

More Than I Can Handle

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Children, you can be dismissed. You can be dismissed to your classes and let's take our Bibles and let's turn over to the Old Testament this morning, the Old Testament book of Judges 7. If you're using one of our Bibles that's provided for you at the bottom of the chair in front of you, you can turn to page 206. Page 206 in that Bible. We're looking for Judges 7 and we'll begin reading in a moment from verse 1. Also, don't forget about Wednesday night. Wednesday night we're going to start a new study on forensic faith and I tell you, it matters when you know what you believe and why you believe it. It matters when you can be confident that you have planted yourself in truth. It matters. It matters in how you will be able to live your life and how you'll be able to share your faith with others and so I hope you'll join us this Wednesday night at 7 o'clock and we'll get started on that.

But now we're looking at Judges 7 and we're going to begin reading at verse 1 and we'll read through the end of verse 15.

1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2 The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' 3 Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained. 4 And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." 5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." 6 And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. 7 And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all

the others go every man to his home." 8 So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. 9 That same night the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. 10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. 11 And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. 12 And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. 13 When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, "Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat." 14 And his comrade answered, "This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp." 15 As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand."

This is God's word.

Let's pray.

Father, we, your people, face various trials. Many who are here this morning are facing fiery trials and we stand in need of strengthening for our hands. As you strengthened the hand of Gideon and his army after hearing your word, may our hands be strengthened after hearing your word applied to our hearts through the ministry and the person of the Holy Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to imagine with me today a conversation. You might not have to imagine it, maybe you had this conversation this week. I know I did. I hear this quite regularly, it goes something like this. You ask someone how they're holding up. You say, "How are you holding up? How are you getting along?" You know that they're going through a difficult time. You know they're facing a trial, hardship, and you ask them, "How are you holding up?" And they'll say something like this, "Well, you know, we're getting by. We're doing our best but you know, you know, God won't give me more than I can handle." You hear that, right? Maybe you've said that, "God won't give me more than I can handle," but is that true? Is that true?

Now some might say, "Well, of course, Brother Van, doesn't the Bible actually confirm that God won't give me more than I can handle?" Well, there are many who think so. I run into them every week and I'm sure you do as you think about it now. After today you're going to be more sensitive to this, okay, because you're going to run into many

people, you're going to run into Christians, you're going to run into unbelievers who will say, "God won't give me more than I can handle," and we usually base it loosely on a verse found in 1 Corinthians. Paul was writing to the church at Corinth and he said this, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it."

Now the first thing we need to recognize here is this: this is not about, this verse is not about God allowing more than you can handle, it's particularly about God not allowing temptation to overwhelm us without him providing a way of escape so that we can endure the temptation and not fall into sin as Israel did. In other words, when you read that verse in its context, Paul was warning the Corinthian church not to fall into temptation like the Israelites did. So that verse really doesn't have anything to do with God allowing trials, suffering, hardship, into my life that's more than I can handle. In fact, I'm going to guess that if you're here today and you've said that, you've said, "Well, I know God won't give me more than I can handle," but you might say this kind of quietly and secretly you might say, "But I'll tell you what, it sure seems like it's more than I can handle. It sure seems like." Maybe you're here this morning and it feels that way to you. You're going through something right now that feels like more than you can handle and so if that's you, then I'm glad you're here today because you're going to be helped from the word of God because as we look at our text this morning, I think you would agree it certainly seems that Gideon's circumstances are more than he can handle, right? Now it's not a trick question, okay, so it certainly seems like the text that we just read certainly seems that Gideon is facing more than he can handle and that God has determined it to be so. Now just take that in for a moment. Gideon is facing more than he can handle and God has determined that it be that way. If you're reading this and paying any attention, you've dialed it in, Gideon is facing more than he can handle and God has allowed it to happen.

So let's get the context for what we're looking at. You'll see a picture of Mount Gilboa. This is the area in which Gideon and his army are standing up on the mountain and Gideon was gazing down on the plain of Jezreel which is to the left of the mountain. Now this is the actual place. This would be the specific place where Gideon and his armies were and they would look out across this empty plain here but at this time in the text, there are 100,000 Midianites in their tents. Now that's pretty overwhelming, you know, I mean, the Bible writer says it was like locusts, you know, they were everywhere. In other words my point is, they were everywhere and so Gideon and his smaller army is having to look at this and kind of reason the odds. This really is a tough situation and that morning, the Lord determines that Israel's army of 32,000 versus 100,000 is too big.

Now do we get that number right? 100,000 Midianites, 32,000 Israelites and the Lord says that's too many. Now, where do you get that kind of math to say that's too many? Why would God say that? And it is so crystal clear in verse 2, "The LORD said to Gideon, 'The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, "My own hand has saved me."'" Now, you ought to be looking at that going, "Well, what's the big deal? What is God after here?" I mean, what is the big deal that after the war is over, after the Israelites win, after the Lord gives the

victory into their hands, what would be so wrong with them sitting around the campfire and, you know, clashing their mugs together and, "Woo, woo! Look what we did! Look what we did! This is great! Celebrate!" What's wrong with that? I'll tell you what, God knows more about us than we can even begin to scratch the surface on. God knew that Israel would think more highly of themselves than they ought to think when God gave them the victory. God was going to give them the victory. God had already purposed this but it was how that it was going to take place. On the other end of the victory were they going to be saying, "We are sufficient. We did it! Look at what we did!" Or are they going to boast in the Lord their God? That's what's at stake. It may not seem like a big deal right now but as we continue, it'll make more sense.

So Gideon trims the ranks. He had 32,000 which he was already outnumbered and now he sends 22,000 home. Now if you're doing the math, he's left with 10,000. He is outnumbered 10 to 1. Not good odds. Then to make it even stranger, the Lord considered these numbers still to be too much in Israel's favor. He's whittled it down to a mere 10,000 against 100,000 and then the Lord says, "That's still too many." So in obedience to the Lord's instruction, Gideon brought his small army who were very thirsty down to the spring of Harod and you'll see a picture of the spring of Harod which is a real place for tourists to visit, and it's at this location that this small army of 10,000 shows up and the Lord tells Gideon, "Now keep an eye on these guys." So then Gideon tells his commander, Purah, he gives him the strange command and he says, "Observe all the men as they drink. Have every man who laps his water like a dog stand off to the side."

Now for many years people have been trying to figure out, "What does this mean? What does this mean?" So there are a lot of different explanations but here's the real deal, here's really what's important so we not miss this: there were 10,000 and now it's reduced to 300. Now by all accounts, this is just military suicide. I mean, it's already bad enough that they only had 32,000 against 100,000 and then God said, "We need to trim this down some," and he sends 22,000 home who were afraid, leaving 10,000. Now they're at the spring of Harod, they're getting a refreshing drink and now all of sudden the army is 300 strong, that's it. Now, I think it's safe to say at this point in the story that Gideon would say, "This situation is becoming increasingly more than I can handle." Are you with me? "This situation is getting increasingly, it was already bad at 32, now I've got 300 men. This situation is getting to be more than I can handle." And furthermore, isn't it clear that God wants this to be more than he can handle? If you're unsure about that, look at verse 2 again.

God wants this to be more than Gideon and his 300 men can handle so the question again: does God allow his people to face more than they can handle? Now I want you to assume with me for a moment, you've probably already gathered this that the answer is yes, but let's just go ahead and assume for a moment that the answer is actually yes, then we need to ask the question: why? Why would God allow you or me to face more than we can handle or I can handle? Now the answer, the answer is going to depend upon what flavor of Christianity you have bought into. The answer is going to matter determined on what kind of Christianity you have bought into, what flavor. If you would have asked me this question 35 years ago, "Van, would God allow you to face more than you can

handle? Will he allow that?" I would have said, "No. No way. No way." That's 35 years ago, I was under the influence of a flavor of Christianity that was like, "Nothing bad. No adversity. No trials. I mean, there may be a little bump in the road but all we've got to do is pray and lay our hands on it and get it out of the way and it'll be done." It depends on what flavor of Christianity you have taken in and that you're standing on, you're embracing, of how you're going to answer the question: why would God allow me to face more than I can handle?

So why would he do it? Let's dive into it for a moment. The Apostle Paul writing to the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians, notice these words. It is so important that we read our Bibles and that we study and we look carefully at words. Words mean something and so here's what Paul said. "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia." Notice affliction, Christians facing affliction, okay? "For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength." Italicize that just so you can see that. "Burdened beyond our strength," translated "more than we could handle, that we despaired of life itself, indeed we felt that we had received a sentence of death but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." Paul is telling believers, "We were so burdened beyond our strength." In other words, "Our experience, our circumstances, we were out of strength. We had no means of handling this." In fact, it says, "then we felt we had received the sentence of death," that means, "we were almost certain we were goners. The circumstances that we were facing, it looked like life was over, earthly life was over, that was it," but then notice the very next sentence. He's explaining why did God allow Paul and his friends to be utterly burdened beyond their strength? Why did God allow them to have more than they could handle? Why did God allow them to feel like this is it, it's over? Why did God allow that? The next sentence, "but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." What does that mean? Just what it says it means. God allowed them more than they could handle so that they would not be self-sufficient but God-sufficient, that they might become less self-sufficient, more God-sufficient that God might become more real to them.

Oh, you know, I look back and I've been a Christian for 37 years, my wife and I, God is more real to me today than he was 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 37 years ago. God is more real to me and do you know why? It's because God allowed me, allowed you, to face more than we can handle on our own so that we would experience his sufficiency in a fresh, new, real, living way. Why did God allow Paul and his friends to face more than they could handle? It was to rescue them from self-reliance that they might become more God-reliant.

Well, let's look at it another way of looking at this and answering why would God do this from 1 Peter. Peter puts it this way in chapter 1, verses 6 through 7, "In this you rejoice," he's writing to believers now, "though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved," Christians grieved, Christians grieved "by various trials, so that," do you see those two words? "So that." Peter is getting ready to explain why God has allowed them to experience more than they can handle. "So that the tested genuineness of your faith-- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in

praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." You see, these various trials is just another way of saying more than we can handle on our own and when it says "so that," you see, trials in the Christian's life are like earthquakes that test our foundations and assure our soul of God's design in our lives. Trials come in and they're kind of like little mini-earthquakes and they shake our lives and they were able to determine, "What am I really built on? What is my real foundation?"

Trials remove every false support in our lives to make it possible for us to deepen our delight in Christ. Trials actually breathe new life into our prayers. Have you ever had those times where you're struggling in prayer and maybe even got into prayerlessness and then a trial comes along, earthquake and things are shaking and all of a sudden now that trial has breathed new life into your prayer. You want to show up for prayer meeting. You want to pray with God's people. You want to pray every day. You want to pray regularly. Why? Because God has allowed more than you can handle.

One other example in 2 Corinthians 12. We're familiar with these verses. Paul writes to the church "to keep me from being too elevated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations." In other words, "to keep me from being so proud and arrogant. A thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' 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." I think you see here Paul faced more than he could handle, right? How do we know that? Because he said, "I prayed three times. Help me here! I need help!" It's more than he could handle. And why was he allowed, why did God allow Paul to face more than he could handle? It was in order that Christ might be exalted in Paul's life so that Paul himself would not be self-sufficient. You see, what you and I need to do badly is we need to abandon any idea of Christian self-sufficiency, "I can handle it. I got it. I got it." You see, that's fundamentally why God allows more than we can handle because he does not design us to be self-sufficient but God-sufficient.

Let's consider one other example. It's not on the overhead but I want to read it for you from the book of Mathew. Our Lord was in the garden of Gethsemane. He was with his disciples and he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch with me." In other words he was saying, "I feel like I'm going to die right now." That's what he was saying. "I'm so overwhelmed. I feel like I'm going to die right now." And going a little further, he fell on his face and prayed saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will but as you will." Friends, Jesus Christ in his humanity was facing more than he could handle. Our Lord in his humanity was facing more than he could handle. Overwhelmed. "Feeling like I'm going to die right now. If there's any way possible, if there's any way possible, Father, let this cup of wrath pass from me." So what did he do? More than he could handle and he cried out to his Father for help.

So let's review for just a moment. Why would God allow you to face more than you can handle? Why would he do that? It's because God knows that we have an ingrained inclination towards self-sufficiency. God knows that. You say, "Well, maybe unbelievers do but not me." Yeah, believers. Believers. All of these examples are written to the church warning us, saying this happens, this is happening. Don't get confused why this is happening. This is happening so that, it's happening in order that. Why? Because we have this ingrained tendency toward self-sufficiency to do just like God said, that Gideon and his army would say, "My hand has saved me. My hand has saved me. I did it. We did it." And this is not a good thing. This is not a good thing. Any idea of Christian self-sufficiency is not good.

So let me ask you a couple of questions before we turn for home. You might say, "Well, I don't think this is me. I don't know, though." Well, let me ask you this: how is your prayer life? You don't have to answer me. I'm not asking you to come and tell me. How is your prayer life? Let's put bookends of Sunday to Sunday, from Sunday to Sunday, what happens in those days regarding prayer? What's that look like? Now, you may say things are good and that's great, but maybe you might be sitting here and you say, "Well, to be honest, there is a lot of prayerlessness with me. There is a lot of prayerlessness with me. I don't pray. I don't really feel like I pray. As a matter of fact, there are days I go and I don't pray at all." Prayerlessness is a sign of self-sufficiency. Prayerlessness is a sign of self-sufficiency. It's basically saying, "I got this." Not really. You don't really have it but, "I've got this." Though our Lord cried out to his Father, we don't think we need to.

So how is your prayer life? How is your prayer life? Prayerlessness is a sign of self-sufficiency. Second question: how about your willingness to allow others to enter your struggles and help you carry your burdens? Do you find yourself more and more opening up your life and going, "Look, my life's an open book. I'm not worried about keeping some kind of image up for everybody. You know, I've got my struggles. I need help. I want the people of God to enter into my life and call me into account. I want people knowing what's going on in my life." Are you one rather who builds up walls, you kind of want to, you've got it, "I don't need the help of the body of Christ. I don't need other believers in my life. I don't need people. I don't need any accountability. I don't need any of that." You see, those walls are a sign of self-sufficiency. You're basically saying, "Not only do I not need God's help but I don't even need the grace that he has provided within the body of Christ. I don't need that. I'm self-sufficient." You see, it might just be as you're sitting here this morning, you might be more self-sufficient, self-reliant than you realize and God allows us to face more than we can handle to rescue us from self-sufficiency, self-reliance.

You see, Gideon faced more than he could handle, yet he trusted and obeyed the Lord. Now you read this text and you see God's not against Gideon and Gideon is not railing against God. Gideon is just walking along each step, "I'm going to obey. I'm going to trust." Jesus in his humanity, he faced more than he could handle yet he trusted and obeyed the Father. And while it was more – listen – while it was more than Gideon could handle, it was not more than God could handle, you see. You see, we find that God strips the ranks down so that ultimately it will be to his glory, it will be the boast of the Lord,

and so it's more than Gideon can handle by himself but it's not more than Gideon and God can handle and whatever you're facing right now, it's not more than you and God can handle together.

You see, this trust, Jesus trusted the Father and obeyed, Gideon trusted the Father and obeyed, this trust was sustained in the midst of extreme difficulty. I find that fascinating. Right in the midst of hardship, right in the midst of handling what you can't handle on your own, faith is sustained. It's kind of like a burning flame that's put down in water but it just keeps flaming. It's amazing and how does that happen? It's because it was ignited and sustained by God. The faith that you have whether it be little, small, tiny, that faith that you have has been ignited, it's being sustained by God himself. Don't think it's a small thing that God began a good work in you and has promised to continue that good work because even right now in the things that you feel like you can't handle on your own and you can't, it's God at work in you to make you beautiful in light of his Son Jesus Christ, to conform you unto his image. So God's even at work right now, even in what you can't handle on your own but you and God together can.

So here's what I'd like to ask you to do in light of God's word, I'd like to encourage you to reassess what you're handling right now, whatever it may be that has overwhelmed you in light of God's word now. Let this reality serve to strengthen your hands. So Gideon didn't say, "That's too much. I can't handle this. I'm done." No, God said, "I want you to go down to the camp and you're going to hear something. You're going to hear something." And you see, maybe today you came and you've heard something, you've heard something from God's word that strengthened your hands and you say, "Yeah, I can't handle this on my own but God's not left me alone. He's promised to be with me even until the end."

So why not reassess what you're handling right now and, secondly, why don't you do this: consider those in your life, in your circle, who may have right now more than they can handle. How does that change how you would pray for them or respond to them? You see, God's not designed us to be, you know, self-sufficient over here, self-sufficient over here, but to care for one another. How does this reality that God, yes, he does allow us more than we can handle individually, how does that affect now how we might pray for one another? How we might serve one another? How we might care for one another? How we might pray for one another? I think if we think about it, we think about what God is saying to us, it will make all the difference in the world how we respond to one another in our times of trial.

One last thing, if you're here this morning and you are without Christ, if you're here this morning and you're not part of the family of God, you have not surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, it's important that I say this to you: you have a sin debt that is more than you can handle. You are facing something whether you realize it or not, you are facing something that is more than you can handle but it's not more than God can handle. He sent his Son to pay the debt that we could not pay, the debt that we could not handle. Looking to Christ, putting our faith in him, will make us right with God and the

death that we couldn't handle will be met in the sacrificial blood-shedding of Jesus Christ. So trust him today. You can't pay that debt but he has. Look to him and live.