

Judges 7:1-25 – Gideon part 4

A few years ago, there was a really annoying television trend – the makeover show. Whether it be clothes, house, or something else, then there was a show to illustrate the makeover. Comically, they used to be low budget and the results were generally pretty awful (in my opinion!).

This part of Gideon's story is God's take on the makeover show. He goes (the spiritual version of low budget) but the results are outstanding.

But let's remind ourselves where we've got to.

God has called Gideon in Israel's time of crisis. The Midianites have been raiding for 7 years and the nation is broken. Gideon is not a prominent person, he's the least of the least but that's just how God works.

God has told Gideon to take a stand in his own land and remove the altar to Baal and the Ashera pole – places of fanatical and gruesome sacrifice. The rot needs to be removed from the centre of the nation before they can move forward.

Gideon, being only human, has doubts and asks God for a sign – a dry sheepskin amidst a heavy dew. Then he asks again but just the other way round. Yes, God really is calling him to this task.

Now, we have battle drawing near. The army of Israel is already heavily outnumbered – maybe 3:1 or 4:1. Worse still, the Midianites are hardened fighters and the people of Israel are rubbish at war. But within this, God says "Your army is just too big!". 30,000 men is too many. The command is that anyone who is afraid should go home. Ok, that's understandable. The last thing you want whilst fighting is for some of your own side to run away straight off. That's how armies collapse. But for Gideon, that meant losing 22,000 men with only 10,000 remaining. A difficult task just got a lot harder.

Then comes the next call from God. "Still too many men, Gideon." I'm not sure how I'd have reacted if I was Gideon but whatever my reaction would have been at the point of the request, it would have been nothing compared to my reaction when seeing how many men were then left. The men are divided on how they drink water. If they knelt down at the stream, they were sent home. If they scooped it up and lapped it from their hands, they stayed. It would be easy to get caught up on the method of dividing the men but that's not the point. God wasn't trying to create some crack commando force, he was just transforming the Israelite army into something pathetically small.

300 are left. What is God's plan? God's plan is to show to Gideon his might. This victory would be won not by human ingenuity or by human power but by the will of God. As it says in Zechariah 4 "not by might nor by power, but by my spirit."

And so, on the eve of battle, Gideon receives one more sign. He hears a Midianite recount his dream, a barley loaf tumbling into and collapsing a Midianite tent. The barley loaf is important. Barley bread

was considered the inferior, cheap and rubbish bread. Gideon, the inferior, cheap and rubbish warrior would succeed against the odds. Not by his might but by God's.

And as we look at the plan of battle – breaking jars, waving torches and shouting aloud - again, we see less a plan of attack and more of a signal for God to do what God can do.

This is what Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

What we see in this story is how God works. Victory through weakness. A great makeover that makes no sense in the world's eyes. But we see it again and again in the Bible and it culminates in the cross. Jesus dying on the cross looks like a moment of weakness, a point of defeat and the end of God's plans. It was an end, but not the end that it initially looked like because the cross led to the resurrection and with it the breaking of the power of death. The foolish things, the weak things are made over and transformed.

And God is still at work in the same way today. We should never be discouraged in our journey of faith because we never quite know what God will do next. Our journey of faith and our life as church is not marked by our might, by our power, by our own abilities but rather by God's spirit working in us just as he did through Gideon and his little band of men.