

## “Gideon: Lose Rationalization”

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bible to the Book of Judges in the Old Testament. As you are turning to Judges chapter 7, if you are a first time guest or visitor, allow me for just a moment to give you a little bit of a disclaimer. As you see the worship guide that's in your hands or as you see things around you on our campus, there is this phrase entitled “Be A Loser.” And we know as a church that is not a phrase that is very positive; we know that's not a statement that increases our self-esteem, so to speak. But the challenge from God's Word this entire fall has been to look at ourselves in the light of the Word of God and ask what is it in my life, and it could be multiple things, that is weighing me down? What is it that is keeping me from being everything God wants me to be? What are the weights that are in my pockets? What are the things that I, we, our family, our community, our church even, need to lose? We've addressed everything from bad decisions to compromise.

Today we come to a subject matter though in the Book of Judges chapter 7 that's a word that typically seems like a positive thing: rationalization; to rationalize something. And can I confess to you that as a parent, I want my children to be rational. I want them to be sensible; I want them to make decisions that are based on good research and common sense. That's rationalization. But on the other side of that definition coin, the term to rationalize can mean to justify or to excuse; that unless I possess this then that cannot occur, or unless this happens first. And we begin to so humanize or put in the flesh that we forget the supernatural, miracle-working power of God.

Today when we come to the Book of Judges chapter 7 there is no sensible thought, there is nothing in our flesh, there is no thought that we could come up with that looks at this story and says this one is going to work out. In fact, much the opposite, you read this story on the surface and say, “There is

no way that this can work.” But that’s being rational. On the other side, we see that God is willing and desiring to move in the life of a man who is most famed. His name is Gideon. It is Gideon’s army that will start at 32,000; it will be whittled down to 300. They will take on the Midianites and the Amalekites in the valley. In chapter 7 in the Book of Judges, the first twelve verses, we have the story of God calling out His army very irrationally.

Judges 7:1-12: “1Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, My own hand has saved me. 3Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. 4And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shall thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 7And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. 8So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley. 9And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into

your hand. 10But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: 11And thou shall hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. 12And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.”

This is a story where the Lord tells a man by the name of Gideon, one of thirteen of the judges in the Book of Judges, during a time when Israel is struggling, the people of God are struggling, to trust God. They are having difficulty believing that God can deliver them and He says the army that you have is too big, I want it to be smaller. Why? Because He did not want the people of God to get credit for the movement of God.

So what happens here is, you can just imagine, the people’s rationalization. I don’t know about you but as I read this story, had I been in the army of Israel and I was told that we were going to do this with 300 rather than 32,000, maybe you’re not as non-spiritual as I am, but I might have looked up to the Lord and said, “Lord, what are You doing? Lord, have You lost it?” Now if you’ve never said something like that to the Lord then you don’t have a good prayer life! Because let me tell you what a good prayer life is: a good prayer life is being honest with God and saying, “God, I don’t see how this is ever going to work out. God, I don’t know how You’re ever going to move in this.” And I can only imagine the words of Gideon when the Lord said this is too many, I need 300. I can only imagine him saying, “What did He just say? 300? You mean 300,000, right Lord?”

So we begin to rationalize when God begins to move in our lives and when we rationalize, we tend to do it in one of two ways. We either begin to get caught up in the quantity of things or in the quality of things. So the two issues I want to struggle with through the Word of God today is this: how do we rationalize focusing on quantity; how do we focus on quality?

Then at the very end, I want to wrap it up by asking a very important question to all of us. So how is it that we focus on the quantity of the situation? In both of these different issues, I want to deal with the present situation at hand that Gideon and the army faced, the past precedents they had to live by and the future fulfillment that would take place later.

So let's look at the present situation. Quantity was an issue, was it not? It says in verse 12 that the Midianites were without number to the naked eye – that's a lot of people. The Midianites who had just recently become somewhat their foe had gathered together in the valley and from all appearances, they're not scared. In fact, it says their appearance was as grasshoppers and as the sand of the sea. In other words, there are so many of them they've lost count of them. You've seen those pictures of tens of thousands of military personnel marching in together. And they just keep marching and keep marching. That's what they were seeing.

And not only are they the Midianites; but it says there in verse 12 that the Amalekites are there. Let me tell you why that's important. Back in Exodus chapter 17 as the Israelites come out of Egypt and go across the Red Sea, as they are soon to possess what we know as the Promised Land, it says the Amalekites who are named after Amalek, the grandson of Esau (remember Esau and Jacob), would always cause agony for the Israelites. And as you study the Old Testament, you will figure out that they never seem to beat these guys; they never seem to have a victory over these guys.

So when they look down into the valley, not only are they incredibly outnumbered even with 32,000; they're outnumbered by a group of people they can't seem to beat. You would begin to think to yourself, "Okay Lord, we've got 32,000. We need 320,000 and we need them now!" The Lord said, "No, you don't need 32,000. You need just 300 men; that's it."

But there's also another bigger issue quantity-wise. Have you ever wondered sometimes why the Bible says what it says, but it says it because it means

it and it needs it? The Bible says they had camels also. About six months ago when I took a group of our people to Israel and the Holy Land, I had the privilege of riding a camel around a gas station. That's what we did – we paid our money, got on the camel and rode around the parking lot and we got down. And you think, “Oh, they had some camels; what's the big deal?” I'll tell you what the big deal is – when the enemy has them and you don't, that's a big deal. They had access to travel without exhausting their energy. They had access to be on top, looking down. They had access to go days without their instrument needing any water. That is an advantage to them.

So the Israelites come to this and look at their situation, rationalizing from a quantity perspective: they are in a mess! They are outnumbered thousands to one. They've got camels; we don't. In fact, if you look at the military armor that the Israelites have, what did they possess in verse 8? Trumpets! That's right – they sent the orchestra in to fight the battle! You think a trumpet across the head would hurt, but how are you going to reach them? They're on top of a camel. Do you see the situation that we have?

But any time we begin to rationalize that there's no way the Lord can pull us through this, there's no way that God can do this; we forget how important it is to look upon past precedents. I just want to address a couple of the stories, a couple of the situations in scripture, leading up to this that would have been known by every one of those 300 people and I hope it's known by you.

Back in the Book of Genesis chapter 6 the Lord says the whole world is wicked in every way. The whole world has gone contrary to Him. So He decides to move in a mighty way – we know it as Noah's flood; forty days and nights of rain, fifteen months on the boat. The whole world is wicked – that's a quantity issue, is it not? But yet, Noah, Mrs. Noah, their three sons and their three daughters-in-law and all the animals got on the boat. In other words, in past times the deliverance of God had nothing to do with quantity and everything to do with who “was in charge.” So even in Noah's day it wasn't a quantity issue.

We can go a little further to a man who was known as the Father of the Israelites, the Father of the Jews – a man by the name of Abram who would later become Abraham. He's at the Tower of Babel when all the languages are confounded, when the whole world is going contrary to the things of God. The Lord, after He dismisses everybody, says I'm going to call somebody out who is going to reach the nations with My truth. He does not call out the majority; He calls out the minority. He says, "Abram, I need you, your wife and your nephew." That's right – three people to go to a land you know not of. And what happened? The world was changed in a mighty way. Eight people on a boat, three people in the desert; but the number can get smaller.

The most famed story in the Israelites history, still celebrated this day, is that great holiday we know as Passover. It is that time period when they had been enslaved by the Egyptians for 400 years. That a Pharaoh had risen up that knew not Joseph. They had been beaten down; they had gotten to the point where they were small in number and even smaller in power. And the Lord said I desire to take them out of that situation, to deliver them out of that situation. So what did He do? Did He raise up a mighty army that was bigger than Egypt? No, He called out a man who couldn't talk and his brother who would. He sent them to Pharaoh – imagine that scenario: it's two against everybody! Study the story of the exodus and the Israelites coming out; they were always outnumbered, always out-powered. In fact, these guys had camels, the Israelites didn't; the Egyptians had chariots, the Israelites didn't. Past precedents stated their present situation wasn't as bad as they thought it was because in God's economy numbers mean nothing.

But then there's the future fulfillment. If we were to take ourselves into the New Testament, we would see that God did not change His math formula from the Book of Judges. He continues it because in the gospels Jesus Christ, God in flesh, the Savior of humanity, though He fed the multitudes and amazed the thousands, He comes in on Palm Sunday with tens of thousands of people saying, "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," He literally changed the world with eleven men. I'm taking Judas

out of the equation. Eleven men, not the majority; in fact, they would have had a minority vote in the Sanhedrin. They could not have battled against the Romans. It was eleven men who took the world and completely changed it with the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ in their lives.

Let's keep going on in the New Testament. We get a man who used to be Saul who is now Paul, the greatest Christian missionary in all of Christendom, in particular in the New Testament. On his missionary journeys did he gather so many people up that they would outnumber the local synagogue so as to out-vote them? In fact, you will notice he goes along with Luke; then there are other journeys with John Mark and Barnabas - just a couple of guys walking in with the power of God. In fact, 1 Thessalonians, which is the first chronological letter of the Apostle Paul, says in the first chapter that our word came to you in power. Not in number, not in quantity, but in power.

We could keep going all the way to the Book of Revelation that we studied this last summer. You study the Book of Revelation, and in particular, when you get to chapter 11 the antichrist is running rampant and everybody is against the things of God, but guess what? Two men rise up, Moses and Elijah; the two witnesses come up and what happens with them? As long as the Lord's power and presence and Spirit are with them then nobody can go against them. From Genesis to Revelation, you don't ever have to worry about a quantity problem with God because you and God together make a majority. But we rationalize and say, "But God, we don't have enough forces; we don't have enough people; we don't have enough money; we don't have enough this or that." What you've got is a rationalization problem because never, from Noah to the two witnesses, did numbers really matter that much.

Sometimes it's a quantity issue, but there's also another issue called quality. We rationalize with God because we say, "God, You obviously don't understand that I'm not even capable of doing this. I don't have the abilities; I don't have the education; I don't have this; I don't have that." And we begin to dismiss ourselves.

In fact, this situation was very present in this story. If you will look back into chapter 6, verse 11, I want you to see where Gideon was when the Lord called him. I'm going to give you the new, revised Jeff version. We're going to put the real version on the screen but let me read it to you as if it happened in my world. "And this guy was scared out of his mind so he went and hid in the winepress because he didn't want to die." No, it said he was in the winepress hiding the wheat for fear of the Midianites. The army was coming, he knew he was outnumbered and he just wanted to somehow survive the attack without becoming a casualty. This is the leader by the way. The leader is the guy that was hiding in the winepress.

Then he gets a group of army together and there are 300 of them. I'll be honest with you; I've done the research and I've been familiar with this story ever since I was as tall as a grasshopper – and no, I'm not still that height so don't even go there! The story is from 32,000 to 300 and there is this big deal about the fact that the men who get down and lap with their hands to their mouths become the 300. And I've heard all the stories: that showed that they were aware of their situation, they were always looking at the enemy. And there are all these nice little devotionals written about this, but I'm going to be honest with you. In light of the story in the Book of Judges, the Lord said I don't want anybody to get credit for this so why would we give credit to a bunch of guys by saying they knew what they were doing? There is nothing militarily strategic about anything they did. How much power or authority do you have because you can drink with your hands up to your mouth and you know how to blow a trumpet? That's all they've got.

So when you say, "But Lord, you don't understand. I just don't have the skills. I don't have the abilities," neither did they. They didn't have any of that. So I want to comfort you because their present situation was also based on some past precedents. Let's go back to the same characters we've already been studying.

How about Noah? It says "But Noah found grace in the eyes of God," Genesis 6:8. That's great, but do you know what Noah did when he got off



the boat? He got drunk and he got naked: there's a good qualified candidate right there! You say, "Yes, that's who we want in the position." In other words, when you look at Noah and say but God used Noah, Noah wasn't much different from most of our people. He had issues; he had struggles; he had temptations. You say but God needs to use somebody that is perfect. Find somebody He used that was perfect that wasn't the Lord Himself, Jesus.

You can move forward. Abram: a righteous, Godly man. Yes; he lied about his wife at least twice and he had a child with a woman who wasn't his wife at least once. That will get you qualified – qualified for a lot of things other than this, but God said I can use that. How about Moses? Moses must have been a qualified individual. That's right – he was a murderer, he lied about it and then he hid for forty years. Do you get the pattern here?

So let's go to the New Testament. How about those disciples; how qualified were they? Not very: Matthew was a cheat and a liar; James and John had a reputation for beating people up and Peter couldn't keep his mouth shut! And that's just four of them. Bartholomew doubted everything God said; he said surely nothing good can come from Nazareth. I can go through all of those guys and they were a disaster when it comes to the quality they possessed. Listen to me: God does not call the equipped; He equips the called.

So we move forward. How about Paul? I'll tell you what; wasn't he a qualified candidate to be a missionary? He wouldn't make it on any mission board we've got in America. Why? Because he was guilty of killing Christians; he lived a despicable life. Yet then in Acts chapter 9 he was miraculously saved. And those of you who have been or are going to go to Bible study today, as you study Romans chapter 7 here is the man who has led the missionary front, three major tours and he is primarily the instrument which God is going to use to write the majority of the New Testament. And in Romans chapter 7, this great qualified man of God says, "The things I want to do I can't do and the things I don't want to do I keep doing. I'm struggling with sin; I'm struggling with temptation; I'm struggling."

Then you get further on in the Book of Revelation and there is a group of people known as the 144,000. We studied them this summer. If you weren't here for that don't worry – in a few weeks the book is going to come out and you can read all about it. One hundred forty-four thousand come in; the tribes are reunited. They're going against the forces of the antichrist and they're surviving. But as you study the Book of Revelation closely, these same 144,000 fell for the lie of the antichrist. They bought the lie; they went the wrong way for three and one-half years and then said, "Oh my, what did we just do?"

From Genesis to Revelation, quantity is never an issue with God and neither is quality. Let me tell you what qualifies you to be used by God. It's really simple. There has to be a time and a place in your life, no matter what your age is, when you realize that you are a sinner. You realize that you have strayed from the ways of God. You realize that you are bound for hell without Jesus Christ and you ask, "Jesus, save me. Jesus, forgive me." The Bible says that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And do you realize the moment you said, "Jesus, save me," you just got enlisted into the army of the Lord. And you say, "But I don't even know how to drink water or blow a trumpet!" You're perfectly qualified for His army. But we rationalize and say, "But Lord, I don't have this gift. I don't have this talent. I don't have this ability." And we so rationalize how many are out there and who we are that we never let God ever move in our lives.

That leads me to the final point. It's a question I have for you and the question is simply this: why not us? Why does God not move through you? Why does God not move through your family? Why could God not move through this church or this community? It's the question: "God, why not us?" I want to answer the question why not you? Let's look at our present situation; let's look at some past precedents; and let's look at some future fulfillment for just a moment.

What is our present situation? You and I, when it comes to quantity and quality, are in a mess! Eighty-seven percent of east Atlanta (if you're a guest

here and you're not from east Atlanta, I don't know what your statistics are), is un-churched, lost or both. That means if you go to Wal-Mart and throw a rock (please don't do that), you're going to hit a lost person. We are completely outnumbered with quantity and we are also outnumbered with quality. Those entities that have a non-Christian perspective, a non-Biblical perspective, are the ones who are controlling the air-waves, the print and all that "stuff" that is out there. And how easy is it for us to say, "Oh but Lord, if we just had the majority, if we just had the television, if we just had this or that." And the Lord is saying, "Hello – I took 300 guys with trumpets and I whipped the grasshoppers!" Our present situation is no different than Gideon's.

So what about past precedents? How have believers, believers that aren't chronicled in the Bible, believers just like you and me on this side of the cross, what's the historical precedent? I could give you a list, but I'm not going to do it today, of every major movement of God in the last four to five hundred years and show you that millions were saved, millions were changed, that literally countries and continents were altered for the gospel, but guess how it always started? With a small group of people. Martin Luther didn't have anybody beside him. Jeremiah Lanphier in 1858 had three people that were praying with him. And I could go list after list of all the great movements and all the great revivals that started with a small group of people like Noah, like Abram, and like Moses who just said, "Okay Lord, whatever it takes, I'll just do what You ask me to do. If you want me to run around my building with pots and pans screaming, it doesn't make a lick of sense but I'll do it." It took down Jericho. The greatest revivals that have taken place in the last four to five hundred years didn't take place with a vote by a political body; they took place with a small group of men and women who said, "Lord, may it happen through us because of You." That's the past precedent.

So what about the future fulfillment? What happens when a group of people, though small in number compared to society, though less qualified compared to society, get together and say we want to do something just so that God can get the credit? I'm glad you asked because I want to show you a short video of something

that happened in the life of your church and in the life of your community seven days ago. Watch this video and notice the similarity with Judges 7.

(Video: over 300 members from First Baptist Church of Conyers went into the Pinedale community to do yard work, have a block party and donate shoes.) An army of people descended on a neighborhood with the most powerful weapons in the world – rakes, shovels and trash bags! That's how you take over a neighborhood; that's how you make a difference!

One of the advantages that I have is that I get to hear things you don't get to hear and read things you don't get to read. And I got an email this week that just came to our main server here, not directly to me; they just sent it to the church. I won't name the name or the house number of the person that lived there in Pinedale but I want you to hear what they said. They thanked you for coming and they thanked you for giving them hope again. Hope – not a cut yard, not a clean sidewalk, not trash out of the living room, but hope. I don't know who this person is; I may never meet them in my life. A few hundred of us went a couple of miles away. We were outnumbered; we weren't real qualified but we brought hope because we went with one purpose and one Person: that Jesus Christ would get the honor and the glory for what we did. So I want to ask you one question: not what can we do, but what can we do if we let the Lord take charge? Let's pray.