Judges: Straight Lines – **wk 5 Gideon 2 – The Test / 300**

**Judges relays the dark ages of Israel. Museum of mistakes & victories.**

**Background: They didn’t drive out inhabitants - troubled followed.**

**We all love underdog stories. Rudy, Karate Kid, Rocky, sports. Gideon was a reluctant fearful savior with self-esteem issues.**

**Last wk - Judges 6:1 The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.**

**Starved off their own land. Humiliated - lost food, livestock, fields, homes (cave dwellers). Cruel oppression.**

**The people cry out to the LORD God (YeHoWaH, Elohim)!**

**God sends a prophet – it was your lack of trust & obedience**

**THEN God steps into the scene: Theophany / Christophany**

**Sitting under a giant oak tree, Jesus calls a scared reluctant farmer working in a hole – in secret. An unlikely hero.**

**Judges 6:12 And the Angel (messenger) of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The** **LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.”**

**God saw in Gideon what Gideon did not see in himself.**

**God doesn’t call the brave; he makes brave the one he calls.**

**\*\* Gideon then asks for three signs that this is true.**

**God in his grace and mercy – responds and Gideon believes.**

**Today - Judges 7:1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.**

**Gideon gets up the next day ready to fight - gathers everyone. But this time God was going to test Gideon.**

**2 The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me (Yahwah say what?) to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’**

**WHAT?! It’s 32,000 Israelites to 135,000 Midinettes.**

**God says I will get the glory. People will know who to trust.**

**3 Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.’” Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.**

**WHAT?! 22,000 left! Things just went from rough to bad.**

**4 And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people are still too many. (Come on!) Take them down to the water, and I will 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.”**

**WHAT?! That makes no sense.**

**Imagine if we picked out military like that?**

**5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, “Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. (Divide them) Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink.” 6 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. 7 And the LORD said to Gideon, “With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home.” (9700 go home)**

**Who?! Send the dog lappers home. Not sure I could.**

**But this shows Gideon’s faith. Chap 6 he was scared and secretive – now, “Okay God whatever you ask.”**

**8 So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.**

**32,000 farmers reduced to 300 farmers going up against 132,000 soldiers. Looking down on the army… God this is going to have to be you.**

**9 That same night the LORD said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. (Right now? They can’t even fight during the day?)**

**10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. 11 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 Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. (He’s afraid…) 12 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. (Hyperbole. I can imagine fear and confusion)**

**They were walking among them secretly – disguised or hiding.**

**13 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.” 14 And his comrade answered, “This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; (by this time they knew Gideon was preparing to fight them) God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp.”**

**A piece of bread came rolling into camp and wiped it out.**

**A soft, weak, and insignificant item. Killed by a loaf of bread!**

**They were afraid of Gideon. This brought Gideon hope.**

**15 As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. (First thing he did - thanked God.** **God in his mercy. strengthened Gideon’s doubts.) And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand.”**

**They are afraid of us – God is with us – let’s go!**

**Roll soldier training montage (Rocky music)**

**What he does next is interesting - God did not tell him this.**

**(Inspired by God, he has an idea) 16 And he divided the 300 men into three companies and (100 each) put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars. 17 And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. (Follow me) 18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”**

**No swords, spears, shields, bow and arrows… just a torch in a jar with one hand and a trumpet in the other. When I blow my trumpet blow yours and break your jars – and shout!!**

**19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, (2 AM – all is quiet – most are sleeping) when they had just set the watch. (Rotated the shift) They blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. (Trumpet sound) 20 Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”**

**21 Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. 22 When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army.**

**Awoke in hysteria to hundreds of torches and loud trumpets giving the impression of thousands of soldiers under attack!**

**300 trumpets, each was usually a battalion = 500 to 1000 men each. Confusion – they began to fight each other and run.**

**And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zere-rah, as far as the border of Abel-meho-lah, by Tab-bath. 23 And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian. (Chased out to the desert past the Jordan river)**

**This next part seems to be the beginning of a dark turn for Gideon. Looked at differently by many. The LORD said you will win w/ 300 but he now summons people from all over. Calling back the ones God sent home.**

**24 Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. 25 And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan. (Gideon, we have a gift for you…)**

**Moral of the story - Trust in God and you’ll get ahead. (JK)**

**The next three verses are like a post-credit movie scene. A teaser.**

**Judges 8:1 Then the men of Ephraim said to him, “What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?” And they accused him fiercely.**

**Angry they felt dishonored, “You never called us to help. Do you think we are weak?”**

**2 And he said to them, “What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezer? 3 God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?” Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.**

**Gideon responds, “Why are you mad you benefited w/ spoils (diversion) and besides you got the heads of the enemy. You’re the real heroes.” (Puffing them up).**

**But notice what he does not say: Nothing about the LORD God, who called him, clothed him w/ the Spirit, gave him signs, and a promise.**

**Simply says, “What have I been able to do in comparison with you?”**

**Next week things go dark for Gideon. When given God’s Spirit, he acts heroically, yet by nature he is a weak and prideful man, who, after defeating the Midianites, leaves the nation in poor shape (if not worse).**

**Some attribute chap 8 to God, but I am not so sure.**

**The Story of GIDEION and THE 300**

**\*\*\* God is not worried about the numbers.**

**God does not need numbers to accomplish his purpose. Size is not a hindrance to the LORD. The only Omnipotent God says trust me.**

**If God is for me who can be against me (Romans 8:31)**

**The speculation why the lapping, “able to see coming enemy”**

**But does not make sense - they were not going to fight.**

**We just don’t know why. God was simply trimming the fat.**

**A repeating thread thru Judges: God surprises us w/ his methods**

**God does not always do things the way we think – or pick who we think**

**Following Jesus might mean you do something that stretches your comfort zone… change! Mark 8:34 – Deny self and follow.**

**\*\*\* It is better to follow Jesus with a few than to trust in the crowd**

**God chose 300 out of 500,000 Israelites. To face off with 135,000 people.**

**Maybe for you it’s the majority at work, or school, in your family, or home. Maybe it’s the culture and the majority who oppose God’s word.**

**I would rather be on the LORD’s side than the world’s side.**

**Matt 7:13 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.**

**This means choosing the more difficult way of Jesus that leads to life. We often must choose the way marked with persecution.**

**An older song as a teen: I Have Decided to Follow Jesus**

**I have decided to follow Jesus, No turning back, no turning back.**

**The world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back…**

**Though none go with me, still I will follow, no turning back…**

**\*\*\* God uses loafs like us**

**V13 I dreamed… a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp… and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, (and) lay flat.”**

**The dream… run over by bread.**

**Not just any bread, this was barely bread – the cheap stuff you feed the dogs. What is worthless to man – is powerful with God.**

**Straight lines with crooked sticks**

**1 Timothy 1:12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, (an early church confession) of whom I am the foremost.**

**16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**

**God loves the loafs. Thank God for he chose a loaf like me.**

**\*\*\* God is not seeking the brave he is seeking the broken**

**God kept reducing the army – making it weaker and weaker. The strength they thought they had was falling away.**

**God was making them weak in order to show his strength.**

**God still does that. We like to rely on our efforts, strength, mind, and abilities – and sometimes God cause us to lose our strength so that we might find our strength in him.**

**(Paul in his weakness says) 2 Cor 12:9 But he 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

**(Peter knew of struggle too) 1 Peter 1:6 In this you rejoice, (in trials & weakness) though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith (more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire) may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

**In our weaknesses, loss, struggles, and trials - we discover the power and strength of God! Sometimes you’ll never know His strength until it’s all you have. Romans 5:1-4.**

**We see it in how they won the battle:**

**The trumpets that blew - are the declarations of God (the message)**

**The empty jars – are you and me**

**The torches – are the fire of God, the Holy Spirit inside us**

**When we are broken, God’s glory and Spirit shine forth!**

**And when the praises of God are declared – the enemy runs**

**2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.**

**Salvation is only found in recognizing our weakness & need for Jesus.**

**Rethink what God might be doing in your life. Maybe you are experiencing a reduction in the army. A stripping away.**

**\*\*\* The main point of the story – Humble obedience brings God’s hand.**

**Being humble and broken - Trusting God’s word – following the voice of Jesus… we see God work.**

**Zechariah 4:6 Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.**

**Psalm 20:7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.**

**I want to mention that dream again – the bread that rolled over the enemy camp. Jesus is the bread of Life – that conquers sin.**

**Next week – Gideon’s humility is buried in Gideon revenge and pride.**

**The story starts w/ Gideon in a hole and his story ends back in a hole.**

**Story starts with Gideon in a hole and his story ends back in a hole.**

**Be careful not to slide back into the hole.**

**Arrogant pride, revenge, self-reliance, neglecting God**