

Opening Scripture: Psalm 118: 14–18 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. ¹⁵ There are shouts of joy and victory in the tents of the righteous: “The Lord’s right hand performs valiantly! ¹⁶ The Lord’s right hand is raised. The Lord’s right hand performs valiantly!” ¹⁷ I will not die, but I will live and proclaim what the Lord has done. ¹⁸ The Lord disciplined me severely but did not give me over to death.

Introduction: In the historic Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C., Spartan warriors, led by King Leonidas, fought fearlessly against the innumerable hordes of Persian soldiers sent by Xerxes I. Positioned between the impassable mountains on one side, and the Gulf of Malia on the other, the Spartans created a bottleneck where they repelled waves of Persian troops using their now famous phalanx, an impenetrable wall of bronze shields interlocked together. For several days, the Spartans held their ground, displaying remarkable courage and skill. However, a Spartan traitor led the Persians to a mountain path that allowed them to outflank the Spartans. Realizing that defeat was imminent, Leonidas ordered most of his men, numbering about 70,000 at the start, to retreat and rejoin and rally the forces of Greece to fight another day. Sacrificing himself and a small contingent of 300 soldiers to delay the Persians’ march into Athens. The Battle of Thermopylae and the legend of the 300 served as a rallying cry for Greek resistance and remains an enduring tale of sacrifice and heroism.

Today, we’re looking at the Jewish “300”—the Battle against Midian led by JeruBaal—Gideon the son of Joash. The story is so memorable because it involves victory despite impossible odds, subterfuge as they created the illusion of a far larger army, divinely inspired confusion as the Midianite tribes turn on each other in the fog of war, the relentless pursuit of the surviving Canaanite combatants, all resulting in the renown of Gideon as Israel’s fearless and faithful leader.

But unlike the Spartans, this “300” ends in the victory of God’s people. Unlike the Greeks, the Jewish tribes trust in the true God of heaven who fights for them.

Main Thought: Gideon’s story is a picture of the triumph of salvation faith.

How do we see the Triumph of Faith in this story?

Judges 7:1–8 Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops who were with him, got up early and camped beside the spring of Harod (*en Harod*, the “spring of trembling,” probably the modern ‘Ain Jalud at the foot of Mount Gilboa). The camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley (the Jezreel Valley). ² The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many troops for me to hand the Midianites over to them, or else Israel might elevate themselves over me and say, ‘I saved myself.’ ³ Now announce to the troops, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand of the troops turned back, but ten thousand remained.

⁴ Then the LORD said to Gideon, “There are still too many troops. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. If I say to you, ‘This one can go with you,’ he can go. But if I say about anyone, ‘This one cannot go with you,’ he cannot go.” ⁵ So he brought the troops down to the water, and the LORD said to Gideon, “Separate everyone who laps water with his tongue like a dog. Do the same with everyone who kneels to drink.” ⁶ The number of those who lapped with their hands to their mouths was three hundred men, and all the rest of the troops knelt to drink water. ⁷ The LORD said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the three hundred men who lapped and hand the Midianites over to you. But everyone else is to go home.” ⁸ So Gideon sent all the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred troops, who took the provisions and their rams’ horns. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

God initiates a two-phased sifting process. God presents Gideon with the terms and the means of His testing—he is to remove the fearful and the kneeling lappers.

He commands Gideon to choose the men who knelt and scooped the water up with their hands vs. the ones who got down on all fours and lapped the water like thirsty dogs. Much has been made of the distinction, but honestly, I think there isn’t much to go on. We know these men aren’t fearful based on the first act of thinning out. So, why send *courageous men home*? Some have also suggested that their drinking technique revealed something about their awareness or readiness. But the emphasis on the text seems to be purely on *numbers*. God *knew only 300 would scoop the water with their hands, and that’s what he wanted*. He wanted a small number of troops because he intended that the story would remind future generations of *HIS power and his strength*.

That night the Lord said to him, “Get up and attack the camp, for I have handed it over to you. ¹⁰ But if you are afraid to attack the camp, go down with Purah your servant. ¹¹ Listen to what they say, and then you will be encouraged to attack the camp.” So he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the troops who were in the camp.

¹² Now the Midianites, Amalekites, and all the people of the east had settled down in the valley like a swarm of locusts, and their camels were as innumerable as the sand on the seashore. ¹³ When Gideon arrived, there was a man telling his friend about a dream. He said, “Listen, I had a dream: a loaf of barley bread came tumbling (Heb. *mithappek*, means “over-turning” and describes the flaming sword of the Angel guarding the entrance to Eden which “turned in all directions.” See Gen 19:21, 25, 29

which uses the same word to describe the overthrow of Sodom and Gamorah) into the Midianite camp, struck a tent, and it fell. The loaf turned the tent upside down so that it collapsed.”

¹⁴ His friend answered, “This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has handed the entire Midianite camp over to him.”

Now, barley bread was just about the most common type of bread in this region and was thought to be more plentiful and accessible to the poor than wheat flour. The vision of a common loaf of bread decimating the sprawling tents of Bedouin soldiers was portentous. A sign of their demise.

¹⁵ When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to Israel’s camp and said, “Get up, for the Lord has handed the Midianite camp over to you.” ¹⁶ Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies and gave each of the men a ram’s horn in one hand and an empty pitcher with a torch inside it in the other hand.

¹⁷ “Watch me,” he said to them, “and do what I do. When I come to the outpost of the camp, do as I do. ¹⁸ When I and everyone with me blow our rams’ horns, you are also to blow your rams’ horns all around the camp. Then you will say, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon!’”

Gideon’s immediate response is to fall on his knees and worship God. Now he returns from this confirming sign with a stalwart and unshakeable faith in God’s plan to overthrow the Midianites.

His conversion is complete—he finally believes the word of the LORD now confirmed in the mouths of his enemies. Gideon is the mighty man of courage God had always intended him to be.

¹⁹ Gideon and the hundred men who were with him went to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch after the sentries had been stationed. They blew their rams’ horns and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. ²⁰ The three companies blew their rams’ horns and shattered their pitchers. They held their torches in their left hands and their rams’ horns to blow in their right hands, and they shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!” ²¹ Each Israelite took his position around the camp, and the entire Midianite army began to run, and they cried out as they fled. **²² When Gideon’s men blew their three hundred rams’ horns, the Lord caused the men in the whole army to turn on each other with their swords.** They fled to Acacia House in the direction of Zererah as far as the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath. ²³ Then the men of Israel were called from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, and they pursued the Midianites.

Clearly, the rumor of Gideon of Israel has been circulating through the Midianite camp. The whole scene would have created the illusion that their troops were far greater in number. And the breaking of the pots, the light of the torches, combined with the apparent rumor that this Israelite warrior was gunning for them—the whole scene creates a panic, and God is arranging the whole incident.

The LORD throws their troops into confusion, disarray and disunity, and the Israelites don’t even raise a sword.

Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim with this message: “Come down to intercept the Midianites and take control of the watercourses ahead of them as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they took control of the watercourses as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan. ²⁵ They captured Oreb and Zeeb, the two princes of Midian; they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb, while they were pursuing the Midianites. They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.

It seems as though Gideon is calling the dismissed troops back to the battle to finish the job. We can surmise this because the 300 soldiers were already “with him” in the trumpet, pottery, torch initiative. And now the rest of the tribesmen, including Ephraim, will be called to serve.

God has made it so they will have to fight their enemies, but God’s victory at Moreh emboldens his people to take up arms and finish the job.

We see here vivid portrayal of God’s saving grace and the triumph of sure faith.

1. Saving faith abandons trust in anything other than Christ (Judges 1:2, 4). “You have too many troops”... “There are still too many troops.” **Gideon’s faith was tested by an otherwise absurd command.** God took away from them, at least initially, everything they would have trusted. As we’ve seen in other victories (Deborah and Barak), God doesn’t always do this. So, I think this story more aptly illustrates our salvation post-Pentecost.

Consider Paul’s recounting of his own religious achievements. Now he counts all of those achievements and his heritage—not as a source of personal pride—but as “trash.”

Every person here faces an existential threat to their existence. When you die you have no hope for life. We will go to one of two places—we will be absent from the body and present with the LORD in heaven’s glory. Or we will be in hell which is the opposite of heaven. The Bible makes it clear that hell is a place of eternal conscious torment.

What are you trusting in today?

- **If you’re trusting in your religious heritage,** the fact that you were raised in a Christian or a very devout religious home. John the Baptist told the Pharisees, the most devout men with unarguably the most enviable religious heritage that if God wanted to, he could raise up sons of Abraham from the rocks on the ground.
- **If you’re trusting in good works**—either a religious regiment or general moral goodness. If you’ve trusted the fact that you were baptized as a child (and yet there is no evidence of a converted heart or life); or the fact that you went through confirmation class at your church, or were bar mitzvah’d, or performed some sacraments—listen if you’re trusting in your relative goodness comparing yourself to really, super evil people, or your religious goodness because you’ve don’t all these things and kept as many rules as you could—hoping that God would grade you on a curve—you will be lost for eternity in hell. Jesus said, “This is eternal life—to know the one He has sent.” **Do you know Jesus this morning?** To know him is to love him—and to love him is to obey him. And it’s in our obedient faith that we find the life that God intended for us.
- **You may be here today trusting in the material world**—convinced that science will discover some way of preserving the conscious mind after the body’s death, or maybe you’re hoping for a spectacular medical breakthrough that will be able to print you a new heart valve or a new lung or kidney, or an advanced therapy for cancer or diabetes. It doesn’t matter how much salad, kale, and broccoli you throw at the problem; it makes no difference how many medical or technological wonders are brought to bear on our predicament—make no mistake about it—eventually, we all expire. 100% of us. And if your faith, your trust is in anything other than the salvation that was purchased and bought at the price of Jesus’ death for you, then you are living with false security. And on that day you will not be able to appeal to anything you previously trusted in.

Jesus may be saying today, “You have too many troops—too much that you’re trusting in to experience genuine saving faith. So let go of them because they can’t save you, only my power can save you.”

Saving faith—a faith that triumphs for eternity—humbly relinquishes trust in anything to save us that is not the grace and finished work of Christ on his cross.

This is what God is doing in Gideon’s story—he’s stripping away everything that he could trust in so that God alone receives the credit for the victory, all glory for their salvation.

2. Saving faith is always tested by and encouraged in adverse circumstances (Judges 7:3b, 7). “So, twenty-two thousand of the troops turned back, but ten thousand remained... 7 ‘I will deliver you with the three hundred men who lapped and hand the Midianites over to you. But everyone else is to go home.’” So, in that moment when God begins to rid our lives of all those things we trusted in, there is a moment of genuine panic that can shoot through our nervous systems and it feels a little like getting tased. After a shaky start, we begin this chapter noticing his transformation in full swing. He’s starting to believe that God is with him and he’s starting to act like the valorous and courageous leader that the AOTL declared him to be. But, whatever modicum of faith, whatever quantum of solace he took in amassing 32,000 troops—God seems intent on wringing it out of him.

Folks, you can rest assured that if your faith is genuine, God will test it. Now, if you’ve had an easy believism—a faith that is molded and shaped by the culture and its trends, fashioned by whatever the flavor of the month is in the world—then be assured, that kind of faith will fail you when tested. If you’ve built the house of your life on that shallow, marshy, boggy ground of the latest ideological fashions of the world, then that faith will collapse when the rains and the winds of suffering beat against the life you’ve built.

But if your faith is authentically in Christ, and you have responded to his command to repent of your unbelief, trust in Christ alone for salvation, and devote yourself as a disciple to walking and living according to his Word—it’s doctrines and values—your faith will be tried, tested, and refined—*proven authentic and purified in the fires of life’s trials*.

Look at how Peter put this for the believers scattered across the Roman Empire in the first century:

1 Peter 1:3–9 NIV Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. (The believer is born again into a new and living hope—our inheritance of resurrection life). This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (Furthermore, he says, this inheritance, which is a resurrected body and life, is warehoused in heaven awaiting that final day— and the faith we have now safeguards us as we await the blessed hope: the glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior Jesus). ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to ***suffer grief in all kinds of trials***.

⁷ These have come ***so that the proven genuineness of your faith***—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—***may result in praise, glory and honor*** when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. He said, “You are receiving it” and “You anticipate receiving it.” It’s like winning a Lottery that offered you *both* yearly Lottery annuity payments—30 installments. And then you get to the end and discover, that they have the same amount now to pay you in one lump sum. You say, “Wait, I already received the 30

installments, and now you're telling me I also get the same amount in one lump sum? What kind of lottery pays like that?" The resurrection lottery does. We receive the earnest down—the presence of the Holy Spirit now—his comfort, his peace, his companionship, his conviction, his assurance and joy. Resurrection life paid out over the course of our lives. And then a treasure beyond words awaits us, kept for us in heaven, awaiting that day. John Piper once stated, "The devil only has two weapons: pain and pleasure. He will either hurt you so bad that you hate God, or give you so much pleasure that you don't need God. The solution to both is the same—God is more precious than what I lose, and God is more precious than what I gain."

And the key to being shielded from the temptations of too much evil or too much excess is a growing, thriving, confident *faith that is buffeted by trials and burnished as gold*.

From this passage, we observe several truths about our faith: Peter tells us of...

- The virtue of our faith (1 Peter 1:6): What is the usefulness or benefit of having it? It reminds us that our trials are temporary; Paul: "Our light and momentary trials").
- The validity of our faith (1 Peter 1:7a): How is faith shown to be legitimate? It is proven genuine by trials and suffering.
- The value of our faith (1 Peter 1:7b): What could be more treasured than a tested, refined hope in Jesus that proves authentic? Nothing in the world is more valuable. Nothing the world has to offer could be of commensurate value and worth.
- The victory of our faith (1 Peter 1:7c): Peter here uses several terms ripped from the military processions where the victors received praise, glory, and honor. Now, most often the words "praise, glory, and honor" refer to God or Christ. But they are also applied to the praise, glory and honor that the believer will see when Christ returns to deliver the victory of their faith (See John 12:43 "they loved human praise more than **praise from God**"); glory (Paul elsewhere says "those he justified **he also glorified**" Rom 8:30); and honor (Rom 2:7 "those who seek **glory, honor, immortality**" versus the things of this passing, transient world).
- The vision of our faith (1 Peter 1:8): While enduring impossible trials in this life, what should be the focus of our lives? Our faith fixates on the author and perfecter—Jesus, who imparts an indescribable and ineffable joy.
- The vindication of our faith (1 Peter 1:9): How will my faith in Jesus be finally shown to have been true? We receive the reward of our hope—the final salvation of our very souls.

So back to Gideon—**Gideon's story is a picture of how God saves us by faith and tests and refines us through trials.**

But it's also a picture of God encouraging genuine saving faith in the midst of our suffering.

Remember the incident we read earlier: After the LORD had reduced Gideon's forces to a meager 300, he then commands the general to rise up and defeat Midian. However, knowing that a grain of fear was still left in him, the Lord proposed that Gideon

take his servant Purah and listen in on the conversations circulating within the enemy camp. So, Gideon and Purah crept down and hid behind a wagon. The first thing they observed was a vast uncountable number of Midianites, Amalekites, and Arameans settled in the valley, which initially might seem very *discouraging*. But then they eavesdrop on two soldiers from the pagan coalition forces conversing. One of them excitedly shared a dream he had experienced, recounting how a loaf of barley bread had tumbled into the Midianite camp and struck a tent, causing its collapse and turning it upside down.

The other man recognized the significance of this dream and interpreted it as a prophetic sign of the sword-wielding Gideon, the son of Joash, the barley-bread-eating commoner of Israel. He believed God had undoubtedly given Gideon authority over the entire Midianite camp. Upon hearing the dream and its interpretation, Gideon bowed down in worship to God, which is always the right response! He returned to the camp, leading the Israelite tribes to a stunning victory.

No doubt, this brought him the encouragement and consolation he needed.

1 Thessalonians 3:2–3 “And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to **strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith**, ³so that **no one will be shaken by these afflictions**. For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.” God means to test us. Those fiery trials can leave us feeling despondent and depressed at times. They certainly left Paul and his companions that way. But in the midst of that, God also encourages our faith through brothers and sisters in Christ who come alongside us so that we will not be “shaken” in our afflictions.

1. Saving faith abandons trust in anything other than Christ (Judges 1:2, 4). “You have too many troops”... “There are still too many troops.”

2. Saving faith is always tested by and encouraged in adverse circumstances (Judges 7:3b, 7). Would you be encouraged today? Be encouraged by the fact that your treasures are stored up in heaven—your new resurrection body and eternity with Christ. Would you be encouraged by your brothers and sisters who share your anguishing heart? Who can come alongside you to bring consolation so that you will not be shaken by your afflictions?