character, and he's not just associated with Bibles, you know the distribution of Bibles. Gideon is actually to be associated with a man who would do some rather remarkable things with a very small crowd of people. Gideon's God though for a while wasn't big enough, he had a god that was way too small. I'm going to read a little about this evening and I'm going to take you through some portions in advance of the text. So the text we're going to look at is specifically in Judges Chapter 7, but in order to get there we need to take a look at the stuff that goes on before because you know the Draegerism, that every text without a context is a pretext. And so I'd like to just take you on a little journey through at least some significant portions of the 6th chapter just to kind of set up the message for this evening and the really strong point that is found in chapter 7.

"The angel Lord came and sat down under the oak of Ophrah," I want you ladies to hear that, that's Ophrah not Oprah. Oprah is not in the Bible, ESPN is but Oprah isn't. No, I just made that up about ESPN. No, there's no Oprah -- it's Ophrah. "An Angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak of Ophrah that belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite where his son Gideon was thrashing wheat in a wine crest to keep it from the Midianites." So here's what's happening, there was a threat from the Midianites and in order to protect his wheat he would use a wine crest rather than a regular threshing floor outside. The wine crest was inside. So already you know that Gideon is a man who has a significant problem with anxiety and fear, because he's inside doing what you would normally be doing outside. You would have way more room outside -- you're going to have this small little wine crest as a place to separate the wheat from the chaff. But because he was fearful he did this indoors.

And when the angel Lord appeared to Gideon, He said, "The Lord is with you mighty warrior." "Pardon me, my Lord," Gideon replied. Now what's interesting is, if the Lord is with us, the angel of the Lord has spoken to him and said, "The Lord is with you," it is a 2nd person singular. So these were words that were addressed specifically to Gideon. He heard them as though it was everybody. I'd like to suggest he didn't personalize this message of God, but rather he took something on to himself, namely anxiety.

It goes on, it says, "Pardon me," said Gideon, "If the Lord is with us why has all this happened to us? Where are all His wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, "Did not the Lord bring us out of Egypt?" But now that the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian?" And the Lord said to him, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. "Am I not sending you?" "Pardon me Lord," Gideon replied, "but how can *I* save Israel?" Notice what he did? Lord said "I'm going to save Israel" and He says "I'm going to be with you in this." And what does Gideon do? How could *I* do it? Do you hear what he's doing? He's taking this as though there is no god big enough to help him. The God who is giving this command says "I will be with you and I will deliver the Midianites". Yet Gideon acts as though he doesn't believe that. In other words he's saying, 'I'm too wimpy. I don't have the strength.' In fact, I'd like to show you a guy who probably qualifies for a, well it was a 20th century Gideon.

Do you remember old Barney Fife? He was just not very courageous was he? I found an image of him where he has his gun drawn and he's hiding behind guess who. So he was clearly a characterization of Gideon. So whenever I read Gideon I want you to think Barney Fife and Don Knotts.

So here goes, the Lord said, "I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites together." Several times, all during this text God has said, "I will be with you." Does that sound familiar at all to you? How many times in the Old Testament did God say "I will be with you"? And then we have this name that was given to Jesus at Christmastime which was what? Emanuel, which Matthew translates for us as, "God with us." And then you have the words of Jesus, "Wherever two or three are gathered in My name, there I'm with you." Then at the very end of the gospel He says, "And behold I am with you until the end of the age." I am what? With you until the end of the age.

So I'm kind of thinking that we have this Barney Fife syndrome here. That we act like we're weak and we can't take care of ourselves. And when we do that we are bound to have worry in our lives. And by the way, some of you will be pleased to know the New York Times reported not so many months ago, that it has now been discovered that there is a worry gene; that it's genetic. That there is an aberration on a chromosome and people who worry have that aberrant chromosome, isn't that good news? All of you worry warts, now you can say, now there's a reason, it's my genes! And we're not talking Levis. I can blame my parents for something else now. Oh by the way, psychologists say that's not an

excuse because there are ways to mitigate the negative effects of the worry gene -- so you're not off the hook. But how often do we not worry because at times we act as though our God is not, like Gideon, is not big enough.

"When the angel Lord appeared to Gideon the angel said, "The Lord is with you mighty warrior." The Lord is with you mighty warrior. God saw Gideon differently than Gideon saw Gideon. And I wonder how many times in my week have I done the same thing. I see God differently than how God sees me. That I act way too many times like it all depends on me, verses it all depends on Him, and I depend on Him.

Well, the story goes on and Gideon said, "If I found favor in Your eyes give me a sign that this is really You talking to me." Now he's saying, I'm not sure I believe this God, so now I need a sign. And here is that little story that comes in about, 'what does Gideon do?' He puts out this little piece of fleece and says, "God if it's go let the fleece be wet and everything around it be dry." Then he comes back a second time God said it works out that way. And so he's still not convinced and he says, "All right God, now reverse it." And do you know a lot of Christians talk about putting out a fleece. I'd suggest they're not reading the scriptures right, because when Gideon put out the fleece, this was not done in faith, this was done to test God. 'God is it really You? Are You really telling me to do what You say I should do here?' Putting out a fleece is not an act of faith it's an act of unbelief. If you read the text and the surrounding piece you will come to understand that. He was still doubting even though he had the Lord talking to him underneath the tree there at Ophrah.

Well finally it gets down to this, he says, "All right, I'll do it." So Gideon builds an altar to the Lord and he called it "the Lord Is Peace" because the Lord had said to him in the verse before, "Peace, do not be afraid, you are not going to die," and so he builds the altar. And then that same night the Lord said, "Take a 2nd bowl from your father's house and so, and tear down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down Ashura's pole beside it, then build a proper altar to the Lord your God and on the top of this height, using the wood from Ashura's pole that you cut down. So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople he did it at night rather than the day time. You notice what Gideon is doing here? He is living in fear the whole time. He's living with anxiety and worry the whole time. In other words he's saying, "God, you're not big enough, you're just not big enough."

Now let's fast forward to chapter 7. Early in the morning, Jerubbaal, that is Gideon (his friends began to call him Gideon because he wrestled with Baal and had the courage to do that, and won) took down the altar to Baal. And all his men camped at the spring at Harod, because now he's going to go and take on Midianites. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreb, and the Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men for Me to deliver Midian into their hands." Now let me give you the ratio here, there were a

130,000 Midianites and there were 32 thousand Israelites; it's a ratio of 4 to 1, in case you want to do the math. And God is saying to Gideon, "you got too many guys, you've got a numbers problem here, you've got too many." So He says, "here's the deal, you go to them and what's going to happen? Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mt. Gildead." So how many went away? 22,000, how many are left? 10,000. But the Lord said to Gideon that there were still too many men. "You've got a numbers problem yet, Gideon -- you've got way too many, you're now up to a 14 to 1 ratio; they've got 14 you've got 1." It started out 4 to 1, this is not good enough. So here's what you're going to do, "take them down to the water and I will sip them for you there. If I say this one shall go with you, he shall go, but if I say this one shall not go, he shall not go."

So Gideon took the men down to the water, there the Lord told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." How many lapped water? 300. They lapped it with their hands to their mouths and all the rest got down on their knees to drink. The Lord said to Gideon, "With the 300 men that have left, I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents, but kept the 300 who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. So now the ratio is no longer 4 to 1 or 13 to 1, now it is 450 to 1. And God says, "Now I've got the numbers where they need to be." If you're Gideon, what are you thinking? I'm scared, Gideon was scared. But what they did was this. Gideon divided up his soldiers into 3 groups of 100. And they took the clay pots and he took the trumpets and he took the provisions and they went out against the Midianites. And in the night the trumpets blew, and every man had one so it sounded like it wasn't just an army of 300 or in this case a division of 100, it sounded like it was a huge army of people coming. And they broke all the pots, made a lot of noise, and guess what happened? Gideon and his 300 chased out the Midianites.

What was the lesson for Gideon? God was saying, "I'm big enough; I'm big enough to take care of you and all the Israelites, Gideon. I'm big enough. You have sent me through the shrink machine but I am big enough."

I look at what Charles read a little bit ago, 'when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Peter takes out his sword to defend Him and cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant.' And Jesus said, "Didn't you know My God is big enough? Because I could have called on the Father and He would call down legions of angels, My God is big enough, Peter." And didn't God have to remind Paul of how big He was when Paul was beseeching the Lord three times to remove the thorn in the flesh. And God said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in your weakness."

And what I'm suggesting folks is, when you worry, your God is too small. It's not about a worry gene -- it's about you're not activating and utilizing a major resource that you have. You put too much on your shoulders and not enough on

His. And we do that everyday, don't we? We take way too much onto ourselves and give way too little to the God who has loved us and gone to the cross for us. Because if you want to know how big His love is, if you want to know how strong His strength is, all you need to do is look at a cross and an open tomb. And if He could bring about His love by sending His Son to the cross in our place, and if He could move that stone on Easter Morning, do you think He might just have the ability to take care of your worries? He took care of Gideon, He took care of the Israelites throughout their history; you are His new Israel -- will He do any less for you than He's done for them? Can He not move the stone of your tomb that keeps you with a god who's too small?

If you pray like Gideon did, basically without a whole lot of faith, you're going to ask for fleece, you're going to ask for signs. We have the most important sign of all -- the sign of Jonah is an empty cross and an empty tomb. The people asked for a sign and Jesus pointed them to Jonah. As Jonah was in the belly of a whale, so will the son of man be three days and rise. If there is a sign of God with us, it's an empty cross and an empty tomb.

And I'd just like to encourage you this week, cause you're half way through the week, maybe the rest of the week you can just sort of live believing God is big enough. That doesn't mean there won't be tough stuff to deal with. It doesn't mean there won't be people who are irritating to you. It doesn't mean there won't be decisions you have to make. It doesn't mean that life is going to be easy. But one thing is certain -- one thing is certain -- your God is big enough to take you through it. It isn't always easy but He is always with you. And that's what you and I need to not forget between Sundays.

May God bless you and me that we like Gideon, will take on God into our lives, and let Him guide, and shape us, and encourage us. Oh by the way, one little small detail about the 300 guys -- they lapped like dogs. That may sound like that's not a good thing, but why were they selected? Because they put the water in their hands and brought it up, and lapped it like this so they could still see what was out there. They were still vigilant, the others were not. And it's the vigilant people who have their heads high in Christ who can take on the world. I trust you're those kind of people. May God bless you and me that we might have God this week, for the rest of this week at least, who's big enough, because He really is. Amen.

And may His peace which surpasses all understanding, keep and guard our hearts and minds as we live by faith in Jesus. Amen.