

GROWING IN COURAGE - RELYING ON GOD'S POWER

Have you ever noticed that some people are naturally bold while others tend to be more cautious or even fearful of tackling new problems. I think that children tend to be on the bold side until we adults provide them with inhibitions in the form of rules. Many of the rules are necessary and make up what we consider to be proper "manners". We tell them, "Don't slam the door!" or "Don't interrupt others while they are talking!" or "Wait your turn!" Most of the time we also give them inhibitions that they don't need such as "You can't draw." or "Color within the lines." or "This is the only acceptable way to do this." or "Don't play with your food." or "That won't work. we've tried that before." Consequently, many people grow up with insecurities and fearfulness in their lives. Poor people tell their kids, "There's no way you can go to college, we just don't have the money." Shy people tell their children, "You don't want to go to that party, someone will make fun of you." We can grow up hearing that "we are not important", that "our opinion doesn't really matter" and many times we believe that it is true. The consequences are that the next generation is doomed to live with the problems of the past generation. Sometimes people can experience failures and setbacks in their lives and lose whatever confidence they had. People that live in countries that have been conquered in war or that have undergone significant economic depression can suffer from a lack of courage. In our study of the nation of Israel we find such a situation. Because the people had repeatedly drifted away from God and had suffered the consequence of the judgment of God they tended to be a people of little courage. The neighboring nations would come into their territory and raid and pillage and they felt powerless to do anything about it. Such was the case in the time of Gideon. The enemy of Israel at this time was the Midianites. These lived outside of the territory of Israel; however, they would send their armies of bandits to steal and loot. They would arrive at harvest time and steal their crops.

JUDGES 6:11-12 Gideon lived at his parents home when an angel of the Lord stooped by for a visit. That probably has never happened to you – although you can't be too sure, because the Bible tells us that some have entertained angels and not been aware of it. The word "angel" simply means messenger. Apparently, Gideon did not recognize the angel as being special – probably didn't have wings or a halo – I would imagine that he appeared like a typical person that Gideon would have encountered. Gideon was a fellow that was filled with fear. He was afraid that the Midianites would find out that he had some wheat and would come steal it. So he was hiding behind the wine press (or maybe down in it) to prepare the wheat. When Gideon looked up he saw the angel and the angel spoke to him a pretty strange message. Here's the angel calling Gideon a "mighty man of valor" and Gideon was probably saying "sshhh! they might hear you!" The message that the angel brought is very significant and was information that Gideon did not have. He did not know that God was with him. He certainly did not behave as if God were with him. That indictment could be leveled against most Christians today. God is with us-even in us-and we behave as if He were a million miles away. Without that realization we then have a right, as did Gideon, to be less than courageous and somewhat fearful.

JUDGES 6:13 Gideon's problem is that he had his eyes on the problem and not the solution. It is an understandable human tendency to believe what we see rather than what the word of God says when there is a conflict in the two. Gideon was, in effect, saying, "I really have trouble believing that the Lord is with me." From all the evidence that Gideon could see, it appeared that the Lord had abandoned all of Israel. Gideon is typical of people – we think that the world revolves around us. In his mind, it was God that had left Israel and he had never

considered that it was Israel that moved. God never changes, He is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

JUDGES 6:14-16 Notice that the Lord did not get into a theological discussion (argument) with Gideon. He just ignored the attempt to debate the issue and gave Gideon a command to go and to save Israel. Gideon was not really listening for he failed to realize that God was promising special power to do the job. When the Lord told him to "go in this thy might" He was referring to the fact that because the Lord was with Gideon that he would[^], in fact, be a mighty man of valor. Notice, also, that Gideon was not ready to obey, he was not a very courageous person. He did not see himself as a mighty man of valor. He saw himself as the least important son in a poor family of a somewhat insignificant tribe. Again, the Lord was not interested in excuses about inability, He was going to supply the ability-Gideon needed to supply the willingness. The greatest assurance that we can have is to know that God is with us and that He is for us. As Paul said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Gideon was coming around in his acceptance and he offered to go prepare an offering to God. He was gone for quite a while and he came back with a young goat, some un-leavened bread and broth. The angel instructed him to lay the meat and the bread on a rock and pour the broth over it. He then touched it with his staff and fire came up out of the rock and burned it up. The angel then disappeared. Now Gideon was really convinced that this was not an ordinary person. Later on that night the Lord brought Gideon a mission to carry out.

JUDGES 6:25-29,32 Notice that God did not give the first assignment to go attack the Midianites. The root cause of the problem was Israel's turning away from God and worshipping Baal. Therefore, God started with the root cause – the idols that the people worshipped. The solution was to pull them down. Where are our idols today? Most of them are in our minds. That is why the New Testament tells us to "cast down every thought and imagination that exalts itself against God." What Gideon did was pretty bold and it turned out could have been very dangerous. The men of the city were going to kill him for his rash act. However, Gideon's father was pretty wise and he advised that if Baal were any kind of a god, then he could take care of Gideon and he did not need any help from them. This act of obedience on the part of Gideon helped to discredit the worship of Baal and marked the turning point in the people coming back to God. All of you are familiar with the account of Gideon raising an army and how God told him that he had too many men. This was hard for Gideon to believe since he started out thinking that he did not have enough to confront the enemy. He started out with 32,000 men and God could see that if that large army attacked the Midianites and beat them, then they would conclude that they had accomplished a lot and would not recognize that God was the Source of their victory. Gideon was instructed to send home all that were fearful and 22,000 left. God was still not satisfied with the number and had Gideon to eventually send all except 300 home. Now there would be no doubt that God would be responsible for the victory. God's plan was to create confusion among the enemy and to get them to panic and fight themselves. It was a bold move as Gideon's army encircled the camp of the enemy one night, blew their trumpets, broke the clay jar that let their torches be seen, and shouted. The enemy concluded that a superior foe was there to do battle and panicked. If we will but be obedient and follow God's directions, then we could be enjoying similar victory over the enemies of the Kingdom of God today.

We have our "light" in earthen vessels and it is necessary to break the earthen vessel before the light of God can be seen in our lives.