

October 4th, 2015 by Samir Massouh

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[0:00] We are in a series of sermons on can God use me. That is, some of us for various reasons don't think that either God will use us or can use us or that we have anything to give or that we are insignificant or whatever.

And we are trying to look at various people that God has used in the past to enable us to see what kind of people he uses. And so we have been looking at the book of Judges because the book of Judges probably has the largest accumulation of different kinds of people that God has used. There is a common theme in the book of Judges. Israel turns away from God. God punishes her. They cry out for help. So he sends them a savior and everything is fine as long as that savior is alive.

And then he dies. And then Israel backslides again. And God punishes her. And they cry out for help. And he sends them a redeemer. And this goes on cycle after cycle after cycle. We have looked at two persons. One of them is Ehud. One of them is Ehud. The left-handed judge. And he is in some ways a misfit because he is left-handed in a society that is basically right-handed.

[1:30] And then Deborah who is a woman in a society dominated by men. So Ehud really doesn't fit very well with society. And Deborah doesn't fit very well in society.

But God decides to use those people of all the different people that he could have used. And this morning I want us to look at the book of Judges chapter 6.

The judge Gideon. So we're going to look at Gideon. The amount of space that is given to Gideon is a lot more than any of the judges up to this point. So he receives a lot of space.

And Gideon is very fascinating. In some ways he picks up themes that we have already encountered. But then explores other misfittings if you please.

Israel again backslides. And God oppresses her with the Midianites. When they are oppressed by the Midianites they cry to the Lord.

[2:38] So look at Judges chapter 6 verse 7. When Israel cried to the Lord because of Midian.

He sent them a prophet. Now this is rather interesting. Because all the other times he sent them a deliverer. Deborah was a prophetess.

And maybe he is connecting this theme here. That God is going to send them a prophet. Who is able to explain things. Rather than just to lead armies.

And so God sends them a prophet. This prophet is not the one who is going to lead them to war. This is not the deliverer. But he is a prophet.

And he has a word from God. I happen to teach at a Christian liberal arts university.

[3:38] And at seminary. A very essential part of my job is to train future pastors. And to be a mentor.

And to guide. And to help with their faith. And as well as with academics. And because my job is not biology or physics or literature or music.

Because it is biblical studies. And to be a Christian liberal arts. With special interest in preparing future pastors. We watch constantly what's happening with Christianity.

We want to understand how Christianity is now. As opposed to how it was at the time of Martin Luther and the Great Reformation. Not in any way to belittle Martin Luther and the Reformation. But we're not living then. We're living here. We're living in 2015. We want to understand global Christianity in 2015. And so.

[4:42] When you ask. Outsiders. Or even insiders. What is the kind of Christianity that we have inherited?

In 2015. What kind of Christianity do we experience? And the answer is. Christianity has gone through two stages.

And these two stages have affected. What our Christianity looks like now. The first stage is in the 1900s. In effect what happened in America.

Is that Christianity split into two branches. Not Catholic and Protestant. Or Presbyterians and Methodists. Not that kind of split. But you ended up with Christianity in New England.

And Christianity out west. And so. In New England. You have Christianity associated with intellectualism. With studies.

[5:43] With studies. With academics. With intellectual pursuit. Christianity. And Christianity. Christianity. Christianity was dominated by Princeton University.

And the theologians at Princeton University. And if you talked to that group of Christians. And you asked them. What do I need to do? What do I need to do? How do I know that I'm a Christian?

The answer would be. Can you write. A valid statement of faith? So the evidence. That I'm a Christian.

Is my ability to write. A valid. Biblical. Genuine. Appropriate. Statement of faith. On the other hand. In the west. We had more Christianity. Of the feelings. The campfire Christianity. The. Give me that old time religion. Kind of Christianity.

[6:44] Christianity. Christianity of feelings. And experience. So you can say. I. You know. I. The Lord said to me. Or you can give your testimony.

As opposed to a statement of faith. So you had the intellectual Christianity. Headed by Princeton. And. Experiential. Christianity.

Well. Which is correct? Well. That's a. Interesting question to ask. But last time I read Deuteronomy. It is. Hear. Hear. O Israel. The Lord. Our God. The Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord. Your God. With. And. Several things are mentioned there. Your heart. Your mind. Your work. So it's not.

Either or. But. That. In effect. Is what has happened. In. Christianity. In America. You still have. Intellectual. Christianity. And then you still have.

[7:40] Experiential. Christianity. Christianity. The other thing that is. True about. American Christianity. Is that when you ask. Outsiders. How would you describe.

Christianity. In America. The answer is. It is. Sweden. On top. Of India. Now. Let me see. Does anybody know.

Anything about. What I just finished saying. Does anybody have. The slightest idea. What Sweden. On top. Of India. Mean. The United Nations.

Did a major. Research. And. As a result. Of this research. It found out. That the most. Religious. Country. In the world.

Is India. Now. That doesn't mean. That. They worship. The living God. Some worship. One God.

[8:35] Some worship. Three God. Some worship. Three million gods. There are all kinds. Of religions. Hinduism is. As broad. As it can come. There is no Hinduism. There is about like. Twelve.

Hinduisms. And so. Practically. Everyone. In India. As high as. Ninety five percent. Or maybe even higher.

Believe. In some kind. Of a God. The least. Religious country. In the world. Is Sweden. Sweden. So.

When you take. Surveys. Of do you believe. In God. In Sweden. You get the lowest. Score. Possible. So. Sweden. On top of India.

Means. That in America. We. Our Christianity. In some. Our society. In some ways. Looks like. India. In some ways. It also looks like. Sweden.

[9:32] How is that? We have far more. Evangelicals. Percentage wise. In America. Than. Surely.

In France. Or in England. Or in Australia. We have more people. Who say they believe in God. More people. Who go to churches. Etc. Etc. Over country.

After country. And after country. And God raised. Elijah. And Elisha. To stop it. From spreading. So the worship of Baal. Never became the official.

Religion. Of Israel. But in practice. Practice is always different. Not always. But often. Different. From regular worship. So Gideon is saying.

I don't see any miracles. Therefore. God is not with us. In a second. We'll have to think. About that. From a Christian perspective. So.

[10:30] God must have abandoned us. Even though. The angel. The angel. Is telling him. The Lord. Is with you. I think.

I'd be hesitant. To disagree. With the. Angel of the Lord. I'd be happy. I wouldn't be. Brave enough. To say. You're wrong. You know.

I don't care. What university. I graduated from. I wouldn't tell him. You're wrong. I don't care. I don't care. I don't care. I don't care. I don't care. But he is struggling. But he is struggling. With two things.

That he is a mighty warrior. And that the Lord is with him. So. In response to the Lord is with you. He says. No. He's not. But now we've got the other problem.

The Lord is with you. Mighty warrior. So. The Lord turned to him. Verse 14. The Lord turned to him. And said. Go in the strength.

[11:26] You have. And save Israel. Out of Midianite's hand. Am I not sending you? Go. Deliver. And look at his response.

Verse 15. But Lord. Gideon asked. How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh. And I am the least in my family.

In Greek philosophy. When the Greeks wanted to. Find a word from the gods. They went to a place called. Well.

It was at Delphi. Where you received an oracle. From the gods. The oracle usually was basically. A kind of a standard answer. Which is know yourself.

And you can interpret that. In a variety of ways. You know. Maybe I need to know my. Strengths. Maybe I need to know my weaknesses. Maybe I need to know what I'm good at.

[12:26] What I'm bad at. What I'm clever at. What I'm dumb at. So. Know yourself. The more you know yourself. The better off you are. That's not what the oracle meant.

To convey. What it meant to convey. Is that you're human. And you're not a god. So. Live with that limitations. It looks like. Gideon.

Gideon. Knows himself. So he says. How can I save Israel. My clan. Is the weakest. In Manasseh. And I am the least. In my family.

Weak. And strong. Is relative. It depends on. Whom you're comparing with. My daughter. Graduated. Topps.

In her high school. So. She went to University of California. Where I went. And she joined the honors program. And she was very frustrated.

[13:27] And. She wrote me. She said. Dad. There is nothing that I can do. To get an A in this class. So I said. Talk to the teacher.

So she went to the professor. And said. What do I have to do. To get an A in this class. I've always gotten A's. I've never gotten. Anything other than A's. You know. I graduated. Topps. In high school. And he said. Oh. If you want to. Get A's. Go to an easier university. She said to me. She talked to the other students.

She said. Valdeterian. Was. Average. Valetorian. Valetorian. Valetorian. Is. Average. In that program.

In that program. We have. In America. Approximately 5,000 universities. About.

[14:24] About. About. About. 150. Produce. Excellent. Athletes. That we watch. On. TV. In basketball. And. And volleyball.

And. And. Football. And. Soccer. And things like that. If you take. If you take. The best. Player. From. Every one.

Of those. 120. Universities. These are the MVPs. In their conferences. If you take. These. Players. And.

When it comes. To bidding. And to recruiting. Do you know. How many make it. In professional. Sports.

You will be surprised. You are. MVP. In your conference. And you recruit. And you are. Drafted by the. L.A.

[15:25] Lakers. And you think. You're going to be the next. You know. Will Chamberlain. Or whoever. And guess what you do. At the end.

You sit there. Number 12. They're lucky. If anybody knows. You exist. To be strong. Or to be weak. Depends on who you're. Competing with. If you lower standards. You know. If you lower standards. Low enough. Jack the Ripper. Could be a saint. You know. I mean. You just have to. Lower. So he. He says. I am. The least. In my family. Okay. So you are. The least. In that family. It is one thing. To know yourself. It is something else.

To use that. Knowledge. As an excuse. Not to minister. It is okay.

[16:23] To say. I am not good at it. There are lots of things. I am not good at. If anything happens. To your car. For heaven's sake. Don't come to me. I don't know anything. About cars. I know. Close to zero.

About biology. But it is one thing. To say. I am weak. It is something. To say. Consequently. Because of my weakness. I refuse to witness. We'll get back to this point. We're not. We're not away from it. We'll get back to it. So.

Verse 16. The Lord answered. I will be with you. And you will strike down. All the Midianites. Together. He said.

I'll be with you. Three times already. In one paragraph. He will win. Because God is with him.

[17:20] The Lord is with you. Oh mighty warrior. Both statements are true. What happens sometimes. Is that. God sees us.

In the way. He sees us. But we. Refuse to accept it. We want to keep seeing. Ourselves. In the way that. We want to see ourselves. We're not willing.

To let. God. We resist God. When he tries. To bring out the potential. And so he has to. Play hard ball.

In some cases. So. I will be with you. Verse 16.

Gideon replied. If now. I have found favor. In your eyes. Give me a sign. Barak. Give me a sign. If you go. I'll go. If you don't go. I don't go.

[18:17] So it doesn't matter. That God is speaking to him. He wants a sign. God. It shows. It shows. How bad things are.

The Midianites. Are. Defeating. Israel. When. Israel. Is ten times. Stronger than the Midianites. But that is because. Israel. Has turned away from God.

And God is punishing them. the fact that it is the Midianites not the Egyptians, not the Assyrians, not the Babylonians not some great world power the fact that it's the Midianites who are defeating the Israelites is embarrassing try to imagine this that Bradford High School invites the basketball team invites the Chicago Bulls to a game and Bradford wins you could ask what does that tell you about Bradford I'd like to ask a different question what does it tell you about the Chicago Bulls where are the glory days there are no glory days if Bradford can beat them the Midianites are beating up on us what could be more insulting it's like if you race a two year old 50 yards and the two year old beats you in the race so

God performs a sign and he is convinced it is God and now to this delightful portion of scriptures God says you know in your village you're supposed to be worshipping me and look what we have here we have an altar for Baal and a pole a wooden pole for Asherah's Baal's consort so he says chop it down and build me an altar using that wood well the verb to hack something down is the word for Gideon a person pun intended in case I'm warning you ahead of time so you'll catch the pun a person whose name is Hacker is supposed to hack the pole at least I can tell at least three people sitting in front got it so he wants to obey God

God has talked to him you're a mighty man go do it but look at this wonderful delight look at verse 27 in chapter 6 627 so Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him but because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town he did it at night rather than in the daytime God is with him he doesn't know how to overcome his cowardice he does it at night I would have said come on be brave but at least he obeys God it's better to obey God cowardly than not to obey God cowardly but at least he does it at night and then there's the argument the next day who did it this at least he has shown himself to be faithful on small things it's only an altar it's only a pole but he has shown himself faithful he's getting somewhere he is willing to obey

[22:25] God he is willing to be used on a small scale and if God trusts us on small things he will make us responsible for bigger things but there is a battle to be fought and so he calls the people from Israel and he has a great army so look at chapter 7 verse 2 the Lord said to Gideon you have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands in order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her announce now to the people anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead so 22,000 men left while 10,000 remained he has just reduced his army by two thirds

I think to myself where was that verse why didn't they tell us that before they sent us off to Vietnam I wouldn't have gone if I had that option but the army is now down to 10,000 you don't win by reducing the size of the army you win by doubling the army for every soldier they have you have three and then you can win so 22,000 men left while 10,000 remained verse 4 but the Lord said to Gideon there are still too many men and so do this test and they're down to 300 people you start with about 32,000 soldiers you're down to 300 what is God thinking God is thinking that he knows how to win and he does not want us to think stupidly that the victory is ours the power comes from God and when we are the weakest God is the strongest that's a basic lesson we have to learn and if you're strong I feel bad for you because God is going to have to play tough with you to make you feel weak so God sends them they don't even fight it's dark and the army is confused and the army defeats itself what is going on what is going on is a lesson that we all know first of all if I said like Gideon the Lord has abandoned us I would know I was wrong because I've heard Jesus say wherever two or three are gathered together in my name there

I am in their midst I know Jesus has said I would be with you always even to the end of the age I know I've heard Jesus say I will never leave you nor forsake you so Midian might think he would be able to get away with it we can't we cannot say God has abandoned us God has said instead nothing can separate us from the love of God and to conclude please turn to 2nd Corinthians please turn to this wonderful passage by Paul who experienced this whole issue how do we understand strength how do we understand weakness look at 2nd Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7

2nd Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7 to keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations there was given me a thorn in my flesh a messenger of Satan to torment me three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me but he said my grace is sufficient for you my power is made perfect in weakness therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me that is why for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses in insults in hardships in persecutions in difficulties for when I am weak then I am strong that is true of us individually that is true of our church the power comes from God the power comes from God and we are not abandoned let's have a word of prayer thank you father for using weak afraid unsure people thank you for working in their lives and in our lives so that they learn to obey even when they're afraid they accept their mission even when they're hesitant father

[28:23] I suspect there are far more cowards than there are heroes in normal churches that some of us are hesitant and are afraid to be used but you want to use us I pray that we would have confidence in you not in ourselves that we will rely on you not on ourselves and we thank you father that you are always with us we give you much thanks and gratitude and appreciation in Jesus name amen