

“Hurray for the Little Guys”
In the Face of Opposition, part 4

Judges 6:1-24

[title slide] *Welcome, prayer*

Jesus Christ, the Living and Mighty One, may your name be greatly praised. Look down on your people gathered here. Open our ears, our eyes, and our hearts, that we might respond to your love. Show us where we need to have the courage to change. And give us the grace to know that your power is always enough, no matter what we are facing. In your name we pray. Amen.

[Dogs] A little boy took his dog for a walk one day. It was a remarkable dog – squat, bow-legged, stubby-tailed, and yellow. It happened that the town bully was walking on the same street with his Doberman – a big, nasty, aggressive black dog. The bully saw the little boy coming, and he shouted, “That’s the ugliest yellow dog I’ve ever seen.”

The little boy replied, “Yeah, well, I bet you my dog can beat your dog in a fight.” “You’re on!” yelled the bully, and they let their dogs go. Just as the Doberman was about to knock him over, the squat, yellow, stubby-tailed dog opened his mouth and swallowed the Doberman with one bite. “Aggh!” screamed the bully. “What kind of crazy dog is that?!”

“Well,” replied the little boy, “before I cut off his tail and painted him yellow, he was an alligator.”

[Bullying] Nobody likes a bully, do they? I was bullied in high school, and I never felt like I could do anything about it. I always felt like the little guy who could never win. To this day, no matter the sport, I always cheer for the underdog, no matter who is playing. My favorite movies always have a hero who has a .001% change of winning: Frodo; Chicken Little; the coach in Facing the Giants. Who are your favorite underdogs? *(Pause for answers.)*

I think everyone has all felt like an underdog, no matter how tall you are. We know that bullying is a big deal in our schools. I submit to you it’s a big deal in the world. Terrorism is just another form of bullying. And our world feels pretty scared right now. A lot of places are facing turmoil right now, and an honest question might be, where is God in all of this?

[Gideon] Gideon asked the same question in his time. In Judges 6, we meet a man who is so scared, he is threshing his grain in a wine press. Gideon was hiding from his enemies, the Midianites. Normally, you would thresh your grain on a threshing floor, so that you had plenty of room to move around. Gideon was hiding in a cramped place, to prevent his hard work from being stolen. The Midianites were nomadic tribes, while the Israelites were farmers. Every spring, these bullies would raid the Israelites, oppress them, steal their food, ruin their farms, and generally terrorize them.

[Midianite raid] The Book of Judges has a lot to say about bullying. Israel faced a repeated cycle of sin, defeat, and rescue in the days before they had a king. Frankly, it's a gross book. But Judges carries an unmistakable message – God supports the cause of the oppressed, the down-trodden, and the bullied underdogs.

[Gideon kneeling] Look at Gideon's story in Judges 6 and 7. When we first meet him, he's hiding in a wine press. Eight other times in these two chapters, Gideon either doubts God, is scared, or questions whether or not he can do what God is calling him to do.

Even when an angel greets Gideon, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!” Gideon was just plain shocked. He questions, “But sir, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?” And Gideon goes on to complain about the oppression and bullying. Even though the angel tells Gideon he has the strength to rescue his country, Gideon doesn't believe him. Gideon is small. He's from a small tribe. He's the underdog.

Even when God gave him a sign, Gideon thought he was going to die, because he had seen a holy angel face to face. Gideon had to test the Lord several more times before he finally believed the message.

Read Judges 6:36-40

[Gideon's fleece] Have you ever “put a fleece on the ground”? Have you ever wanted to test God? I know, Jesus said it is a sin to “put the Lord your God to the test.” (Matthew 4:7) By testing, I don't mean tempting God by throwing yourself directly in the path of danger. Instead, I mean, testing God to know God's will. Praying for a sign. Listening in obedience to what you think God is telling you, and then acting on your discernment. Have you done as Gideon did?

I believe God gives us signs. For example, in 2001, I prayed whether or not I should marry Katja, and God gave me a very specific sign one day. It was very similar to the presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost falling on the disciples. I was amazed. In my heart, I knew that God confirmed my decision. The more you pray, the more you walk with Jesus, the more often these things happen.

[Gideon’s army] And yet, even with multiple clear signs from God, Gideon still didn’t fully trust in God alone to deliver Israel. So God made it abundantly clear who was in charge. Gideon recruited 32,000 soldiers, and God whittled the forces by 99% - Gideon went into battle with just 300. Those are very long odds.

[Horns and torches] Still, God granted Gideon the victory. In fact, Gideon’s men didn’t even have to use swords. God sent in a marching band! Three hundred men, armed with only torches and horns, defeated the entire army of the Midianites. Gideon just had to follow God’s directions, however strange they sounded. There was no way that anyone else could take credit for the victory, because only God could have done the impossible.

We seem to be facing the impossible right now. The world is being shocked by war, unrest, and tribalism. Everywhere we look, we find oppression, bullying, and murder. We are tempted to think that we can do nothing about it. Or worse, we are tempted to become bullies ourselves, fighting violence with more violence, suspicion, and hatred.

Violence never solved anything. But trusting in God to provide the victory? Now, that’s a radical idea! Praying for our enemies? Loving those who would do us harm? Instead of lobbing bombs at each other, what if we sought peaceful resolution, open discourse, diplomatic, non-violent solutions? That’s crazy, I know. It’s telling 32,000 able-bodied soldiers to just go home. It’s taking a few dozen friends, grabbing a few horns and some flashlights. The situation is impossible. Yet God’s Word is clear: We cannot win on our own merit.

What if we decided to fight our battles, not with our own strength, but by being obedient and waiting for God to deliver us? What if we really believed some of these scriptures? *(Members read these aloud from the pews.)*

Matthew 19:26 – “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With humans this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”

Job 22:29 – “When people are brought low and you say, 'Lift them up!' then he will save the downcast.”

Psalms 138:6 – “Though the LORD is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly; though lofty, he sees them from afar.”

Matthew 23:12 – “For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Matthew 5:5 – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

James 4:10 – “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

1 Peter 5:5 – “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’”

How different would this world be if we actually trusted God to deliver us? Gideon was scared. We are, too. Yet God calls us “the mighty ones.” God uses the meek and the humble to accomplish his will, underdogs, like Moses, Esther, David, and Mary. And God will use you and me, too.

[Jesus] Jesus himself was the ultimate example of the underdog, and God provided the greatest victory ever through the cross, a victory over sin and death. Jesus embodied humility. He died for us, and God resurrected him and gave him all the glory. Every person who believes that Jesus is Lord is saved, not by their own works or strength, but by grace and grace alone.

Matthew 12:20 says Christ won't break a fragile reed, he won't snuff out a smoldering candle. If you are feeling like the underdog today, there is good news. God is on your side! God won't snuff you out. God will provide the victory! That's a promise!

[World, hands] So what battle are you fighting? An addiction? A broken relationship? A sin? Does someone flat-out hate you, even though you've done nothing wrong? Are you facing an impossible situation? Do you need to ask God, “Please, help me! I don't feel like a mighty warrior! I can't do this by myself!”

Let's take a risk this morning, church. Let's lay our proverbial fleeces on the ground. I'm asking you to pray for those battles, right here, right now. Find two or three people around you – move around the room if you have to, and spend some time in prayer together. During the next song, take a few minutes and pray for victory. Pray for peace in our world and for barriers to break down. Ask God to overcome egos, dysfunction, pride, hate, anger, addictions, and sin. Ask God to

whittle the army down until there is nothing left but a miracle. And boldly pray for that miracle, as you discern your part in it and ask God to make you obedient. Find a few humble soldiers in your midst now, and ask God to fight for you. God won't snuff you out. He will provide the victory. Let's take some time now and pray.

(Quietly play Voice of Truth by Casting Crowns)

Memory verse

Psalm 145:14 - “The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.”

Reflection questions

1. When in your life have you felt scared?
2. Have you ever felt oppressed or threatened? By what or whom? Where was God in that situation?
3. Have you ever felt like God was asking you to do something impossible? What was it? Did you do it? What was the result?
4. Reflect on Psalm 145:14. Whom do you know that is humbled, fallen, and needs lifting up? How can you show them God is on their side?