

Message Summary

At Christmas, we celebrate Christ's coming to bring the deliverance we need from our sin. Hebrews' chronicle of Old Testament faith brings us next to Gideon, that judge of Israel who was full of faith and failure, surrender and fear. Gideon's example teaches us to replace fear about the surrounding world with gospel surrender that trusts the Almighty to bring the deliverance we need.

In the time of the judges, "there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). They submitted neither to the Lord nor to any earthy ruler. As a result of their sin, the Israelites were suffering military oppression from the Midianites. Not all oppression we experience in this world is punishment for sin (cf. Job), but Israel's was. Regardless of the cause, the story of Gideon teaches that God graciously delivers all who sincerely cry out to Him for deliverance from bondage. Israel was no exception. They were surprised to find, however, that God's first answer to their cry was to send a prophet to preach the Word (Judges 6:8-10). They were not under Midianite oppression because of military weakness, nor would military strength solve their dilemma. They were under bondage for spiritual rebellion, and what they needed was not military strength to reinforce such sin. They needed surrender to their Creator.

After reminding them of their need to repent, God raised up a leader, though still not the strong military leader one might expect. He gave Israel Gideon – a scared, fearful man. The Lord knew his physical and spiritual weakness, but still addressed him as a "mighty man of valor" (v. 12). The Lord met Gideon where he was and brought Gideon where he needed to be. His strength came because "the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon" (v. 34). Gideon's fight for spiritual renewal began at his own home, tearing down the altars to false gods (vv. 25-27). He then proceeded to battle the Midianites directly. The Midianites boasted 135,000 soldiers strong. Israel started with only 32,000. The Lord saw that the situation was lopsided, and set about correcting it – by taking Israelites away! The Lord whittled down the Israelite army, first by removing 10,000 who were scared, then by removing 9,700 because they drank water directly, leaving only 300 to fight the well-fortified enemy. God was teaching the Israelites that it was not the military with them, but the God with them, who would win the battle.

Still, Gideon's faith was not perfect. He asked the Lord for confirmation that the Lord's presence would continue to be with him, by two tests with the fleece and dew. Though Gideon's faith should have been stronger, the Lord graciously acquiesced to his requests. Our faith, too, needs strengthening as we look to Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Gideon's story points us to Christmas – to our Savior being born into the world, so that all people who look to the Messiah's deliverance could be rescued from the bondage of sin and receive life eternal.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Why did the Lord first send a prophet instead of a military leader? Why would this have been hard for the Israelites to receive initially?

Why does the Lord prefer to use the weak things of the world rather than the strong to accomplish His purposes (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31; 2 Cor. 4:7-18)? How does our weakness show the gospel most clearly?

The Israelites suffered military and financial oppression from the lording Midianites. What sort of oppression does our sin subject us to? How does Christ rescue us from it?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

1. Are you in need of deliverance from the bondage of sin?
2. If you have found Christ's deliverance, who around you needs that same deliverance who you can be an instrument of Christ's redemption to?
3. Are you submitting and surrendering to Christ's Lordship, or are you doing what is right in your own eyes?
4. Has the Lord called you to something far beyond your own strength that forces you to rely on His power and presence? Are you surrendering to Him, or despairing of your own weakness and inability?
5. Do you long to see people "worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness" (Ps. 96:9), or are your dreams and ambitions too low and worldly for heavenly dreams?
6. In your own household and family, do you see altars to false gods?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for rescuing us from the bondage of our sin and placing us in His kingdom forever.
 - Pray that the Lord would replace our fear with surrender to the Lord and His purposes. Pray that we would trust the One who delivers us from bondage to sin to provide us with all we need to accomplish His purposes now (Rm. 8:32).
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that the Lord would use us, in our weakness, to be vessels of mercy to bring the freedom of the gospel to many in the Gadsden community.
 - Pray that the Lord would strengthen our faith, like Gideon's of old, and that He would call us to great works of faith that far exceed our human capacity because He is with us
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray that the Lord would move in the hearts of many to contribute generously toward the 2017 Global Christmas Offering. Pray that the Lord would enable to thousands of IMB missionaries who receive such support to proclaim the gospel in their respective mission fields with clarity and boldness, which is how they ought to speak (Eph. 6:20)
 - Pray for London, England. Pray that this global city would be a strategic place for many gospel laborers to go, and pray that their work would be fruitful to expand the gospel to many nations around the world that would otherwise not have access to it.