

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for July 22: Risk

July 11, 2012

Poor Gideon. Who can blame him for hiding at the bottom of a winepress? Life in Israel was scary. The Midianites could attack at any moment (6:11). A streak of bad circumstances had Gideon and others wondering if God had abandoned them (v. 13). Where was the miracle-working God of the Exodus now?

It must have been bad to be thrashing wheat in a winepress. The process was supposed to be conducted outside in a field. The wheat would be crushed and thrown up into the air, where the heavier, usable kernels would fall back down and the lighter, unusable chaff would be blown away. Imagine the process done inside a winepress. A cloud of dust and chaff would hang right there with the wheat kernels. Sounds like an exercise in futility.

So why did the Angel of the Lord appear to Gideon? By all accounts, he was cowardly, faithless and self-loathing. He was in a winepress threshing wheat. What did the Lord see in him?

Nothing.

I don't mean he had no potential, no brains, no seed of trust in God. I just mean that when the Lord looked at Gideon, he saw an empty vessel. He saw a person who, with some guidance, would carry out the Lord's plan. And the Lord's plan actually depicted this spiritual truth.

We can read of how Gideon defeated the Midianites in 7:16-25. Gideon and his tiny army of 300 each had a trumpet and an empty jar. Inside the empty jars, they placed torches. In the dead of night, they surrounded the Midianite army. When the signal was given, the Israelites blew their

trumpets, shouted a battle cry and smashed their empty jars to reveal the light inside. When the Midianites heard and saw the surprise attack, they began to flee and actually turned their swords on one another in the confusion.

What a creative way to win a battle. The desired effect came about when those jars were smashed so that the light hidden inside could shine out. Can you see the headline? "Cracked Pots Win Battle!"

I'm reminded of a passage the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4. After describing the beauty of Christ's salvation as "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (v. 6), he writes, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (v. 7).

Just like those jars held by Gideon's army, every Christian has the treasured light of Christ inside. Isn't it interesting that God uses jars of clay? Not fine china, not golden goblets, not silver vases. Paul tells us he does this so it is clear that the power belongs to God, not to us.

This is what was accomplished in the victory over the Midianites. If the Israelites had used their swords and armor, they would have taken credit. But only God could have brought about the victory they enjoyed. The empty jars gave God the glory.

And Paul says Christians are to be jars of clay that hold Christ's light. He continues: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

The experiences in life that put pressure on us, challenge us, and chip away at our finish are all part of God's plans. The cracks in the pot let the light shine out. We die with Christ so we can live with him. We lose our lives for

his sake, and we find eternal life instead.

Paul got very personal later in this letter and shared about his struggle with his thorn in the flesh. Three times he pleaded with the Lord to take away this big crack in his pot. Finally, he heard the Lord tell him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Then Paul writes, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Our weaknesses prepare us to be vessels for God’s strength. Our cracks become the channels for his light to shine out into this world. Our hardships become platforms for his victory. For the glory of God, we are to boast in our weaknesses. For the sake of Christ, we should embrace our identity as cracked pots, jars of clay, and stop trying to be fine china or gold-plated dinnerware.

Gideon’s time down there in that winepress threshing wheat, fearing the Midianites, loathing himself and getting chaff in his eyes was preparation. Those experiences broke down his pride to make him ready to humbly obey the Lord.

We should view our challenges and hardships the same way. God our Potter is forming the clay in his hands, carefully placing each little crack in our lives exactly where he wants it. In his time—if we let him—he’ll shine the light of his grace through our weakness into the world.