

Little is Much

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Date: 08 October 2023

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[0 : 00] We are the church. I want to thank you for your participation in this series. This is our last sermon in this eight-part series on the church, and so I pray that God has used it in the life of our church to recenter us on what his purposes and plan are for our church. And we have been studying this idea of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. We get that big theological term from the Bible word for church, which is ecclesia, a called-out assembly or gathering of God's people.

And so we've adopted a few statements into the life of our church. For the last time in this series, let's try to read these together, every voice if we can. Ready? We don't just go to church, we are the church. Honestly, we should probably be able to say that without the benefit of the slides, but we'll go ahead and let you cheat again one more time here. Ready? Here we go. The church is not about me. Who's the church about? Church. That's right. It is. And then finally, don't let what is secondary become primary. We've identified some ideas in the life of our church that we are supposed to accomplish. What do we do? Here we go. Ready? We gather, we grow, we give, and we go. Amen. And so if we can agree on these primary things about our church, then God can use us mightily, even if we have secondary and tertiary disagreements, we can agree on what is most primary and what our church is about.

For this final segment of this series, I want to get this thought across to us that comes from the Bible. Little is much. Little is much. Anybody would know what comes after that?

Miss June? That's right. Little is much if God is in it. Our church is not the largest church. We don't have the largest building. We don't have the latest of everything. We don't have necessarily all the advantages that every church across America may have.

We might be little compared to some. Our town and surrounding towns might be little compared to some. But little can be much when God is in it. And that is our goal. As individual believers, as followers of Jesus, to let God take over our lives so then we reap the fruit of God's efforts, not just our own.

[2 : 57] All right, let's get into the scriptures a little bit. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Judges chapter 6. Judges chapter 6. We're going back to the Old Testament today. We're going to hit a familiar story for some of you. The story of Gideon against Midian. One of my favorite things to say.

Gideon against Midian. The Midianites were a mighty, mighty people, mighty warriors, and they gathered over 300,000 soldiers to fight against around 135,000 give or take. I'm sorry. I got my numbers mixed up there and I need to start that over. About 135,000 Midianites against about 30,000 Israelites.

I know how much Wade Pierce studies the Bible and he would have called me on it after church if I didn't, if I got those numbers wrong. About 135,000 Midianites against about 30,000 Israelites. So needless to say, the advantage lay with Midian. Gideon was not a leader in the army. Gideon was anything but that. And so let's pick it up in Judges chapter 6. You can remain seated. Need your Bibles in front of you on your laps or whatever else. We don't have the verses on the screen today because of the length of this passage. So Judges chapter 6 in verse 1. The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Well, that's bad news. So the Lord handed them over to Midian for seven years and these Midianites oppressed Israel. Because of Midian, the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, the caves, and strongholds. They had to flee to the mountains.

They had to go find hiding places because of the might of this army that was against them, oppressing them. Verse 3. Whatever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the Ketamites came and attacked them. They encamped against them and destroyed the produce of the land even as far as Gaza. They left nothing for Israel to eat, as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey.

For the Midianites came with their cattle and their tents like a great swarm of locusts. They and their camels were without number and they entered the land to lay waste to it. So Israel became poverty-stricken because of Midian and the Israelites cried out to the Lord. When the Israelites cried out to him because of Midian, the Lord sent a prophet to them. He said to them, this is what the Lord God of Israel says. I brought you out of Egypt and out of the place of slavery. I rescued you from the power of Egypt and the power of all who oppressed you. I drove them out before you and gave you their land.

[6:01] I said to you, I said to you, I am the Lord your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites whose land you live in. But you did not obey me. That's where we leave off that part of the story.

It's a dark, bleak picture. Israel has no hope. They're surrounded by enemies. And they do not have any military might. Then we have a scene change. Verse 11.

The angel of the Lord came and he sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress.

Why was he in the winepress threshing wheat? In order to hide it from the Midianites. Then the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, the Lord is with you, valiant warrior.

And Gideon looks around behind him like who's, what valiant warrior is in this room hiding right now that I didn't see when I came in. Verse 13. Gideon said to him, please, my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, hasn't the Lord brought us out of Egypt? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian. Verse 14. The Lord turned to him. Do you see how first it was the angel of the Lord? And now we have the Lord, all caps, Jehovah God himself. He says, the Lord turned to him and said, go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you. He said, Gideon, go in the strength that you already have and deliver your people. I'm sending you to do this. And Gideon says, yes, God, I was feeling strong when I woke up today.

[8:19] No, not exactly. Verse 15. Gideon says to the Lord, please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family's the weakest in this tribe of Manasseh. And I am the youngest in my father's family. I'm the lowest of the low here. I'm not trying to make any excuses for my family. Like, we're weak. We are not impressive, me and my family. I'm well aware of that. And I'm the weakest and youngest in my family. So you really couldn't find anybody less equipped to lead the people of Israel than I am. God says, verse 16, but I will be with you. The Lord said to him, you will strike Midian down as if it were one man. Gideon would have had a hard enough time with one man.

God says, I will be with you. You will strike them down. You will win a great victory. You will liberate your people. For sake of time, this story continues on through the rest of chapter six and chapter seven. And we don't have time to dive into the whole story, but I encourage you when you go home today or tomorrow, parents, even with your kids, maybe at a family devotion time, take some time and study out this story of Gideon. It's incredible what God did, the stages, the Gideon questioning God and asking for signs and saying, God, how do I know that this is really you? And how do I know that you're really the one sending me to do this? That this is really your will for my life. Anybody ever been there questioning, is this really God's will for my life? Does he really want me to do this? Maybe I'm just alone. I've been there a lot of times. And so Gideon's laying out fleeces and saying, God, if it's really you, then make the fleece wet on one side in the morning and dry on the other side and then reverse it the next time. I got to really see that this is for real you.

And God comes through patiently, didn't have to, didn't have to honor Gideon's requests, but he came through patiently with this man that he called time and time again until Gideon finally said, okay, God, I'll do what you called me to do. I am little. I am not much, but little can be much if God is with him, if God is in it. So I read a quote that says, there is no doubt God is going to come through. The only question is how good a seat we will have when he does.

There's no doubt God's going to come through. The only question is how good a seat we will have when he does. Will you get to be front and center when God comes through like he did with Gideon?

Or will you be back far away because you didn't let God use you, work through you? Will God work through you or will he work in spite of you? God calls fearful servants.

[11:47] This is kind of the first thought I want to leave with you today from the story of Gideon. God calls fearful servants. It's very difficult to search the pages of scripture and find times when God called bragging, self-confident, powerful individuals. Sometimes in the case of someone like Samson, who's maybe the closest we can find to that, God often had to humble him and break him

down before he could use him ultimately in the way he wanted to use him. It is hard to find when God calls those who are strong in themselves. God often goes for the weakest, the most fearful before he says, I want to use you. Why? Why does he do that? Anybody want to take a guess?

Why does God call the fearful servants? Yeah, Ray? Because what?

Little can be much. That's right. Anybody want to elaborate on that, adults? Come on, jump in here. Depending on God. Then everybody knows it wasn't this person who accomplished something great. It was God working through them, just like he did with Gideon. So if you read on through this story, it's an incredible story. What happened in the life of Gideon? What did God do with this fearful servant? 135,000 Midianites, give or take. Some 30,000 or so Israelites. Did God let Gideon go to battle with all 30,000 of those Israelites as overmatched as they were? No, he didn't, did he? He had to trim that number down. Because maybe the historians could look back and say, wow, what an impressive battle, outnumbered four to one. The Israelites still overcame the odds and won an amazing battle that day under this mighty leader Gideon. That could have been what the historians wrote.

But instead, God had Gideon go through a series of trials that would whittle down that number to 300 men. 300 soldiers against 135,000 Midianites. Powerful, well-trained warriors against the ragtag bunch of Israelite refugees scattered throughout the mountains, 300 of them. So what happened?

[14:32] God used the element of surprise. In the dead of night, Gideon following the instructions of the Lord. And these men had come to now respect this man who used to be the laughingstock of Israel. The weakest family in the tribe of Manasseh, the youngest of this weak family. And now they see God's hand on him. God's starting to use him. God's starting to move him to attract those who would truly follow God and not run in fear, but follow the word of the Lord.

And so as this group of 300 people has passed these tests, and now God is ready to use them in the dead of night, he had them surrounding the camp of the Midianites up on the mountains. And he had them holding jars, holding trumpets, and holding torches for light. And according to the Lord's instructions, they blew the trumpets, they smashed their jars on the ground with the lights inside them, the torches.

And it produced this mass confusion of sound and light. In the middle of a dead sleep, the Midianites, whatever few watchmen were on duty there, couldn't help at all. They weren't sure what was going on.

And the rest of them woke up out of their dead sleep, grabbed their swords and their spears, and started turning on each other in the confusion, thinking that they were under severe attack. And what happened? They defeated themselves. God didn't need those 300 men to go down and wage war against them. He just needed them to obey his instructions, and he was going to win the day.

[16:30] God will always win the day. What part will you play in his victory? God calls fearful servants. So don't let it discourage you if you're a fearful person. Don't let it keep you from following Jesus if you have a problem with fear, with uncertainty, with discouragement, with being down on yourself, a lack of confidence. Boy, that's most of us, isn't it? That's most of us. Even those who seem to be the most confident, I can promise you, struggle with their own insecurities. We all struggle with our own questioning of whether we're really good enough, whether we're going to mess up, whether we've really got this or not. Sometimes we try to present a bold front. We try to be the rock for those who need us the most, but the truth is there's only one rock, and that's Jesus Christ.

We all crumble unless we are building our lives on that rock. That is the rock. He is the rock that will weather the storms. Sometimes we get off that rock, and sometimes the winds come, and they blow, and our house starts to crumble. But that's the kind of people that God calls. He calls fearful servants. Look back again at Judges chapter 16. It's the only verse we put up here on the screen from Judges 6. Let's check this out together. He said to him, please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? My family's the weakest.

I'm the youngest in my family, but God says, I will be with you. The Lord said to him, you will strike Midian down. So, 2 Timothy, Paul wrote it this way in his second letter to his son in the ministry, Timothy. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment. You have to take this in context with the rest of Scripture. So if you look at the story of Gideon, and you see how fearful he was, and if you read on through the rest of chapter 6, and see how many times

he questioned the clear instructions of God, he made it hard on God to call him. He didn't jump up and say, absolutely, God, let's go. Some time ago, I preached on Peter going out fishing again after Jesus said,

Peter, you didn't catch anything all night, but let's go fishing now that it's morning. And Peter said, oh, we have done that already, and it didn't work. But at your word, I will do it.

Peter's also the one who stepped out by faith, walking on water to Jesus, and then he looked down at the waves around him and started to get scared and started to sink, and Jesus reached out and pulled him up. And later we see Peter filled with the mighty power of God, the Holy Spirit of God, preaching in the temple at the day of Pentecost, and thousands giving their lives to Jesus in that moment. God uses fearful people of little faith. Are you one of those? Do you qualify for God's use? [20:14] Are you a fearful servant? I am. I have a hard time always doing exactly what God wants. I have a hard time being sure that I can do what God is telling me to do. But I have to remember, that spirit doesn't come from God. And his spirit can overwhelm it. His spirit can win the day. God has not given us that spirit of fear, but he's given us a Holy Spirit of power and love and sound judgment. And that is what we rely on. I guarantee you those 300 men that followed Gideon into battle that dark night, not sure if they would ever come back. They didn't exactly know what God was going to do. They didn't really know what the plan was going to be. All they knew is they had these weird instructions and they weren't supposed to use their swords or their spears that night. So I'm sure when they kissed their wives goodbye, they didn't know if they would be coming home. But I bet you they looked at Gideon, full of power, love, and sound judgment, and said, I'm going to follow that guy. Where did he get that? Because all he had before was a spirit of fear, an unholy spirit of fear. But then God replaced that spirit with a spirit of power and sound judgment. God conquers with faithful soldiers. God calls faithful servants. You have to be willing to say, okay, fearful, I'm sorry, God calls fearful servants.

You have to be willing to say, okay, I'm going to put my fear aside and by faith, I'm going to step forward and follow Jesus. And then God can turn you into a conquering servant full of faith.

That's what God can do with you and me. Isaiah chapter 55 and verse eight, my thoughts, the Lord says, are not your thoughts. Your ways are not my ways. As heaven is higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways. And my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. We have to remember, we're serving one who is greater than we are. Boy, that should be a comforting thought. God is better, bigger, smarter, wiser, more perfect, more loving, more forgiving, more powerful than I ever will be. And I really need him to be that. Because if he's not, we're all in trouble. I'm building my life on something I can't rely on. But God is higher than we are. God is greater than we are. And we can turn to him. We can trust him. Maybe you're going through something right now that you need to turn to God for. Maybe you are having trouble forgiving someone for something. And you can't, in your own heart, bring yourself to do it. But you fall on the instructions of God and the Holy Spirit of God and say, God, forgive them because of you. Not because of me. Not because of them. I need your spirit to work through me and forgive that person. Maybe you need to step out by faith and you're full of fear. Maybe God is asking you to do something. Maybe he's asking you to step forward in your church and start serving in an area that you're uncomfortable with. You're just not sure that you're really cut out to do that. But God is saying, go. Just like he told Gideon, go and I will win a mighty victory through you. Whatever it is. Y'all, we got needs all over this church. We got needs in nursery. We got needs in pre-K. We got needs in children's classes. We have needs in youth ministry.

We got needs in choir. We got needs in instrumentals. We got needs in the welcome team, ushers, deacons. We got needs on committees and ministry teams. All over this church, there are needs. Who's going to fill those needs? Who's going to fill those places? We are. We are. It's our church. We are the ones who are going to step forward. God's going to call just like he did with Gideon and say, you serve.

[24:33] You step forward. Go with me and I will do something great through you. Howard Hendricks, longtime professor down at Dallas Theological Seminary said, how big is your God? How big is your God? The size of your God determines the size of everything else.

My God's pretty big. I've seen God do some amazing things in my life. There's nothing my God can't do. There's no mountain he can't move.

How big is your God? God calls fearful servants and God conquers with faithful servants, faithful soldiers. So what's our takeaway today? Our takeaway is this. God's plans might take me beyond

my comfort zone. What do we mean by that? God has a plan for your life. God has a plan for your kids. God has a plan for your church. God has a plan for your workplace, in which he's put you a leader. God has a plan, teenagers, for your youth group.

God has a plan. God has a plan for your comfort zone. God had a plan for the people of Israel. He had a plan for those 300 men. He had a plan for Gideon and all of them, it was beyond their comfort zone. It took them way out.

If they had sat down and brainstormed God's plan that day, if they had sat down and had it come before the committee and they all sit down and talk it through before they bring a recommendation, it might not have made it out of that committee. They might have landed on a different plan. Say, listen, we know we serve a God who is powerful. We know that God can do anything. But why don't we put our best foot forward? Why don't we give ourselves the best chance of success and then God can pick up the rest? Let's arm ourselves to the teeth, pick the strongest, tallest, biggest, baddest, scariest guys in our bunch here, and we'll go down and take on those Midianites because we know we've got God on our side. That's probably the kind of plan that they would have come up with.

[27 : 19] Would it have been out of their comfort zone? Well, sure, going down to take on Midian, absolutely. But they might have been a little more comfortable with that than the plan that God actually enacted with them. So God's plan might take us out of our comfort zone. It might be scary. It might not do much to comfort your fears. But just like God did with Gideon that day, he wants to win a powerful victory in Henrietta, Texas. He wants to win a powerful victory for his name in Clay County.

He wants to win powerful victories through the people of First Baptist Church. He wants to win a powerful victory in the life of your family, with your loved ones, with the people in your family that don't know Jesus. He wants to conquer the power of sin and call them as his children. God wants to do something mighty.

But it might take you out of your comfort zone. You know what we can rely on, though? We can rely on the power of the gospel.

We can rely on the saving power of the Holy Spirit of God working on a dark heart and turning us away from darkness, away from sin, and to Jesus. Whether that needs to be for salvation, or whether that needs to be for sanctification. Meaning you don't know Jesus and you need to turn to Jesus for the first time. Or you are a child of God and you need to turn from sin back to Jesus. Maybe you need to turn from self back to Jesus. Maybe you need to turn from sanctimoniousness. I needed another S word there that meant something along the lines of pride.

[29 : 17] Those word-a-day calendars that I had when I was a kid come in handy every once in a while. You need to turn from your own ego, your own pride, your own self-confidence and say, I surrender all to Jesus Christ. He is my strength. Might take you beyond your comfort zone.

But a long time ago, Jesus willingly allowed himself to be hung on a cross. They killed his body that day. But Jesus didn't stay dead. They buried him in the tomb and then he arose. And he came back to life.

Fully proving to all that he is God. He is different. There's been all kinds of people say, follow me. I'm a great religious leader. There's been people who called themselves God. People who called themselves divine tried to attract followings on this earth. But Jesus Christ is the only one who died and came back to life and said, you can trust me. You can follow me.

And if we put our faith in him, and if we follow the directions and the instructions in the word of God that say we must repent and turn from our sin and turn to Jesus and put all of our faith in his forgiveness, his cleansing of his blood, then we can be redeemed. Meaning we can be brought out of that sinful darkness and brought into the light of the family of God. God will become your father. You will become his child. And I'm confident there's someone in here today who needs to make that decision.

Who's got to make that decision. I'm not talking about coming to church. I'm not talking about being a good person. Those are all good things. But the most important thing is becoming a child of God.

[30 : 57] God. And there's a very specific way in the Bible for how to do it. And then you get God on your side. Then you get God to fight your battles for you. And can I tell you, like he proved to Israel and Gideon that day, he wins. My God always wins. He never loses. I want to read you this and we'll be done.

Every power on earth and in heaven is a shadow in his light. No authority, law, or government challenges his sovereign might. His reign and rule have no boundary. All that is his hands have wrought.

Nothing ever can, nothing ever will overcome the Lord our God. We are well aware we were orphans once, bent and broken in our shame. Then he sought us out. He adopted us. Now we bear his royal name. Every sin or crime we have ever done is no match for Jesus' blood. Nothing ever can, nothing ever will overcome the Lord our God. We are rescued out of darkest night, free from Satan's evil hold. And the kingdom of our Savior's light is our soul's eternal home. Though the enemy tries to steal and kill what the death of Christ has brought, nothing ever can and nothing ever will overcome the Lord our God. Because our God is victorious. He always wins. In love he reigns over us. He always wins.

We the church declare that Jesus Christ is King. For he conquered death once for all. We will live in light of his victory following his gospel call. And when the story ends, we know that Jesus wins. For his power cannot be stopped. Nothing ever can, nothing ever will overcome the Lord our God.

Would you bow with me?

Heavenly Father, we celebrate your victory. We stand in it. We claim it. We receive it. We believe it. It is not us. It is you.

[33 : 08] So many years ago, you came through in a powerful, powerful way for the smallest of the small, the weakest of the weak in Gideon. And your people, the children of Israel, you came through in a powerful, powerful way.

God, we are fully confident that you can do the same for us. We are fully confident that this church, these people, through your Holy Spirit, can accomplish every bit as much as Gideon and those 300 Israelites did.

We may be small, but you are mighty. We may be little, but you are much. I pray that we would not believe Satan's lies. I pray that we would walk in your strength with your confidence, saying, my God is great and he can do great things through me. Help us to not settle for less than the best. Help us to not get distracted by all of Satan's arguments, all of Satan's lies, all of his doubts that he tries to weasel into our minds. I pray that the Holy Spirit of God would resist it, that through prayer, through reading the Bible, through the fellowship of believers, we would strengthen ourselves against those attacks.

God, if there's someone in this room this morning who hasn't personally turned to you, put all their faith in you, repented of their sin, and accepted you as their Savior, let them not leave this room today without making that most important decision. I'm going to ask that question now. If that's you, would you slip your hand up right now? Say, I need to turn to Jesus.

Would you slip your hand up? Thank you, and put it down. Anybody else? Anybody else? Thank you. God, I pray for these that raise their hand, that you would give them full understanding of their need for a Savior. And if you'd like to come talk to me after the service, I'd love to sit down and share with you how you can know for sure that you are forgiven. For the rest of us in the room, we're going to have a moment of invitation, and we'll go on with our business meeting, but we're going to have a moment of invitation first, where you can come down to this altar and you can pray.

[35 : 59] I'd love to see as many as God is working in your hearts right down here at this altar, praying before God together as a church. That's what it's here for. I'll be down here if you need to talk to me, but as many as God is working on your heart, would you come down and would you say, God, work through me, whatever it is. Let's stand together. Let's stand together. Now is the moment to step out, come down and do business with God.

I'll be down here if you need me.