

“Great Things in Small Packages”

Big Buts in the Bible – part #2

Judges 6:1-24

Today is the second message in our series, “Big Buts in the Bible.” That’s B-U-T-S, as in, excuses. We all make excuses, for various reasons. Some are legitimate; others, not so much. Take these excuses for skipping work:

- “A co-worker once called in that he wouldn’t be leaving his house that day because his shoelace snapped. He insisted this was a bad omen.”
- “A co-worker said he couldn’t make it to work because his grandmother died. It was the third time he used this excuse.”
- “A colleague told our boss that he was expecting a package from Amazon and couldn’t come to work.”
- “My coworker once told our boss he couldn’t go to work because of his younger sister’s wedding...He is an only child.”
- And finally... “A guy from work called in sick with back pain, then was caught hanging out at the beach. His excuse: ‘My doctor said to lie flat on a soft surface to ease the pressure on my back...and sand is a soft surface.’”¹

Of course, it’s one thing to make a lame excuse to get out of working or school. It’s quite another thing to say “No” to God Almighty. Yet there were plenty of people in the Bible who did. My hope is that by examining their stories, we will be encouraged to say, “Yes” to God, and not make excuses anymore.

¹ <https://www.cracked.com/pictofacts-1166-here-are-21-worst-excuses-to-miss-work-like-ever/>

One of the excuses we often use before God is that we feel insignificant. One of the things I have discovered is that many people, especially my age and younger, feel like they have no chance at making a difference in the world. They see the problems we face, such as poverty and corruption, and despite their good intentions, they do not believe that individually, they can do anything about them. What an awful conclusion! Without courage and optimism, we would have never sent people to the moon, ended segregation, combatted cancer, or made a score of other amazing discoveries that help our world. There are far too many people saying, “I’m too small, too poor, too unknown to do anything great.”

That’s why we need the story of Gideon. In God’s kingdom, great things come in small packages.

Last week we learned how Moses tried to say “No” to God. Now, Gideon did not flat out tell God, “No!” the way Moses did, but there are many similarities in their calls. Gideon reminds me of a kid who keeps asking “Why?” in order to get out of a certain chore. “Why do I have to load the dishwasher? Why do I have to clean my room? Why do I have to walk the dog? Why? Why? Why?” It is almost as if Gideon thinks he can stall God with his questions, and God will go away.

The beginning of the story we just read finds Gideon hiding in a winepress while trying to thresh grain. It’s our first indication that Gideon is afraid – normally, you need a wide open space to thresh grain, and Gideon is trying to work in the confined space of the winepress. It’s like trying to do jumping jacks in a closet. At the first greeting of Lord’s angel, Gideon immediately asks two questions. “Why has all this happened to us? Where are all God’s wonders?” (Judges 6:13)

It’s kind of snarky of him, but we have all thought the same things. When everything is going great, we think, “God is blessing us!” But when everything is going down the toilet and our lives are literally in danger, we ask, “Where are you now, God? Where is a miracle when I need one?”

This is so ironic, because God’s answer to us is the same as his answer to Gideon. “I am here. And you are my miracle.” Look at verse 14. “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” Great, God answers a question with a question. And a rhetorical one, at that.

So Gideon responds with another question. “But how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

There’s that word again. “But.” I was told in a business seminar, never start a sentence with the word “but”. It’s rude and ineffective.

Gideon comes from a small tribe, and he himself is the runt of his family. It is beyond his comprehension that God could use him, or in fact, would even want to. Nobody picks the short guy to be on their team, unless you’re racing horses.

God’s answer to Gideon is simple and to the point. God says, “I will be with you.”

I wish I could end the sermon right there. Shouldn’t that be enough? If God said to you, “I will be with you,” wouldn’t you jump up and say, “Yes, Lord! Let’s go!” Sadly, that is not enough for Gideon. Gideon hesitates, just like Moses did. And again comes the dragging of the feet.

Gideon’s third response is not a question, but a request. He says to the angel, “Please wait here until I bring back an offering for you.” (see Judges 6:18) This is another a test of God’s patience.

Of course, the Lord does wait for Gideon, and God sets his little offering on fire. Wow, another miracle! Just like Moses and the staff-turning-into-snake thing. Great! Does that convince Gideon?

No, of course not. If anything, it scares him more. Gideon thinks, “I just saw God. I’m dead!” (see Judges 6:22)

God’s response is almost comical. “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.” (Judges 6:23) Seriously, if I were God, I would have just said, “Enough of this silliness, Gideon. Get up, we’re going.” Have you ever said that to a child before? The one who threw a tantrum and fell on the ground? The one whose legs suddenly didn’t work? It’s like God is dragging Gideon to the battle.

Obviously Gideon is reluctant to obey. The first thing God asks Gideon to do is tear down a pagan altar his father built. So Gideon goes ahead, but he does it in the dark of night, so no one will see him. “Great job, Gideon. I’m so proud of you. You’re so brave (not).” Let’s give him a golf clap.

The next morning, we find Gideon blowing his trumpet and gathering an army for battle. Thirty-two thousand soldiers join him. The little guy has his big army, so you figure, now would be the best time to go into battle, right? Nope. Gideon still drags his feet. He makes two more requests of God. First, he places a fleece on the threshing floor and asks God to make the fleece wet with dew, while keeping the ground dry. I have to imagine God smirks and says, “OK. Here you go.” And Gideon finds it just as he requested. Great. Another sign! Let’s go! At this point in the story, I feel like I do when we’re going on vacation. “Come on, already! Get in the car, Gideon.”

But wait, Gideon has to go use the bathroom, I mean, the threshing room. He actually says, “Please God, don’t be angry with me.” (Judges 6:39) Have you

ever had a child say that to you before? Gideon asks for one more sign, making the fleece dry and the ground wet, just to be doubly sure. And God, with infinitely more patience than I would have, again does as requested.

“Why? If... But... Wait, I’m not ready yet.” Even though God shows up multiple times, Gideon has a hard time trusting God. It isn’t until after God calls him, gives him three signs, and finally reduces his army from 32,000 to 300 that Gideon really understands. Twice God tells Gideon, “You have too many men. If they win the battle, they would only boast in themselves, not me.” (see Judges 7:2&4.) So with less than 1% of his original force, Gideon’s army routs the Midianites and saves Israel. In fact, they never even lift a sword. They use trumpets and lanterns to scare the enemy into chaos.

Make no mistake, Gideon is a great hero in the Bible. But his methods show that he had a really hard time trusting God. He kept giving God roundabout answers, instead of just saying yes and getting to work. Because Gideon thought he was too small to change the world, he only served God reluctantly.

Where I find hope in this story is that God never gave up on Gideon, despite the excuses, despite the long list of questions and requests, despite Gideon’s feelings of inadequacy. In a way, Gideon was right: he was too small to change the world, alone. But God can do anything. I am reminded that Jesus once told his disciples, “Take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) That is exactly what we need to know. God overcomes the world; our part is to obey.

God never gives up on us. I believe the church needs to stop thinking like we need 32,000 people to overcome our troubles. The story of Gideon shows us that we only need a few willing, faithful people to change the world. Much of the

time, we are concentrating on our perceived lack of resources, instead of seeing what we have right here, right now.

Take for example the simple task of filling this place with people on Sunday. Can one person bring 100 people in? No way. But each one can bring one. The sad part is, many of us think we have nothing to offer. Do you realize the walking miracle that you are? According to 2 Corinthians 4:7, you carry the treasure of the gospel “in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” Use it!

God could use the great and mighty, but the Bible indicates that God prefers to use the meek and humble. Mary and Joseph. Esther and Ruth. Peter and the fishermen. Children like Samuel and David. The widow with the two small copper coins. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor, the poor in spirit, the meek.” (Matthew 5:3, Luke 6:20, Matthew 5:5) Maybe our problem is that we are not meek enough. Maybe we need a big dose of humble pie so that God can really use us, instead of trying to rely on our own strength.

I don't mind that Gideon thought that he was too small for God to use him. Humility makes us useable in God's hands. What we need to learn from Gideon is that trusting God takes time, but it does come if we persevere. Eventually, it clicked for Gideon, and from then, on he was sold out on God's plan.

Are you sold out on God's plan for your life? Do you know that you are a mighty warrior for God? We don't fight this battle with ordinary weapons. We fight with light, music, and beauty. We lift up strange symbols, like the cross, an instrument of torture and death, and proclaim resurrection and life in Jesus Christ! We put on the armor of God – things like salvation, righteousness, truth,

faith, peace, and scripture. (Ephesians 6:10-17) We proclaim, as the Apostle Paul did, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10.)

Church, don't sell yourself short. Don't make excuses for what you think you lack. God has never been interested in what you don't have. God wants what you do have. Your heart, your hands, your resources, and your willingness to serve. Even if you don't see how God can change the world through you, step out in faith. Got questions and fears? You're in good company.

Now is the time for us to trust and obey. Now is the time to realize, by God's will and for God's glory, we are mighty warriors. Now is the time to heed the call to love, to serve, to give and to show the world the greatness of our God.

Will you pray with me?