

June 25, 2023

“The LORD Alone Can Save”  
Judges 7:1-25

FCF: Our struggle with dependency

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) The LORD alone can save.  
(anchor) So we must trust in Him alone.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Here’s something a friend of mine said recently. Actually, he says it all the time. “I don’t do anything on my own. I only do what I see my father doing, what I know he wants me to do.”

What do you make of that? Most of us would probably say, “He needs to grow up, to mature, to put some distance between him and his father, and become more independent.” That makes sense. But would it matter if you knew who said it? (**READ John 5:19**) Jesus is speaking of His dependency on His Father. Which tells us something about what it means to follow Him.

We’re pressing on this morning in our series through Judges and the account of Gideon.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** **Judges 7:1-25****PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

I mentioned Star Wars last week and the lessons we can draw from such modern myths. Here’s one worth considering - salvation comes through weakness. There are hints of this all through the original trilogy. The odds are against the Rebels and their junky ships and motley alliance. Little wonder we keep hearing the refrain, “I’ve got a bad feeling about this.” But it comes out all the more with the little furry heroes in *Return of the Jedi*. I mean the Ewoks, these primitive goofballs that take down the Empire. Honestly, I’ve never liked them. I much prefer Wookies to Ewoks. It’s a sticking point for many fans. But perhaps that’s missing the point. It may not be popular and it may go against our instincts. But salvation comes through weakness.

Or, if I can expand on that, it’s in our weakness that God shows forth His strength. Perhaps that’s why we don’t care for the Ewoks and what they remind us of. Which brings us to this section of Gideon’s story in Judges 7. We see this very thing here. We may chafe against our dependency and the idea of acknowledging our weakness. But salvation comes through weakness. Put another way, the LORD alone can save. So we must turn and trust in Him alone.

What do we learn here in Judges 7 about this salvation and this God who alone can save us? Our text points us to three things. First, the power of our savior. Second, the patience of our savior. And then, third, the persistence of our savior. Each of these are incredibly profound.

**I. THE POWER OF OUR SAVIOR**

First, the power of our savior (**READ Judges 7:2**). This is really the key point of the text.

*A) What He Says*

Think about what the LORD is saying here. If you go back to the last chapter, the need is pretty clear. This is a battered beleaguered people. And this is right on the eve of the battle.

## 1. The expectation

So what's the expectation? The enemy is too much for them. Surely they need more numbers!

2. The surprise

That then brings the surprise. Yes, the enemy is too much for them. But they need less numbers.

*B) Why He Says This*

Again, what did the LORD say? (**READ Judges 7:2**) He has a clear purpose in this.

1. Our stubborn tendency

Our stubborn tendency is to rely on ourselves, to credit our contributions, to trust in our methods. Which means our default, once things are resolved, is to then praise and boast in ourselves.

2. The deep reality

That's our stubborn tendency. That's the default setting for us all. But that flies in the face of the deep reality that God alone can save. He alone is due the praise and trust in all things. And He is determined that we would know this - so much so that we see it patterned in these real events.

Judges 7 and this battle shows forth the power of the LORD. And His well due praise.

*Illustration:*

Think to how this battle plays out. Yes, we can say the strategy was sound and the tactics were wise. The timing was clever and using the trumpets and torches negated the size disparity and the difference in the strength of these two armies. But it was all set up by the LORD.

And the outcome was all of His hand (**READ Judges 7:20-22a**). How much did Gideon's army actually do? They broke their jars, blew their trumpets, and stood and watched. That's it.

*Application:*

This was the power of the LORD at work. This is how we begin and continue through the Christian life (**READ Romans 1:17**). We cannot save ourselves. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And that is also how we grow. The character traits we long to aspire towards are all the "fruit of the Spirit." This is Christianity 101, the very basics.

And we never outgrow it. Listen to Jesus' words (**READ John 15:5**). What does this tell us? If there is little fruit in your life, you need to ask yourself, where you are abiding? Where are you trying to draw life from? Who or what are you relying on? Turn to Jesus. Turn to Jesus.

The LORD alone can save. He alone is our strength. So we must trust in Him alone.

## **II. THE PATIENCE OF OUR SAVIOR**

Which brings us to the second thing, the patience of our savior. He is deeply committed to our deep reliance upon Him. So good. We see this in His dealings with Gideon in vv.9-15.

*A) To Calm the Fear*

How does this begin? (**READ Judges 7:9-11a**) The LORD knew and met Gideon's need.

1. The initial sight

He wanted to calm Gideon's stubborn fear. Think how this played out. Gideon and his servant go down into the enemy camp. What is the initial sight? Innumerable enemies and resources.

## 2. The assurance

Not what they were hoping for. But then comes the eavesdropping and the assurance. They learn of the dream of a loaf that knocks down the tent. They hear the interpretation of the dream. They pick up on the terror that has overcome their enemy. And with that comes the assurance.

### *B) To Stretch the Faith*

The LORD is patient to calm the fear of His servant. But also to stretch his faith.

#### 1. Gideon's preference

After all, how does this assurance come? Gideon would surely have preferred to receive this news at his own camp, a place of safety. Surely, Gideon desired to stay right where he was.

#### 2. The LORD's insistence

But the LORD insists on his going down into the enemy's camp, into a place of risk. Gideon had to trust the LORD here. That's where he hears of the dream and its message. Going there was how he was assured. Doing the risky thing was how it came. Which proved to be no risk at all. The assurance he needed from the LORD came as he walked in obedience to His commands.

And, again, this was all by the LORD's initiative. And all through surprising means.

### *Illustration:*

Summer has just started. No few of us will be taking road trips and finding ourselves relying on others for directions. We may well hear, "You can't get there from here." This route is not what you think, not what you want. Just as this assurance - it comes through obedience.

### *Application:*

Where do you need assurance this morning? Perhaps of your security and status with God in the midst of failure. Perhaps of His working and and purpose in the midst of suffering.

How does His assurance come? We see hints of it here - through His word and people. Why might we lack this assurance? It could be we have been unwilling to listen. We refuse to go down into the camp. We don't want to be stretched, to risk, to really depend upon the LORD.

But, again, the LORD alone can save. So we must trust in Him and His means alone.

## **III. THE PERSISTENCE OF OUR SAVIOR**

Which brings us to our third point, the persistence of our savior. We see this especially in vv.3-8. The LORD mercifully meets our stubbornness at every turn. "Too many?" we say. Yes.

### *A) Through Sensible Means*

How does He reduce our numbers and strength? Sometimes by very sensible means.

#### 1. The command

Think of the first of the two siftings of this army (**READ Judges 7:3**). The Old Testament law was clear. There were military exemptions for several classes of people - including the fearful. Fear can spread. It is contagious. So this is very practical and a concern for an army's morale.

#### 2. The assessment

Now this is all logical, right? It lines up well with our expectations and our reasoning.

*B) Through Surprising Means*

But that's not what we see in this second sifting. Here we see something surprising.

1. The command

(**READ Judges 7:4-5**) This is the great drinking test. We have two groups - kneelers and lappers.

2. The assessment

Now some have tried to make the case as to the rationale. There have been many theories as to why the 300 lappers were the better group to go with. But that's to miss the point entirely. The LORD said there were too many. So the issue is not the kind of troops but the number. Why? So that no one can say, "We did this." And everyone will have to say, "This was the LORD."

Note the persistence of our savior here. He is desperate that we might depend upon Him.

*Illustration:*

Think of the experience of the Apostle Paul (**READ 2 Corinthians 12:7-9**). The Lord had given Paul this vision. It was a transformative experience. But the Lord saw a risk here in Paul's life. And so, to keep him where he needed to be, in a place of trusting humble dependence, the Lord gave Paul not just a vision but a thorn. We don't know exactly what this was but it was something that continually drove Paul to Jesus. It wasn't in any way a mark of the Lord's apathy or indifference towards Paul. Not at all. It was a mark of His intense devotion to this man.

*Application:*

That is not unique to just apostles. This devotion of Jesus is true for all of His followers. It is true for us all still today, for you and me. What does this mean? Think with me. Have there been times in your life when the Lord has weakened you, exposed you, when He has caused you to see more clearly who it is who saves, times when He has worked through your weakness?

What impact did that have upon you? What was eventually birthed in your heart? Was it not praise for Him, deeper reliance and trust in Him? Would you want to undo that in any way?

The LORD alone can save. He wants us to know this. We need to trust in Him alone.

**CONCLUSION:**

There's a great line in C. S. Lewis' book, *Prince Caspian*, the second in the Chronicles of Narnia series. It's towards the very end of the story. Aslan and his army have put down this terrible insurrection and Caspian, the rightful heir to the throne, is brought to Aslan (**READ**):

"Welcome, Prince," said Aslan. "Do you feel yourself sufficient to take up the Kingship of Narnia?"

"I - I don't think I do, Sir," said Caspian. "I am only a kid."

"Good," said Aslan. "If you had felt yourself sufficient, it would have been proof that you were not."

That's the very thing we are learning here in Judges. And it holds true for every one of us.

So how should we respond? Pray a hymn. In 1872, Annie Hawks wrote a poem and brought it her pastor, Robert Lowry. Lowry could see the genius of her words and added but the refrain. It was published a year later. We still sing it from time to time today (**READ**):

(1) I need Thee ev'ry hour,  
Most gracious Lord;  
No tender voice like Thine  
Can peace afford.

(2) I need Thee ev'ry hour,  
Stay Thou nearby;  
Temptations lose their pow'r  
When Thou art nigh. [Refrain]

(3) I need Thee ev'ry hour,  
In joy or pain;  
Come quickly and abide,

Or life is vain. [Refrain]

(4) I need Thee ev'ry hour,  
Teach me Thy will;  
And Thy rich promises  
In me fulfill. [Refrain]

(Refrain:)  
I need Thee, oh, I need Thee;  
Ev'ry hour I need Thee;  
Oh, bless me now, my Savior,  
I come to Thee.

Such true and beautiful words. Praying that is a good and wise way for us to respond.

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