

Hymns: 1 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God  
Psalm 85

27 To God Be the Glory 31 Victory in Jesus

Good morning! It's that time again – March Madness. Who can tell us what that means? It refers to the NCAA basketball tournament. Today's games will decide the remaining two teams headed for the Final Four and a shot, eight days from today, at the NCAA Championship. Are you ready?

What was the most exciting college basketball tournament you can remember? Being an N.C. State graduate, it's **not** hard for me to answer that one. It was back **thirty-one years ago** – 1983 – the year of the “Cardiac Pack” – referring to the nine heart-pounding, cliff-hanger, nail-biter games that were won by the **underdog** NCSU Wolfpack to capture the title. They even made a Coke bottle to commemorate the event.

To summarize, NCSU by virtue of it's mediocre season did not qualify to go to the NCAA Tournament. **But** conference champions received an automatic slot. Their **only hope** was to win the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) tournament. The stage was set for the most exciting series of games I had ever witnessed.

Back then, the ACC was a much more local and colorful conference than today with the likes of coaches Dean Smith, Lefty Driesell, Mike Krzyzewski, Bobby Cremins, and Jim Valvano. Valvano, the young coach of NC State, despite his faults, was a **master strategist** and an **ace** at extracting **every last ounce** of performance from his players. If State lost **any game** they would have to **pack** up and go home. Here's a recap how they won **nine straight games** to capture the title:

**1983 ACC Tournament Results**

Round	Opponent	Score
Quarterfinals	Wake Forest	71-70
	UNC	
Semifinals	sophomore Michael Jordan	91-84 OT
	Virginia	
Championship	Ralph Sampson	81-78

Those three battle victories just got them **into** the NCAA tournament.

**1983 NCAA Tournament Results**

Round	Opponent	Score
First round	Pepperdine	69-67 2OT
Second round	UNLV	71-70

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Sweet Sixteen	Utah	75-56
Elite Eight	Virginia	63-62
Final Four	Georgia	67-60
Championship	Houston	54-52

Reading from the Wikipedia account:

*The Houston Cougars, nicknamed [Phi Slama Jama](#) for their athletic, fast-paced style of play that featured [Clyde Drexler](#) and [Hakeem Olajuwon](#), were expected to win easily over the **underdog** Wolfpack. NC State escaped **with** their second national title after a last-second air ball by Dereck Whittenburg was **caught** and **dunked** by [Lorenzo Charles](#).<sup>[9]</sup> The 54-52 final is one of the most **famous** in college basketball history.*

Speaking of underdog battles, today we're going to look at the story of Gideon and along the way learn the secret to the “**Perfect Military Strategy**.” Strangely, Gideon pops up in three consecutive chapters of the book of Judges and then **disappears** from scripture except for an honorable mention in Heroes of Faith listing of Hebrews chapter 11.

The time of the judges was a strange transitional era in the history of Israel. Moses had brought them **to** the Promised Land. Joshua took them in and possessed it. Then thirteen judges ruled in a time of apostasy. Some familiar names are:

- Deborah
- Gideon (whom we will look at today)
- Jephthah
- Samson
- Samuel

The characteristic phrase that described this time was:

Judges 17:6

*In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

During the span of about 350 years, Israel repeatedly turned its back on God and worshiped idols, was judged by God, repented, and then did it again. The judges often were the deliverers that brought Israel back from judgment. So it was with Gideon. You can see then, the Book of Judges perhaps could also be remembered as the book of *judgment*.

Judges 6

*[1] And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.*

This is the broken record of the Old Testament. The Israelites turned from the Lord and worshiped other gods and were judged by the Lord. In this case, it was the Midianites who came as an invading plague and destroyed Israel's crops and livestock.

*[5] ... they came **as grasshoppers for multitude**; for both they and their camels were **without number**: and they entered into the land to destroy it.*

*[6] And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.*

The Bible says the Israelites had to flee to the mountains and live in caves. In response to their cries, the Lord then sent a prophet to remind them that the Lord was their Redeemer, and they were disobedient to Him. Then we're introduced to Gideon.

*[11] ... Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.*

*[12] And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou **mighty man of valour**.*

Gideon responded to the angel of the Lord asking why he picked him. The Lord said:

*[14] ... thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites:*

Gideon objected:

*[15] ... behold, **my family is poor** in Manasseh, and **I am the least in my father's house**.*

In other words, why me? God gives us the answer.

I Corinthians 1

*[26] For ye see **your calling**, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*

*[27] But God hath **chosen the foolish** things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the **weak things** of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*

*[28] And **base things** of the world, and things which are **despised**, hath God chosen, yea, and things which **are not**, to bring to nought things that are:*

Why?

*[29] That no flesh should **glory** in his presence.*

The Lord had chosen the **lowly** Gideon. It's reassuring to note that God chooses the weak, humble people **like us** to serve Him. Gideon asked the Lord for a sign. He then prepared the Lord a meal with meat, its broth, and a cake of bread. The Lord told him to put the meat and bread on a rock and pour the broth over it. The Lord then took his staff and **boom!** He vaporized it with a flame from the rock.

There was Gideon's sign that he had requested. The Lord departed, and Gideon realized he had seen the Lord face to face.

Gideon then built an altar to the Lord that day. After that, he was instructed by God to tear down the altar of Baal, cut down the associated grove, build an altar to the Lord, and sacrifice a bullock there to Him. Gideon went out with ten of his servants at night, fearing being seen, and did as the Lord instructed him to do.

Sure enough, in the morning the people of the city saw **what** Gideon had done and went to Joash his father and said, "Gideon must die." Joash told them that if Baal's so great, let him kill him. When he said that, the people backed off.

Next, we learn where the enemy set up camp:

*[33] Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.*

Interestingly, this place is also known as Armageddon. Could it be this battle is a foreshadowing of the future end-times battle and the that implements and actions of Gideon's army symbolize something else? It's food for thought.

*[34] But **the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon**, and he blew a trumpet; and [his family] gathered after him.*

Gideon assembled an army from his tribe and others in Israel. Then he asked for another sign from the Lord.

*[36] And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,  
[37] Behold, **I will put a fleece of wool [on] the floor**; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside [it], then shall I know that thou wilt **save** Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.*

*[38] And it was so: for he rose up early on the [the next day], [gathered up] the fleece..., and wringed the dew out of the fleece, [filling] a bowl [with] water.*

I can't help interjecting this. Have any of you ever seen the ShamWow! commercial? Here are a few classic lines:

- *ShamWow! made in Germany, you know the Germans always make good stuff.*
- *You're gonna spend \$20 every month on paper towels anyway. Stop throwing your money away.*
- *This [ShamWow!] lasts ten years. This [sponge] lasts a week. I don't know, it sells itself.*
- *If you call now, within the next twenty minutes, **we can't do this all day**, we'll give you a second set absolutely free.*

I remember. He took this product soaked with water and wrung out a bowl full of water. So the picture's there. If you've ever seen the ShamWow! commercial, there you go. Interestingly, the very skillful pitchman who did that commercial, Offer Shlomi (alias Vince Offer), was born in **Beersheba, Israel** (according to Wikipedia). Let's get back to our story.

Next, Gideon asked the Lord to do the reverse – to wet the ground and leave the fleece dry. So the Lord did that the next night. That was enough to give Gideon the confidence he needed to move forward.

Judges 7

He took **his** army of thirty-two thousand and moved them into position to strike the Midianites. But the Lord told him his army was too large. He said to tell his troops that anyone who was afraid should go home. More than two thirds left, leaving Gideon with ten thousand. Then the Lord told Gideon, his army was **still** too large and instructed him to trim it down by selecting only those who drank from their hand rather than kneeling to drink. That dwindled his forces to a band of just three hundred to take on a host of perhaps a hundred thousand or more.

The Lord told Gideon to spy out the enemy and if he was afraid, to take his servant with him. Gideon (“the mighty man of valor”) was afraid, so he took his servant.

*[12] And the Midianites and the Amalekites and **all** the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.*

*[16] And he [that is Gideon] divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.*

At about 10 p.m., they moved into position above and around the Midianite camp.

*[20] And the three companies blew the trumpets, and [broke] the pitchers, ... held the lamps in their **left** hands, ... [blew] the trumpets in their **right** hands...: and ... cried, **The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.***

*[21] And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the [enemy] ran, and cried, and fled.*

What was the strategy here?

1. Cull down fighting forces to almost nothing.
2. Surround them at night.
3. Startle them with trumpets, sudden lights, and shouts.

What do you think? Was that the answer? Was Gideon a master military strategist? Let's go back and see what the Bible says.

Judges 6

*[16] And the LORD said unto him, **Surely***

*I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.*

Judges 7

*[2] And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me **to give the Midianites into their hands, lest***

Why?

*Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, **Mine own hand hath saved me.***

*[7] And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped [water from their hands] **will***

Who?

*I [that is the Lord]*

***save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand***

*[9] And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; **for***

What?

***I have delivered it into thine hand.***

*[14] ... for into his [Gideon's] hand **hath God delivered** Midian, and all the host.*

*[15] ...**the LORD hath delivered** into your hand the host of Midian.*

*[22] And the three hundred blew the trumpets, **and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow***

God moves the hearts of men. He had the enemy **kill each other!**

So what's the answer here? Was it a bunch of lights and trumpets and filtering out of soldiers? No! It was the Lord. With the Lord, Gideon had won against all odds.

Application

Speaking of winning against all odds, you may have heard that Warren Buffet offered a billion dollars for a perfect prediction for the outcomes of all games in the NCAA tournament called the "bracket." Did you fill out your prediction? Even our president, as busy as he is running the county, filled out his. To a fair degree, the outcome of each game is random. Do you know the odds of getting it right from making random picks? It's one chance in two to the 63rd power or more than 9 followed by eighteen zeros. That means the chances are about one in nine million trillion.

But **as** with Gideon, **with** God on your side, **odds** go out the window. Three hundred unarmed men plus God routed unnumbered armed hordes.

God plus you is a majority.

What's your battle? What's your greatest fear? Is it the government, your health, your finances, a personal relationship, worries about the future, or is it even death itself? God has the answer for those fears.

Romans 8

*[37] ...we are more than **conquerors** through him that **loved** us.*

*[38] For I am persuaded, that neither **death**, nor life, nor angels, nor **principalities**, nor powers, nor things present, nor **things to come**,*

*[39] Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

As with Gideon, the Lord wants to show Himself mighty on your behalf. Despite the odds, will you trust Him to win the victory?

### **Benediction**

#### **Ephesians 3:20-21**

*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*

*Unto him be glory*

*in the church*

*by Christ Jesus*

*throughout all ages,*

*world without end. Amen.*

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