

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: The Strength You Have**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **Judges 6:1-14**

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. <sup>2</sup> Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. <sup>3</sup> Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. <sup>4</sup> They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. <sup>5</sup> They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. <sup>6</sup> Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.

<sup>7</sup> When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian, <sup>8</sup> he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>9</sup> I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. <sup>10</sup> I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."

<sup>11</sup> The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup> When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

<sup>13</sup> "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

<sup>14</sup>The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

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**Transcript:**

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Welcome to all of you that are here. Glad to have you here. Those of you joining us online, thank you for worshipping with us.

The scripture comes from Judges 6 and 7 and it says, "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. So for seven years, He gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, the Amalekites, and other Eastern people invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock in their tents like swarms of locusts. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help. The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son, Gideon, was threshing wheat in a wine press to keep it from the Midianites."

"When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The Lord is with you mighty warrior.' 'Pardon me, my Lord.' Gideon replied. 'But if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.' The Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?'"

So Holy Spirit I ask that you use these words to teach us and to make us more like Jesus in His name. Amen.

Amen.

Let's talk about the Mariners. Okay, so like yesterday's game, two games practically, 18 innings, didn't go the way we wanted to go. However, let's look at all the positives. This is a young team, right? This is a young team. They found their mojo. I think things look really good for next year, and the most important thing, they ended the longest playoff drought, not just in baseball, but in all of sports. But if they put that playoff drought, they ended that. And that game, that game where they ended the drought, now that wasn't.. Let's think about that game, shall we?

That was a happy game. That was an exciting game. In fact, right after that game where they ended the drought, MLB tweeted out, "Tie score, bottom of the ninth, two outs, the count is three and two. Cal Raleigh walks it off ending a 21 year playoff drought. How can you not be

romantic about baseball?" Amen. I am romantic about baseball. That's why I think they're going to win the World Series next year because this is a team that has found its confidence.

And one of my favorite players, he sums it up, Sam Haggerty or Swaggerty as his nickname is like he just has swagger. He just has confidence. His walkup music is the theme from the Godfather movies, movies about gangsters who kill people. Why? Like that could intimidate a pitcher. "I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse." He has swagger, he has confidence.

Do you have confidence? Do you have confidence that you can do the things that God has called you to do? Do you have confidence that you can be the kind of student, or parent, or spouse, or friend, or worker, or leader that God calls you to be? Do you believe that you can thrive through whatever challenge you're facing right now, whether it's financial, or relationships or health? Do you believe that you can thrive through that? Do you have confidence in that?

Well, we've been doing a sermon series about following God's leading in uncertain times, both in our lives individually and corporately as a church. And when we are following God's leading, He will lead us to things we are not sure that we can do. That's just a fact. He will lead us to things that we're not sure that we can do.

As a church, our mission is to participate with Jesus in furthering the Kingdom of God on the Eastside and the places in the world where He sends us. And Kingdom of God means when things are happening the way God wants them to happen. People are discovering Jesus and people are being brought out of poverty, and there's reconciliation between divisions, and families, and races, and nations, and all of that, that's the Kingdom of God.

Now, we are a group of talented people, but we cannot do that on our own. We need to work with other churches, so we do. But most importantly, we need God's power. Only God's power will bring His kingdom here. And over the next three to five years, we're going to do this by focusing on three things we've talked about. Equip our whole congregation to be fully engaged disciples, empower every generation to reach young families, and further develop our campus to serve the needs of our church and the Eastside. Those things can't be done without God's power. With God's power, they can be done.

Let me just take that first one, become disciples. A disciple is basically someone who is becoming like Jesus. That's a tall order isn't it? Can you become like Jesus? Yes you can, but only by God's power working in you, through you and working on you. And that's what we see in the story of Gideon that I just read. The background is for seven years Israel has been oppressed by a group of people called the Midianites. They come in, they take all of their crops, steal all of their food. So the Israelites are starving, they cry out to God and He responds.

And it says, "The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah," not Oprah, Ophrah, two very different things, "where Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press to keep it from the Midianites." So this is comic because the way you thrash wheat is you throw it high in the air so the wind blows all the chaff away and then the wheat falls to the ground. But Gideon

is thrashing wheat in a wine press, which is a hole in the ground. So there he is crouched down in fear of the Midianites, trying to thresh wheat in this hole. He's just cowering in fear. Is that ever you? Do you ever feel like you are crouched down in some kind of hole, lacking confidence in something God has called you to do, or because of some challenge that you're facing in your life? Are you ever like that, crouched down in some wine press?

The angel says to Gideon, "The Lord is with you mighty warrior." Again, crouched in the wine press, mighty warrior? Yeah, not so much. Which is why Gideon says, "Ah, pardon me my Lord." Basically who are you calling mighty warrior? "No mighty warriors here, just people crouching down in wine presses." If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Do you ever say that? "God, if you're with me, why am my finance is a mess? Why aren't I married yet? Why am I doing so badly in school? Why don't I have more friends? Why am I having this career problem? If you are with me God, why is all of this happening to me?"

See, the circumstances of our lives can rob us of our swagger, of our confidence. So God says to Gideon, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand." The strength you have. "What God exactly is that strength that I have? The Midianites, they're taking all of our crops, they're burning our villages to the ground. What strength are you talking about God?" What strength do we have as a church to do the things God has called us to do? What strength do you have to face the challenges that you're facing in your life? What strength do you have? Well, a couple of things. First strength is you are who God says you are, not who your parents say you are, not your teachers, or your boss says that you are. You're not even who you say you are. You do not even get to define you. God made you. He's the one that gets to define you, and He calls you a mighty warrior capable of doing more things than you think you can do. So who are you to argue with Him? He's God, He made you.

But Gideon does argue, Gideon dares to argue with God. And he says, "How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." There were 12 tribes in Israel, and Manasseh was not one of the cool tribes. Okay, not like Judah. Judah was the cool tribe. All the leaders came from Judah. Judah had swagger, not so much Manasseh, plus Gideon is the youngest son in a system that privileges the oldest. So he is saying, "Basically, I'm not cool, I'm not wealthy, I'm not strong, I'm not popular, I'm not educated. What can I do?" You ever say that? "I can't share my faith with people at school or at work? What if they ask me a question I don't know the answer to? What strength do I have? Shouldn't pastors do that sort of thing? I can't stand up to my friends or my boss if they're doing something unjust, I might get fired. I might lose friends. What strength do I have?" So then God says to Gideon, "I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites." Which is the second strength we have. God is with you.

And He will work through us, not just in spite of our failures, and our weaknesses, and our lack of credentials. He'll work through us, not just in spite of all of those things. Even more cool, sometimes He uses our weaknesses and our failures to accomplish His purposes.

Yes.

Here is a comforting truth. When God put a calling on your life, He already factored in your incompetence. Isn't that comforting? I like that. That's what God's saying to Gideon, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know Gideon. Your tribe is the weakest. You don't feel like a mighty warrior, blah, blah, blah. Whatever Gideon, I've already factored it in." God has already factored in your utter and complete incompetence as a parent, student, leader, evangelist, healer of injustice, whatever it is. He is going to work not just in spite of maybe even because of your numerous incompetencies, and all of mine. All of us have weaknesses. All of us has flaws. All of us have failures. That's not a lack of faith, that's being human. But the good news is, God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called.

If we look within ourselves for our sense of confidence and adequacy, we will toggle between two extremes, arrogance on the one side, and insecurity on the other. And both arrogance and insecurity are based on who? Me. But if our confidence comes from what God can do, it makes us both humble and courageous. Because it's based on God, not me.

And we so often lean, we so often lean on our credentials, our education, our money, our skills, the things we know how to do. And those can be helpful things, but they are also dangerous things. Because they've worked so well for us that we just keep leaning on the things that we have in our own strength, which shrinks our vision down to what we can accomplish in our own strength instead of the much, much bigger things God can accomplish in His.

Now, we're always still involved in the process. Gideon's going to have to fight some battles here. But if we know that it is God who is empowering us, it gives us God size vision, and God size courage, and we don't shrink our vision down to what we can do. We expanded what God can do.

I know a man who was hired as a pastor when he was only 28 years old. And there was this one man in his congregation who would say to him constantly, Sunday after Sunday, "You're too young to be my pastor. My kids are older than you. You have nothing to teach me. I can learn nothing from you. You're too young."

Well finally, one Sunday when this man said, "You're too young to be my pastor," my friend held up a Bible that was in his hand and he said, "I may only be 28 years old, but when I preach from this I am 2,000 years old." That's a good comeback, isn't it? It's kind of a mic drop moment. His confidence was not in his age, his confidence was not in his education, his confidence was in Jesus working through him.

It is not too big of a vision for us to say as a church, that we exist to participate in bringing God's Kingdom here and around the world. That is not too big of a vision. That is not just church

being grandiose, that is not too big of a vision, if, if, if what we're relying on is God's power, not our own. It is not too big of a thing for God to do. If God leads you to it, He will see you through it. And I know that begs the question, "Well, what is God leading me to do? How do I know what God is leading me to?" That's next week's sermon, so come back next week. But for this week, if God leads you to it, He will see you through it, through His power, not ours.

Gideon raises an army of 32,000 soldiers, and then God says something that makes no sense at all. He says, "You have too many men. I can't deliver Midian into their hands or Israel would boast, 'My own strength has saved me.'" This is weird. This is like God saying, "Your grades are too high to get into college. I need you to get some Ds." It's just weird.

But here's the thing. God increases our courage by decreasing our resources. You heard me right. Often God increases our courage by decreasing our resources so that we see what He can do, not what we can do in our own power. So if you right now feel like you don't have enough of something, "I don't have enough money, I don't have credentials, I don't have enough time, I don't have whatever it is, I don't have enough education, whatever it is." If you feel like you lack something, that is good news. Because God is about to show you what He can do in His power, not what you can do in yours. And that makes all of us brave because God can do anything. God tells Gideon, "Announce that anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave. So 22,000 men left." I love that. "If you're afraid, you can go home." "Well since you say so, run away, run away."

And then God says, "The army is still too big." He comes up with the weirdest idea ever. If you know the story, it's so weird. He says, "Take them to the river and separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink." What? This doesn't make any sense. 300 of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. The rest got down on their knees to drink. And God says, "We'll fight the Midianites with the 300 dog lappers." I love reading all the scholars and commentary, "Why did God choose the 300 dog lappers?"

Tons of theories. "Maybe it's because they were drinking from their cupped hands and so their heads were up and they were looking around, they were more alert." Nonsense. It's random, it makes no sense. That's the point. It's random, because life is random. We have some skills, we lack others. It's random. It doesn't matter. God can use anybody. So Gideon ends up with only 300 dog drinkers against thousands of Midianites. He's going to learn what God can do in God's power.

The text says, "Gideon placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of the men with torches inside." Basically candles in jars. Again, this makes no sense. This is like glassy babies. This is the Pottery Barn strategy of battle. "We're going to attack them with our glassy babies." And then Gideon tells them to smash the jars and blow the trumpets, which all 300 of the men do. But here's the thing, in battle you need both of your hands in order to use weapons. And so in army there would only be a few people with trumpets and torches to light the way.

So when the Midianites saw 300 trumpets and torches, they assumed the army must be gigantic. They freak out, they get confused, they start killing each other, and Gideon wins without firing a single arrow. Because the strength you have is that you are who God says you are. God is with you. And finally, what you don't have is what you do have. Sometimes our greatest asset is what we don't have. Gideon did not have a huge army and that's what led him to this winning strategy.

If he had had a huge army, he would've fought a bloody battle with lots of casualties. It's what he didn't have that led him to a winning strategy that spared his army. What we don't have is often our greatest asset. And conversely, what we do have can sometimes get in the way of what God can do because we lean on the things that we have rather than on God.

Back to my 28 year old pastor friend, what qualified him to be a pastor wasn't his age. It wasn't even his seminary education. Seminary can be helpful, but there are lots and lots of amazing pastors that God is using in amazing ways that have never been to seminary. And conversely, there's a lot of really crappy pastors who have been to seminary. Education is great, unless we start relying on it more than on the Holy Spirit. What we don't have is often our greatest asset because it leads us to lean on God.

When someone sees that you don't have it all together, you don't have perfect grades or you're not the perfect parent or whatever, what you don't have often makes other people comfortable to share their weaknesses and their flaws, which leads to community. What qualifies you to serve our kids, or our students, or bring justice in your workplace, or share the good news of Jesus with someone, is God.

You don't need a class to train you to do those things. I know you think you do do, and classes are fine and we'll offer some classes, but you don't need those classes nearly as much as you think you do. "Well, what if I talk about Jesus with someone and they ask me a question I don't know the answer to?" Oh dear, that would be tragic, wouldn't it? That would be horrifying. Except you see there's this really handy phrase in the English language. "I don't know, I don't know the answer to your question, but I will go find out and I will tell you." And that shows humility in a world where the image of a Christian is a self-righteous, obnoxious, know-it-all.

Your inability to answer someone's question maybe what leads them to Jesus. Did you ever think of it that way? What you don't have is what you do have if it leads you to God.

So, what is God calling you? What is God calling you to do as a leader, as a student, as an employee, as a parent? What is God calling you to do? Or what challenges are you facing in health, or finances, or relationships, or school or work? Whatever it is, you can't do it. But Jesus working through you can and He will.

So, action step for this week, is to do what Anthony Ballard told us to do last week. Whatever it is you face, whatever it is that God is calling you to give 10% of the time that you spend on that thing to prayer, think of it as a prayer tithe. If you spend two hours worrying about something, spend 10% of that time praying about the thing you're worrying about. If you're working on a presentation all day, spend 10% of that day praying about it as a way of putting into action the fact that without God's power, we cannot accomplish the things he calls us to do.

There's this really cool thing happening right now in New Hope Revival, this wonderful community of African people that are part of our church. Two summers ago when we had that heat dome, temperatures over a 100 for over a week, some folks from New Hope slept here at the church because they lived in small apartments without air conditioning, very few windows, sometimes third or fourth floor, suffocating. They stayed here. And one night they stayed up all night talking and praying because that's what they do. Whenever they gather, they pray.

And they started talking about how as immigrants, they often have to keep moving from state to state, city to city, chasing jobs, trying to find opportunities that's not good for them, is not good for their kids, not good for their kids' education. And often they never do find financial stability. They started talking about how they could get out of this, and God led them to a winning strategy of pooling their money together to buy houses. They got a lawyer, and they started a business, and 17 families pooled their money together. Last month they bought a house in the Tri-Cities where it's more affordable.

They bought it cash, because all these families had pooled their money together and they're going to rent that house out and create an income stream to be split amongst the 17 families. They're going to buy more houses in the months and years ahead. They'll buy more and more houses to create revenue and begin to build wealth.

Now here's the bigger miracle. The 17 families are from different tribes that back in Africa are at war with each other. The miracle wasn't just the winning strategy financially. That too for sure, that too. But the greater miracle was the Holy Spirit has been at work in this community healing wounds, and divisions, and animosities that have been there for a long time so that they could all work together. They will be the first to tell you this is God, not them. This is a community that constantly, constantly prays, and God is doing what we can't do on our own, healing divisions so that they can work together.

And as immigrants, they sometimes don't have all the things that we think you need to thrive, but they are who God says they are. And God does not call them refugees and immigrants. He calls them mighty warriors, sent here as missionaries to teach the rest of us how to rely on God, not on all the stuff we've got. God is with them. And what they don't have, a lot of money, led them to what they do have, which is each other. I'm not sure a group of Americans could have come up with a strategy, because we think so individualistically in our culture, but they think



communally. Not I, but we, plural, can rise together because we are who God says we are and God is with us. And what we don't have is what we do have.

So whatever God is asking you to do, whatever challenge you face, whatever mountain that is in front of you right now, and whatever God is asking us to do as a church, we go in the strength we have. And that strength has a name, Jesus. He is with us, and He is for us. And we can be confident because the battle belongs to Him.

So Jesus, thank you so much. And God, we ask in your name, through your power that you make us brave. Do in us, through us, around us, what we cannot do on our own. Lord, thank you that you are always with us. Thank you that we go in that strength. And Lord, as we head into this week, whatever we face, we give it to you. And we say, Jesus, walk with us because with you, we can do all things, without you, we can't do anything. Make us brave the way you're brave, in your name Jesus. Amen.

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### **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What is God calling you to do that you're not sure you can do (in your faith, family, school, work, to spread his kingdom)? What strength do you have to do it? How can we help?
- Have you tried giving 10% to God in prayer this week? How did it go? If you haven't tried it yet, what is holding you back?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.