

JUDGES 7:8-15
THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF GOD!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Judges chapter 7 as we continue our in-depth study of this book.

And, as we have seen here in Judges chapters 6 and 7 so far, that the children of Israel were in bondage, due to their sin, their turning from God. And the Midianites were the enemy that God was using to oppress the children of Israel to draw them back to Him.

And this was going on for seven years and then they cried out to God and God raised up a deliverer, a Judge to destroy the enemy.

But the Midianites were a formidable enemy. They had 135,000 soldiers and again, they oppressed the children of Israel for seven years.

And what they would do, since they were more of a nomadic people and didn't plant crops, they usually would barter for their food. But now something better came up. They would wait for the children of Israel to harvest their crop and then they would come down and take it from them!

That is what we are told in Judges 6:3-6, **“So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.”**

And it is out of all of this that God raised up Gideon to deliver the children of Israel from this bondage.

Now we have seen that Gideon was not a tough guy, and when the Lord called him, he had all kinds of excuses why he couldn't deliver Israel. But the Lord was not looking for excuses, but for Gideon to trust in Him and walk by faith!

We see this in Judges 6:16 where we are told, **“And the Lord said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.’”**

And the first thing the Lord calls Gideon to do is to destroy the altar of Baal and the image of Asherah that his dad, Joash, had set up and the people came to worship these false gods there at the home of Joash.

In other words, God wanted Gideon to deal with his home first before he goes out to battle for the nation and that is exactly what he did. He tore down the altar, destroyed the wooden image and the actions of Gideon stirred the heart of his father and his father stood by the actions of his son!

Then, as Gideon gathers his troops, he has 32,000 men. Not bad but not really good when the Midianites had 135,000 men.

Now, as God sees this, He tells Gideon that He does not like the odds here. And don't think God was going to add to the numbers of Gideon's army, not at all!

You see, God was going to give them this victory and if there was the slightest hint that they did this on their own, they would take the glory away from God.

So God brings the number down by asking Gideon to send all those home who are fearful. And twenty-two thousand leave!

Great, but God is not done. There are still too many even though Gideon is now down to ten-thousand soldiers.

And we see God bring that number down to 300. Think about this for a minute.

They went from 4 to 1 odds, then to 14 to 1 odds, and now, it is 450 to 1 odds. That is not good. Exactly, because there is no way that they could ever take credit for this victory, the odds were so great against them.

And that is exactly where God wanted them, to look to Him instead of their strength, their might, their ability!

This morning, with these crazy odds, we are going to see God give Gideon some more encouragement and I love that about God, how He wants to encourage us to move forward, to walk by faith.

It is interesting to me that the words we hear can either encourage us or discourage us. They can make us afraid or they can give us confidence. Let me show you what I mean.

Let me share this story with you to show you the power of words, and, as I have said, we will see that this morning in our study of Gideon.

This is a story about my grandmother, and you can decide for yourself if it is true or not, but keep in mind, she was Italian. Thus, I cannot confirm or deny the information given in this story.

My grandmother was a terrible driver. And one day, down in Chicago, she was driving, I think it was 70-mph in a 40-mph zone!

And you guessed it, she got pulled over by the police.

So my grandmother is in the car as this Chicago police officer comes up to her and he tells her, "Ma'am, you were speeding!"

And she told the police officer, "I know I as speeding!"

"You know you were going 70-mph!" he said.

"Yes, I know!"

He said to her, "Do you have a driver's license?"

And she told him, "No, I don't!"

"What do you mean you don't have a driver's license?"

She told the police officer, "I am legally blind!"

"Your legally blind?"

"Yes, I am legally blind!"

"Well, is this your car?"

She said, "No, it's not my car!"

"Then you don't have any registration papers?"

"No, no, not at all! It's not my car, I stole it!"

"Excuse me ma'am, you stole this car?"

"Yea, I stole the car!!!"

“Who did you steal it from?”

“I didn’t ask him his name before I killed him!”

“What do you mean? You are telling me that you killed the owner of this car?”

“Yes, I killed him and chopped up the body and it is in the trunk!”

At this point the police officer was shocked, and he backed away from the car and called for help. And arriving on the scene was a more seasoned police officer.

And he told this officer the whole story and he came up to the vehicle with his hand on his gun. Keep in mind my grandmother is under five feet tall, but she is Italian!

And as he comes up to the car, he tells my grandmother to pop the trunk.

“All right!”

So my grandmother pops the trunk and he looks in and all he sees is a spare tire. In fact, the trunk was very clean, very tidy.

So he comes back up to my grandmother and he asks her, “Do you have a driver’s license?”

And my grandmother told the officer, “Yes, I have a driver’s license!” And she pulled it out and gave it to him.

Everything was fine on the driver’s license.

He asks her, “Can you see okay, are you legally blind?”

“Oh no she said. I can see fine. I just passed my driving test!”

He then asked my grandmother, “Is this your car?”

She told him, “Yes”, and pulled out the registration papers and everything was in order.

The police officer could not believe it. He said, “I am so relieved to see this because my partner told me that you don’t have a driver’s license, you are legally blind, you stole the car and you killed the owner of the car and put him in the trunk!”

And my grandmother, you have to love her. She looked at the police officer and said, “Yea, he probably told you I was speeding too!”

Again, you can decide for yourself if that is true or not, but it was my grandmother!

But did you see how words can influence us?

And that is what we will see this morning, the Words of God encouraging the man of God to do the work of God!

I have called this study – ***THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF GOD!***

I guess that just makes sense. And I have broken down these verses we will be looking at this morning like this:

SEPARATION FOR BATTLE – JUDGES 7:8

GOD’S PROMISE – JUDGES 7:9-11

AGAINST ALL ODDS – JUDGES 7:12

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF GOD – JUDGES 7:13-14

THE WORSHIP OF GOD – JUDGES 7:15

So with that as our introduction, let’s begin reading in Judges chapter 7, beginning in verse 8 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we look at the topic of - ***THE***

ENCOURAGEMENT OF GOD!

JUDGES 7**VERSE 8**

Here we see the *SEPARATION FOR BATTLE*. And what I mean is that of the 32,000 troops that Gideon brought together, 31,700 went home and the 300 men prepared for this battle against the Midianites remained.

There are a couple of ways that we can look at this. And the first one is simple. Before we can go into battle, we must separate from the things of this world, from those things that are holding us back from moving forward.

That is obvious. You will never influence the world by trying to be like it! I think we all understand that, but do we really practice it?

I see in the church today that the church wants to be like the world so that the world will like the church. Let me ask you this. If the church does that, who will they be like? The world of course because we have let them influence our lives to conform to their lives. We end up compromising our faith, and they don't compromise anything!

And make no mistake about it, the world wants to conform us into its image, to be like them, to go along with their lifestyles, to believe whatever anyone wants.

But the Lord wants to transform our lives and that is only going to happen as we separate ourselves from the world.

Now please understand I am not talking about going to some island and living alone or getting in a spaceship and traveling to outer space. That would be foolish, and it is not what the Lord has told us. We are to be in the world, but the world is not to be in us!

John tells us in I John 4:4-6, **“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”**

Notice the contrast here. We are of Christ, He dwells in us and thus, His nature should flow from our lives.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who don't know Christ and they mimic the things of this world or this world system that is in rebellion against God. And thus, when they speak, the world loves to hear them.

But we are of God and those who are of God hear the things of God, they hear those who speak forth the things of God.

Those who are not really of God, they may call themselves Christians, but they have bought into the error of this world and they are not hearing from God.

We hear the truths of God found in the Word of God and they hear the lies from the world and the ruler of this world!

So we must separate ourselves from this world, in a sense, before we go into battle.

Secondly, having only 300 men going up against 135,000 men, from a human perspective, would be foolish.

But God is not sending them in alone. He is going to give them this victory and we have seen the promise of God to Gideon for this battle.

Why does God do this?

Remember what we read in Judges 7:2, “**And the Lord said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’”**”

Thus, He calls for us to walk by faith by putting us in impossible situations many times and as we walk, we see the salvation that He brings to those battles, those situations we face.

Now let me also say this. We don’t always see, and I think that is most of the time, what God is doing or how He is going to accomplish this victory for us until we get through it and look back.

And some may feel that is not fair, that is not right. Why doesn’t He just tell us how He is going to accomplish this victory for us?

Because that really isn’t faith. Faith is seeing the impossible as being very possible with God and thus, you walk accordingly. It is trusting God at His Word and not by sight!

Think about this Coronavirus and all that craziness it has brought upon us. How many of us were angry, fearful, mad, and-so-on because you were looking at what the world was doing instead of what God was doing. What is God going to do through all this? I don’t know but I do know He is not going to do nothing!

And for Gideon, he could only trust in God because there was nothing else to trust. And how true that is for us, who else are you going to trust, there is no one but God!

And that really leads us into our next point – ***GOD’S PROMISE!***

VERSES 9-11

Why in the world is God allowing Gideon to go down to the enemy’s camp?

I think there is really only one reason, Gideon was still afraid!

Why was he afraid?

Think about it. The Lord just eliminated most of Gideon's army, he lost 31,700 men and now his army is down to just three-hundred men!

And he is going to have to do battle against an army that is much larger than his, as the Midianites had 135,00 soldiers!

And what I love about this is we see God's grace and mercy that He extends to Gideon here. God wanted Gideon to find encouragement in this visit to the enemy's camp. This shows that when God asks us to do hard things for Him, He doesn't fold His arms and sit back and expect us to do it on our own. He is there to guide us and to keep us and to encourage us all along the way.

Thus, the Lord is going to strengthen the faith of Gideon, who was fearful at this point. The Lord not only tells Gideon that they will be victorious, but He sends Gideon into the enemy's camp with his servant Purah because Gideon was fearful, to hear what the enemy is saying about this soon to come battle. It is out of this Gideon will be strengthened!

And here is the difficult lesson for us.

The situation did not change for Gideon. He was still outnumbered 450 to 1! But once again we see the Lord give Gideon a promise that his fears will melt away because the Lord is going to give them this victory.

The promises of God. It is easy to read them and let others know about them, especially when they are going through a difficult time or they have to walk by faith. But what about us?

Do we really believe in those promises of God that He has given to us? We need to because God does not lie and what He has promised us He is more than able to bring to pass.

And it is not easy, we do become fearful, we do become afraid of the situations that we find ourselves in.

But remember what the Lord has told us, a promise to each and every one of us, “**... For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’**” Hebrews 13:5-6.

That is a promise from God, that He is with us, He will never leave us and thus, when we have that perspective, we don’t need to fear because what can man really do to me? Nothing apart from what God allows!

But, as we are told,

Fear is one of Satan’s most popular weapons that he uses against us. The most common lie that Satan uses to instill fear into us is that God is far away or absent from our presence.

Have you ever felt that way before? If you have, welcome to the club. We’ve all felt at some point that God is distant or even ignorant. But nothing could be farther from the truth. God promises in His Word over and over again that He is always with us. Not only that, He has proven time and time both in the Bible and even in our lives today that He is there.

The presence of bad times is usually the greatest persuasion of God’s absence, but remember that various times in Bible times, God was there even in the midst of war, famine, flood, and even storms. God is with us always and promises to never leave us nor forsake us.

The best way to always remind ourselves of this is to remind ourselves of what God’s Word promises us when it comes to Him always being present in our lives. Here are seven scriptures that assure us that God is with us always.

Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Deuteronomy 31:6 “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

Zephaniah 3:17 “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

Matthew 28:20 “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Romans 8:38-39 “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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Folks, God calls us to do things that seem way out of reach for us, but He doesn't leave us there. The Lord will guide us; encourage us so we can walk by faith! He will stretch our faith and He will help that faith to grow. Even with the doubts and fears we may have, God will comfort us and lead us so that we can press on, move forward!

Let me give you this perspective of how big our God is. There was a study that was released in 2010 by Yale astronomer Pieter van Dokkum. And he just took the estimated number of stars in the universe - 100,000,000,000,000,000,000, or 100 sextillion - and tripled it. And even that is a guess.

So what is the big deal about that. First of all, God created all those stars! But there is something even more amazing. In Isaiah 40:26 we are told, **“Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is missing.”**

And in Psalm 147:4-5 we are told, **“He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.”**

Not only did God created all these stars, but He named them, and He remembers each one’s name. I remember growing up, my parents had four sons, I was the oldest. And my poor dad, he would forget our names at times. And thus, he would just go down the list, “Joseph, John, Jerry, I mean Jimmy!”

We do that, God doesn’t! And thus, with God’s understanding being infinite, what He tells us to do, He knows what is going to happen and thus, all he wants us to do is trust in His promises!

And that is great, we can do that, and then our next point – *AGAINST ALL ODDS!*

VERSE 12

At this point, with all that God has told Gideon, as he and his servant, Purah head down to the camp of the Midianites, I think he is pumped up. He is encouraged. God is for us, who can be against us! I think that was what Gideon was thinking.

And then, as he sees the camp of the Midianites, I think his heart just sank. Listen again to what he saw, **“Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.”** Judges 7:12.

One writer summed it up like this. He wrote,

So down they go into the valley of death, where the enemy is everywhere and uncountable, like a locust plague, filling the valley floor.

And they are armed and have camels! Camels were a frightening thing to men on foot.

Gideon had none, and the Midianites had thousands of them, like the sand on the seashore for multitude, like devil spawn come to mock the afflicted seed of Abraham (v. 12).

Can you imagine what Gideon felt as he went down into that valley? This was everything he had dreaded and more.

But God had promised that when he got down there he would hear something to strengthen him. And so he pressed on, his heart in his mouth, with the faithful Purah at his side.

- R. Kent Hughes, Judges and Ruth – God in Chaos, p. 142

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like that, where the odds are totally against you and you are losing hope, you are becoming more and more fearful? I think we have all been there and what was Gideon going to do? Was he going to exit stage left? Or was he going to continue on into the camp?

Now if Gideon did not have any of God's promises for him, this would be an impossible task. But he had God's promises and even though the situation for Gideon was – **AGAINST ALL ODDS**, it was not going to stop him for doing what God called him to do!

You see,

At last they reach the outskirts of the Midianite camp, creep into it under cover of darkness, and hear a hushed conversation coming from one of the tents. They edge closer to try to hear what is being said. And sure enough, in the pre-dawn stillness the conversation in the tent becomes clearly audible.

- R. Kent Hughes, Judges and Ruth – God in Chaos, p. 142-143

And that is what we will look at next – ***THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF GOD!***

VERSES 13-14

Keep in mind that Israel, because of the oppression they were under, they were seen as nothing and this is portrayed in the dream that one of the Midianite men had. He pictured the children of Israel as a loaf of barley bread!

Spurgeon tells us that “Barley-meal was rather food for dogs or cattle than for men; and therefore the barley cake would be the emblem of a thing despised.”

So this soldier is telling his buddy the dream he had. And that he dreamed that this loaf of barley, which again was the poor man’s bread, it was insignificant, rolled into the camp of the Midianites and destroyed them.

I don’t know about you, but that is a pretty strange dream and to share it with your battle buddy, wow! In hearing that I would want to get another battle buddy!

But the story continued on, we now see the interpretation of this dream, and as Gideon and Purah continued to listen, the other man said, “. . . **‘This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp.’**” Judges 7:14.

Amazing. This guy now interprets this dream that his buddy had. What are the odds of that happening at the precise time that Gideon and Purah are in the camp and happening to be listening at just the right tent?

The odds are overwhelming and yet, God orchestrated this whole thing to take any fear Gideon might still have and strengthen him for this coming battle.

Imagine, these two Midianite soldiers are talking about the children of Israel wiping them out! How crazy is that! That is not how you build up confidence for the battle and yet, God gave this man the dream and the other man the interpretation of this dream so that Gideon could hear and know the battle is already won, God has given them this victory and all they needed to do was walk by faith!

Spurgeon summed it up like this. He wrote, “I think if I had been Gideon I should have said to myself, ‘I do not so much rejoice in what this dreamer saith as I do in the fact that he has told his dream at the moment when I was lurking near him: I see the hand of the Lord in this, and I am strengthened by the sight. Verily, I perceive that the Lord worketh all things with unfailling wisdom, and faileth not in his designs. He that has ordered this matter can order all things else.’”

Encouragement is so important because it spurs us on. Let me show you what I mean with this amazing story.

We are told,

Jesse Owens seemed sure to win the long jump at the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin, Germany. Just the year before, he had set three world records in one day. He was the record holder for the running broad jump with 26 feet 8¼ inches - a record that would stand for 25 years.

As he walked to the long-jump pit, however, Owens saw a tall, blue-eyed, blond German taking practice jumps in the 26-foot range. Owens was nervous. He was aware of the tension created with his presence. He knew the Nazis' desire was to prove Aryan "superiority," especially over the blacks.

The pressure was overwhelming, and on his first jump Owens inadvertently leaped from several inches beyond the takeoff board. Rattled, he fouled on the second attempt, too. He was only one foul away from being eliminated.

At this point, the tall German approached Owens and introduced himself as Luz Long. Then an amazing event took place. The black son of a sharecropper and the white model of Nazi manhood chatted in view of the entire stadium. What were they talking about?

Since the qualifying distance was only 23 feet 5½ inches, Long suggested making a mark several inches before the takeoff board and jumping from there, just to play it safe. Amazing! At the beginning of World War II, this model of Germany's strength was providing technical assistance and words of encouragement to a foe both on and off the field.

Owens qualified easily. In the finals, he set an Olympic record and earned the second of four gold medals during the 1936 Olympics. The first person to congratulate Owens was Luz Long - in full view of Adolf Hitler.

Owens never saw Long again, for Long was killed in World War II. “You could melt down all the medals and cups I have,” Owens later wrote, “and they wouldn’t be plating on the 24-carat friendship I felt for Luz Long.”

- Ken Sutterfield, *The Power of an Encouraging Word*, pp. 105-106

How important words of encouragement are from God and from others. Listen to what Paul wrote in II Corinthians 1:2-5. We are told,

“Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” 2

Corinthians 1:2-5

Do you ever get discouraged? Don’t answer that, because I already know the answer. Of course you do, you’re human. Encouragement is something we all need. Thank God it is something He has promised to everyone of us. I’d like you to first see that the word, “encouragement”, is not used in the King James Version of the Bible. Instead, you’ll see the word “comfort” which is used 10 times in this passage from 2 Corinthians.

It is also translated “consolation” and used to describe the Holy Spirit who is called the Comforter (John 14 & 15). I want you to know the sweet encouragement that only our Savior can bring. And once you receive that gift, to pass it on, thereby allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you up again and again. God has cornered the market on comfort. So if you are discouraged right now, the devil is hot on your trail. There’s a story that illustrates this point so well.

One day, the devil was auctioning off his tools. That is, all but one tool. It was such a high price, no one could afford it. When someone asked why, he said, "That's my favorite tool. It's the tool of discouragement. I use it to pry open a life and when I get inside, I can do all kinds of damage with my other tools of hatred, lust, envy, jealousy, and pride."

When the Bible says, "who comforteth us," I want you to notice that the word "comforteth" is in the present tense. This encouragement is ever-present. It flows like a river - never stopping to flow from the loving bosom of God.

That's you and me, and everyone who's gone before us or who will come after us. You see, one of the consolations of discouragement, is that we're in good company. We don't have to go around wearing a mask and pretending to be happy when we're not. There have been three times in my life when I was really discouraged. And in all three times I went to the Lord and He met me there. He became the God of all comfort to me.

Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, was often discouraged. In fact, his wife thought the only way to help him was to shock him out of it. She put on a black dress and veil as if she was going to a funeral. When he asked her who had died, she said, "Martin, haven't you heard? God has died." He declared, "That is blasphemy!" His wife said, "Aye Husband, and it is blasphemy for you to be living as if God is dead." Needless to say, Martin snapped out of it!

God is the One who encourages us so that we may be able to comfort others. This is the purpose of encouragement! We are blessed that we might be a blessing. The word "aboundeth" in 2 Corinthians, verse 5 means that we are to overflow with the life of Jesus Christ. Everywhere we go, we are to be a source of encouragement.

To some people, tribulation is a prison. For others, tribulation is a hospital from which they get well. But friend, tribulation is to be a seminary where we learn to become stewards of the comfort we receive, so that we can pass on our encouragement to others.

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How important encouragement is for us and it was for Gideon.

Yes, God will encourage us through His Word, and I am so thankful for those precious promises.

But He also will encourage us through others who come along our path, those words that just spur us on.

I can't tell you how much you have encouraged me over those weeks we were under lockdown and we couldn't gather at church. Just sharing with the chairs is tough to do and yet, you wrote me or emailed me or texted me with words of encouragement and it spurred me to continue on!

That is what we need to do for each other! Encourage them.

And it is out of all of this, that we see something amazing that Gideon does, and I think sometimes we miss out on doing as God encourages us. We are going to see, in our last point –

THE WORSHIP OF GOD!

VERSE 15

Look at what is taking place here. First of all, after Gideon is given this assurance of the enemy being fearful and that the dream the Midianite soldier had showed that weak, insignificant Israel was going to be victorious in this battle, Gideon worships the Lord!

The Bible speaks a lot about worship, and I think part of worship is being thankful! And yet, so often that is missing in our relationship with God. He blesses us, encourages us, gives us victories, and we just go on, we are not thankful!

Let me share with you a few verses to show you what I mean.

First of all, in Psalm 50:23 we are told, **“Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.”** As we praise God, we are glorifying Him. It is worshipping Him!

Then, in Psalm 95:2 we are told, **“Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.”** I find it interesting that the Scriptures speak of coming before the Lord and as we do, we come before Him with thanksgiving. You see, we don’t deserve anything, and He has given to us everything, and thus there is no reason we should not be thankful!

In Psalm 100:4 we are told, **“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.”** Notice that it doesn’t say to enter His courts with complaining, but with thanksgiving! That is important because it is easy to fall into that pattern of complaining about this and complaining about that, and it doesn’t glorify God!

And I have seen this with this Coronavirus issue. People on Facebook, Christians complaining about the government taking away our freedom, that we are going to become a socialist nation! I am not sure why all the complaints because God has told us in His Word that this is coming to pass. We might not like it but complaining is not a form of worship. But having a thankful heart knowing that God will work it out some way, somehow, for good! Be careful because people are watching how you are handling these things.

In Psalm 107:22 we are told, **“Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, And declare His works with rejoicing.”** Our lives are a living sacrifice unto God and thus, as we go out and engage in this world, may we do so with thankful hearts declaring all that God is doing and rejoice!

And many want to know what the will of God is for their lives and I can give you one point that God has told us is His will for each of us, and that is found in I Thessalonians 5:18, where Paul wrote, **“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”** That is not a suggestion, that is the will of God for your life, that you give thanks!

And lastly, in Hebrews 12:28-29 we are told, **“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”**

The Living Bible puts this verse like this, **“Since we have a Kingdom nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving him with thankful hearts and with holy fear and awe. For our God is a consuming fire.”**

In other words, this is not our home. We are aliens and strangers here. And our mission is to bring the Gospel to a lost and dying world. Thus, have a thankful heart, serve with a thankful heart because the Kingdom of God is coming, and nothing is going to shake it or destroy it!

Let me share this with you and then I will bring this study to a conclusion and show you how the worshiping heart of Gideon prepared his men.

In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln established an annual national holiday of Thanksgiving to be observed on the last Thursday in November.

Most of us look forward to this holiday, a day on which we eat good food, enjoy time with family and friends, and perhaps watch some football. And we will probably set aside at least a little time to thank the Lord.

We all likely recognize the importance of being thankful. We tell our kids to say “Thank you” when they are given something, and we generally try to be grateful ourselves. But how many of us really see gratitude as an important part of our worship? How many of us consider thankfulness to be a truly significant expression we offer to God?

If I were to ask most Christians what kinds of expressions of worship bring God the most glory, I would probably hear things like praise, love, and joy more than I would hear gratitude.

However, I believe gratitude to be an extremely important - if not the most important - expression of worship toward God that brings ultimate glory to him.

Gratitude is a response to grace. God acts in grace, and we respond in gratitude. We see this in 2 Corinthians 4:15:

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

In particular, gratitude is a response of our affections toward God. It is very similar in many ways to responding with love toward God or joy or praise. These are spiritual affections with which we respond in worship toward God when he has shown favor toward us.

But notice that Paul didn't say that what brought God most glory was increase of love toward him as grace extends to more and more people or increase of joy or praise.

Now God's grace in our lives certainly does produce those affections, and God is certainly glorified when love and joy and praise toward him increase. But I believe that there is a particular reason Paul focuses on gratitude here instead of other affections.

You see all true spiritual affections have an object, and their object is always God.

This is why true spiritual affections are different from what we often mean when we talk about our feelings.

Feelings are different than affections.

Feelings often have no object; mere feelings wallow in themselves. When we experience mere feelings apart from spiritual affections, our focus is not on any object; our focus is purely on ourselves and the feelings themselves. We love the feeling of love; we delight in the feeling of joy.

So sometimes we just feel happy, and someone might ask, “Why are you happy?” And we reply, “O, I don’t know; No reason; I just feel happy.”

But that’s different from spiritual affections. Affections always have an object; they always have a reason.

The problem is that sometimes we use the same word to both describe an affection and a feeling. . . .

So the reason I believe that gratitude as the best link between grace and glory is that while love or joy or praise could certainly be directed toward God as a result of his grace toward us, many times what we call love or joy or praise are actually mere feelings that are more about us or the gift than the one who showed grace toward us.

And in the case of the religious affection of gratitude, the very nature of the biblical term in 2 Corinthians 4:15 makes clear that the biblical affection of gratitude is always produced by grace in our lives.

The Greek word for “grace” is *charis*.

The Greek term for “thanksgiving” in the text is *eucharistia*.

The idea of grace is baked right into the idea of thanksgiving in the text, and the original readers of this letter would have immediately recognized the parallel that Paul is making here.

“So that as *charis* extends to more and more people it may increase *eucharistian*.”

That’s why I’ve been using the term “gratitude” rather than “thanksgiving” - it better resembles the parallel between gratitude and grace that exists in the Greek between *charis* and *eucharistia*. “So that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase gratitude.”

Grace produces gratitude, and it increases, according to 2 Corinthians 4:15, in direct proportion to how undeserved the gift is. The more ill-deserved favor, the more gratitude.

This is why true gratitude always glorifies the giver. Gratitude is always humble, because we are acknowledging that we do not deserve the gift.

If we think we deserve the gift, we’re not thankful. If I pay for a dinner at a restaurant, I’m not really thankful because it’s not an act of grace that the waiter gave us food.

And yet, we do often say, “thank you” to waiters when they bring us our food, don’t we? Why do we do that? Why do we say thank you, even if we really do deserve what we are receiving?

We say thank you because we instinctively know that genuine gratitude is an expression of humility. We are trying to show respect and honor toward the waiter even though we paid for the meal.

This is why true and genuine gratitude always glorifies God. If God shows grace toward us, and we are truly grateful, that gratitude inherently has God as its object, and it inherently acknowledges that we are undeserving of the gift. This glorifies God.

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How true that is. And I believe that is the heart of Gideon here. He understood that he was not worthy for this gift and thus, he is thankful, he is showing his gratitude towards God for giving them this victory before the battle even started.

We see this fact that Gideon saw himself unworthy of any of these things from God as we are told in Judges 6:15, **“So he said to Him, ‘O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.’”**

If we truly believe that God owes us something or we are worthy to receive something from God, when things don’t go the way you want, you won’t be thankful but you will complain how unfair this is.

God has given us so much, may we have worshipful hearts that are filled with thanksgiving and gratitude in all that God has done, is doing and will do in our lives! So Gideon was encouraged by the words of the enemy, how they saw their own demise. And Gideon worships the Lord as his faith is strengthened in God.

And now, that faith in Gideon is caught by his three hundred men, his soldiers that are with him. He pumps them up you might say. Gideon is ready for battle and he is encouraging the people to, **“... ‘Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.’”** Judges 7:15. You see, Gideon’s encouragement was contagious. Having received encouragement, he could not help but spread that encouragement to others and his encouragement built their faith. May people see our faith, our worship of God that is filled with thanksgiving and gratitude towards God and may our faith be contagious.

Don’t wear a mask over your face and cover your faith. Let people see your faith, hear your faith and understand, that if they catch Jesus it won’t be harmful to them, but it will save their lives! *May others catch what we have and may it encourage them to walk by faith!*