

Creekside Community Church  
*Strange Tales, "The Timid Warrior"* (Judges 6:1-40)  
November 10, 2013  
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This morning as we continue to look at the strange tales in the Old Testament book of Judges, I want to talk about how God transforms a coward into a champion. That may sound a little melodramatic but it's a process we all need to go through if we're to be useful to God. I am convinced that the greatest obstacles to God using us in this world are our own fears and insecurities. So this morning, we're going to begin the strange tale of Gideon which we'll be in for the next three Sundays. Today we'll look at how God begins to change this timid warrior into a champion. The story of Gideon begins with Israel returning to their idols and, as always, idolatry leads to bondage. Forty years have passed since God delivered Israel from their slavery to the Canaanites through Barak and Deborah; 40 years, the land has been undisturbed by war. Judges 6:1-5 "*Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it.*" The Midianites were a wild, nomadic tribe who would sweep down on Israel out of the desert every year at harvest, stripping the land of crops, and animals and anything else that wasn't nailed down like a vast cloud of human locusts. The Israelites worked hard all year, sowing, watering, weeding their crops, shepherding their flocks, fattening their cattle, only to have everything they worked so hard for stolen by marauding bands of Midianite bandits. And of course, the insurance companies refuse to honor their claims. Israel's economy is ruined. People are poor and hungry and hiding out in the hills. Once again, idolatry leads to bondage and misery with Israel sinking lower morally, economically and socially each time the cycle repeats itself. The Midianites are so bad that it only takes the Israelites 7 years to get to the next step in the cycle when they cry out to God for help. Now each time before this, when God's people cry out, He sends a deliverer. However this time, He sends a prophet.

Judges 6:7-10 "*Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord on account of Midian, that the Lord sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, and I said to you, "I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me." The people have finally turned back to God. "We've got a huge problem, Lord. These Midianites are robbing us blind, and there's nothing we can do. Could you help us?" And God replies "Midian isn't your problem. Your problem is your idols." The Midianites*

are just a symptom. The reason they are able to oppress Israel is because Israel stopped worshiping and serving the Lord, to serve gods of the Amorites, Baal and Asherah. Baal was the local god of the sun and of storms and was worshiped in conjunction with Asherah, the goddess of sex and fertility involving ritual sex and child sacrifice. But the motivation for their worship was purely economic. Their agriculture depended on rain coming in off the Mediterranean Sea and for the next 8 centuries, Israel flirts with Baal and Asherah in the hopes of insuring a good harvest instead of trusting God. And so when Israel finally turns back to the Lord and asks for help against the Midianites, He points out what the real problem is. The Midianites are just a symptom. The real issue here is that Israel has forsaken the Lord. And before God sends another deliverer, He wants Israel to put away their idols because simply being miserable and crying out to God for help is not the same as repentance. Repentance means to change; to stop going in one direction and to start going in another; which Israel has yet to do in Judges. Trouble comes and Israel cries out to the Lord but as soon as the trouble is past, they go right back to the idols. They feel bad about their situation. They don't feel bad about their sin. Regret is sorrow about the consequences of our choices; repentance is sorrow about the choices themselves. Regret is feeling bad about the results of sin, repentance is feeling bad about the sin itself and turning from it because it hurts God, regardless of its results in my life. So God sends a prophet to Israel to remind them of their real problem and to urge them to repent. You know, if we want to enjoy the empowering presence of God in our lives, we need to develop a lifestyle of repentance and that means not waiting for sin to cause me pain before I recognize it and turn from it but to be seeking God in His word daily and responding to what He tells me is sin by turning from it, regardless of whether that sin is causing me trouble right not or not. However, there is no evidence that Israel does repents, but God sends a deliverer anyway. And in the case of Gideon, God chooses the last person anybody, including Gideon, would have expected to lead Israel to freedom. At the beginning of his story, he thinks too little of himself and by the end of his story, he thinks too much of himself. Gideon becomes useful to God once begins sees himself the way God sees him and he becomes useless to God when he stops seeing himself the way God sees him. Let's look at how God changes the way Gideon sees both himself and God.

One of the major differences between the gospel and every other religion in the world revolves around the issue of identity: who am I really? Religion says you are what you do. The gospel says you are who God says you are. He defines our identity and He defines it not by what we do but by what Christ has done in our behalf. By His grace in Christ, He makes us new people. The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you become a new person. The old you dies, a new person is born and that's what the Bible means by born again. Then God tells us how to behave as new people. But in my experience, the fundamental problem most believers have in living as Christians is we don't know who we are. We still see ourselves as the person we used to be rather than the person God says we are now because of what Jesus has done. And because we always behave consistently with the person we believe ourselves to be, until we see ourselves the way God sees us, until we see ourselves as the person we really are because of Christ, we will not live as new creations. That's why the first thing God does in transforming a coward into a champion; in making us useful to Him is to radically change the way we view ourselves; as illustrated in the life of Gideon. Judges 6:11-24 "*Then the angel of the Lord came and sat under*

*the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior."* We talked about the angel of the Lord a few weeks back. The angel of the Lord isn't just any angel, it is the Lord Himself disguised in human form; which is why Gideon doesn't fall down in terror when the angel of the Lord visits him. Gideon initially thinks he's speaking to a man. Now remember, Israel is in a bad way because of the Midianites, hiding in caves and in the hills and trying to hang on to the little they have left. That's why the angel of the Lord finds Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress – which any farmer reading this story would know immediately isn't the way you thresh wheat. Normally wheat was threshed out in the open so the breeze could blow away the chaff. But Gideon's trying to hide his wheat from the Midianites and so he's down in a hole in the ground, trying to thresh his wheat in secret so the Midianites won't see him and take what belongs to him. Threshing wheat in a winepress is just a pathetic picture of how powerless Israel has become. Yet... *"The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior."* Gideon looks up and says, "There are no valiant warriors here. You must have got the wrong winepress." *"Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."* Gideon replies, "You're clearly mistaken. I'm certainly no mighty man of valor and the Lord certainly isn't with us. If He was, we wouldn't be in the mess we're in." Now remember, we're talking about the way God transforms us by first changing the way we see ourselves and I want you to notice two critical mistakes Gideon makes because we make the same mistakes all the time. Gideon doesn't see his circumstances from God's perspective and he doesn't see himself from God's perspective. First, Gideon assumes that God is not with them because He hasn't rescued them from the Midianites like He rescued their ancestors. Of course the reader knows that the reason they're in the hands of Midian is because God has not abandoned them and is using these circumstances to break them of their dependence on idols. But Gideon assumes that if God was with them, they wouldn't be in so much trouble; and we do the same thing. We think that when trouble comes, God has abandoned us instead of asking how God is using this trouble for our good and His purpose as the Scripture teaches. God never abandons us and He never abandoned Israel. That's why He is appearing to Gideon. *"The Lord looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?"* God says, "Gideon, mighty man of valor, the Lord is with you. So go deliver Israel from the Midianites. Isn't it enough that I have sent you?" But Gideon He said to Him, *"O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."* "Me, deliver Israel? Come on! Now I know you've got the wrong address. I'm the youngest son of the smallest family of the smallest tribe in Israel. I'm the last person to deliver Israel." Can you see the second mistake Gideon makes? He fails to see himself the way God sees him. Does that sound familiar? It should. Because that's what we tell God when He shows us His plan for us. "I can't do that. You've got the wrong boy, Lord." *But the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."* God tells Gideon, "You can't deliver Israel, but I can and I'll be with you, and you will defeat Midian as easily as if it was a single man." Now Gideon has a choice. He can see himself the way he sees himself or

he can see himself the way God sees him. From Gideon's perspective, he's nobody. He's from an insignificant family from an insignificant tribe of an intimidated and defeated second-rate nation. From God's perspective, Gideon is His chosen instrument for His people's salvation. Gideon sees himself as a scared farm boy. God sees him as a valiant warrior. Gideon thinks he's powerless. God says he's unconquerable. Because it doesn't matter who Gideon is or where he's from. All that matters is who God is. And God begins the process of changing a coward into a champion by changing the way Gideon sees himself. And He does the same thing in our lives.

Now by this time in the conversation, Gideon has a hunch the man he's speaking to may be more than a man. But before Gideon will take this message seriously, he needs to know for sure that God is speaking to him. Vs. 17, "*So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me.* Apparently the angel of the Lord looked human. So how does Gideon know that it's really God speaking to him? Vs. 18-23 "*Please do not depart from here, until I come {back} to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You.*" And He said, "*I will remain until you return.*" Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought {them} out to him under the oak and presented {them.} The angel of God said to him, "*Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.*" And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "*Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.*" The Israelites believed that no one could see God and live and that was true. No one could see the face of God and live. But the angel of the Lord is the way God would sometimes appear and speak with certain people. "*The LORD said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die."*" I don't know if Gideon heard an audible voice from heaven but God speaks to assure him to be at peace, he won't die as a result of this conversation. Vs. 24 *Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.*"

What just happened? In one sense, not much; Israel is still in bondage to the Midianites and Gideon is still threshing wheat in a winepress; but in another sense, everything. Gideon no longer sees himself or God the same way he did an hour ago and that changes everything else. We always behave consistently with what we believe about God and what we believe about ourselves so to turn a coward into a champion, God first changes the way the coward sees himself and the way he sees God. Before the angel of the Lord visited Gideon, Gideon saw himself as weak and incompetent and God as completely absent from the situation. His conversation with the angel of the Lord begins to change the way Gideon sees himself because it changes the way he sees God. God hasn't abandoned Israel but is going to rescue them; and He's going to rescue them through Gideon. He is God's mighty warrior because God is with him. God changes us in the same way. When we put our faith in Christ, God makes us brand new people, forgiving our sins and clothing us in Christ's perfect righteousness, adopting us into His

family and making us His beloved children. And because we are new people, we are able to live a new life. However, that new life will elude us until we first believe what God says is true of us just as Gideon will not become useful to God until he believes that he is a mighty warrior because God is with Him. As long as he believes he is the least of the least of the least, there is no way he'll be able to lead the armies of Israel and as long as I see myself as the person I used to be before Christ, I'll live the way I lived before Christ. I prayed for years that God would release me from a particular sin without seeing any improvement at all. Then I studied the Romans 6 and discovered that I was asking God to do something He had already done the moment Christ came into my life. As a result of being in union with Christ, I already had all the power I needed to say no to this sin. I just needed to use it. But I had lived for years in ignorance of what I had been given when God gave me Jesus. I've discovered that just about every problem I have is because I don't know or don't believe what God says is already true of me because of Christ. The New Testament never says, "Do this so that you can become this." That's religion. Rather it says, "You are already this by the grace of God through Christ – so live like it." That's the gospel. In most of the epistles of the New Testament, the commands and the practical everyday stuff is at the end of the letter so I used to skip the first part and go right to the stuff I could apply. But I found I couldn't apply the stuff at the end without first understanding and believing the stuff at the beginning which was almost always about what God has done for us in Christ and how we're different as a result. Growing as a Christian begins with understanding who I really am; with seeing myself the way God sees me, which is beautifully illustrated in the story of Gideon. Gideon's choice and ours is whether we will see ourselves as God tells us we are or as others tell us we are; whether we will define ourselves by our past or define ourselves by what God says is true today because of Christ's work in our behalf.

Do you see yourself as God sees you? Ask yourself the following questions. 1. Do you believe that you are holy, blameless and perfect in God's sight or a sinful wretch? 2. Do you believe you are perfectly loved and accepted by God or on probation? 3. Do you believe that Christ lives in you and will never leave you or forsake you or that you are on your own? Do you believe that you are a member of God's family and that all born again believers are your brothers and sisters, or that you are alone in this world. 4. Do you believe that God delights in you, controls everything that happens to you and uses it for His purpose and for your good or are you worried about what might happen in the future? 5. Are you confident that Christ will supply all that you need and that your needs and inadequacies are His opportunity to show Himself strong in your behalf or do you resent your current situation? 6. Do you believe that Christ can conquer any sin or do you feel like you're a slave to habits you can't control? We become Christians when we believe the gospel and we grow as Christians by applying the gospel; believing that what God says is true of us now because of Jesus is the truest thing about us. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:17, "*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*" Who are you? Do you believe that you're not the person you used to be? That you don't have to be chained to the past? That you're God's own beloved child, indwelt by Christ, a person of destiny, put on this earth to do great things?

This week, when you're tempted by fear or hopelessness or insecurity or any other temptation, ask yourself two questions. What am I not believing about God? What am I not believing about what God says about me? Paul writes in Philemon 1:6, "*I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.*" Notice, Paul isn't talking about every good thing that needs to be developed in you. He's talking about every good thing that's already in you because Jesus is in you. We don't need to be changed nearly as much as we need to recognize we've been changed.

First God changes Gideon's view of himself and of God and our life will change as we begin to believe what God says about us instead of what our parents or our friends or our experience says about us. However, true confidence in God isn't a result of reciting self-affirming truths - it has to be acted upon to be experienced. And the next thing God does is to send Gideon home on a mission. Gideon needs to start behaving like a mighty man of valor and to begin at home. Judges 6:25-27 *"Now on the same night the Lord said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; (Gideon's dad was the local priest of Baal and Asherah) and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down."* Remember, the root of Israel's problem is idolatry. So the first thing God tells Gideon to do is to deal with the idolatry of his own family. *Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.* Gideon wasn't totally transformed by his conversation with the angel of the Lord. He's still timid. But he obeys; secretly and in the dead of night, but he still obeys. And the next morning, everything explodes. Vs. 28-32 *"When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built. They said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched about and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing." Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it." But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar." Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he had torn down his altar."* Even though Joash is the local priest of Baal, he asks the crowd, "Does Baal need you to fight for him? If he's a god, let him fight for himself" - which was a pretty smart move by Joash. He didn't want Gideon to be killed and so he says, "Let Baal kill him - if he can." And he renames Gideon Jerubbah, which means, "Let Baal contend against him." Now Gideon is identified publically as the enemy of Baal, which changes everyone else's perspective on Gideon. God gives Gideon a new identity - the mighty man of valor, the deliverer of Israel - but Gideon doesn't feel like a mighty man of valor until he steps out in faith and obeys. It wasn't a big step. It was local and at home. But that simple act of obedience galvanizes his family, his tribe, and his nation into action. Somebody stood up to Baal and lived to tell the tale. As a result of his first small step of obedience, not only does Gideon see himself with new eyes, his entire community sees him with new eyes. Gideon's

obedience is the pebble that starts a landslide and his own father is the first to follow Gideon and the Lord. Who would have thought? I want to tell you a strange tale from my own life and you can make of it what you will. But this is what happened. When I was on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ at Cal, my own family was a mess. My mom had been an alcoholic for many years and she would often call me at Berkeley in a drunken stupor which made concentrating on the ministry a challenge. My little brother was addicted to hard drugs and my dad was on his way to alcoholism, I believe, out of sadness over the deterioration of his family. I was asked to be involved in an exorcism at Stanford (where else, Cal fans?) and because I knew nothing about spiritual warfare, I had done some background study and discovered that in foreign countries where idolatry is common, missionaries often tell new converts to the faith to destroy their household idols or else their family will continue to have trouble with demons. When I read that, I remembered an old Ouija board my brother had gotten on his birthday many years earlier. He and I had used it once and were so freaked out by what happened that we put it back in the box and put the box up in the rafters of our garage where it had sat for years gathering dust. So as I'm reading about missionaries' experiences with demons in foreign lands, I'm wondering if that Ouija board has anything to do with my family's deterioration. I went home for Christmas and as soon as I got there, I got the board out of the garage, took it to the back yard and burned it. Within 24 hours, my mother stopped drinking and my father gave his life to Christ. In the 30 years, my mom lived after that, she never had another drink and my brother is a believer today. Did that Ouija board have anything to do with that? I don't know. But I do know that Gideon destroying the idols released his family from bondage and I believe that my obedience to God benefited my family as well. So here's the point. God gives us a new identity in Christ but we don't begin to experience the reality of that new identity until we obey Him. And God doesn't give us a big mission right away. He starts small because it is only when we are faithful in the small things that He entrusts larger things to us. And that first mission usually involves serving God in our family because if our faith doesn't work at home, it won't work anywhere else. So ask yourself, what does obeying God look like in relation to my family? Gideon was the youngest member of his family but because God was with him, his family was profoundly transformed. Don't bypass your family on your way to reach the world. It took my father four years of observing the changes Christ made in my life before he became a believer and it took my mother and my brother decades before they came to faith. But God brought them to Himself. What does serving Christ look like in your family?

Salvation is about Jesus making all things new. Right now He's making people new. In the future, the Bible says He will make the world new. If you are not a Christian and wish you can start over, the good news of the gospel is that if you will trust Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, He will make you new.