

JUDGES The Mighty Weak Warrior

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[0 : 00] Again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Again, it's this ongoing repetitive thing like a parent to a child.

How many times do I need to tell you? There are three places for clothes. Not in every room of the house, just three places. That's all they need to be. How many times do I need to say this?

My tools go back where you found them. How many times do I need to tell you? Not all over the backyard. Your scooters go here. How many times have I got to tell you this?

It's a repetitive behavior. It's the familiar beginning of another judge's cycle as God's people fail to wholeheartedly serve their Lord and they keep forgetting Him.

They have failed to remember who the Lord is, what He had done for them. They turned instead to the idols, which is what it means here to do evil in the eyes of the Lord.

[1 : 07] This time, for their rebellion, God gave Israel into the hands of the Midianites for seven years. And this is the worst oppression yet.

Have a look at it. Israelites, we are told, are forced to leave their homes and to live in the harsh and inaccessible mountain ranges.

That's because whenever the Israelites would plant their crops, Midian and his mates would invade the land, ruin the produce, take the produce for themselves and consistently pillage and plunder the land.

They would allow their livestock to walk through the crops that they had harvested themselves.

They took Israel's sheep and their cattle and their donkeys.

That's equivalent to not just stealing the mechanic's job. They also took his tools as well so that he couldn't work again.

[2 : 16] And so Israel is poor. They are hungry and they are tired. They are oppressed. They are doing this constant run from their farmlands up into the hills to escape.

And that's why Gideon in this moment is threshing wheat in a wine press. Because the Midianites wouldn't expect that.

He's hiding from them. And they cry out to God in verse 6 for help. And in verse 8 it says God sends them a prophet.

Now that seems like a ludicrous response, solution from God. Imagine you're on the side of the road. You're broken down. Your car's broken down. You're on the freeway somewhere. You call the NRMA and the NRMA sends out to you a philosopher.

A philosopher. Not helpful. I need a mechanic. And we have to marvel at what appears to be, at least at times, the inappropriate answers that God gives to our urgent needs.

[3 : 32] We want escape from a circumstance while God wants to interpret the circumstances for us. Sometimes we need understanding, clarity.

More than we need relief. Sometimes God must give us insight before he grants us safety. Before they can appreciate the rescue that will come to them, these people need to understand why they need rescuing in the first place.

Israel wants to get out of the bind. God wants them to see their idolatry. The prophet comes. And the prophet comes and helps them understand why they're in the trouble they're in.

What that means is that the crying out to God that we see in verses 6 and 7 is not a sign of genuine repentance.

And the history of Israel tells us this as well. Their sorrow was skin deep.

[4 : 44] And so what God does, he sends his prophet along and reminds them of two things. He reminds them about what he has done. Have a look at verses 8 to 10 there in Judges 6.

That's what God's done.

What has Israel done? Verse 10. But you have not listened to me. And so God sends his prophet to convict sin.

Convict his people of sin before he sends the judge to rescue them from oppression. And so Israel, from what we can tell here, is regretful but not repentant.

And there's a clear distinction between the two. If you look at 2 Corinthians 7 verse 10, it says, Godly sorrow brings repentance and it leads to salvation and it leaves no regrets.

[6 : 13] But worldly sorrow brings death. Both are characterized by very deep sorrow and distress.

But they're very different. Regret doesn't produce any real change. Repentance does.

And the difference is that regret is sorrow over the consequence of the sin, not over the sin itself. If there was no consequences, then there would be no sorrow over sin.

There is no sorrow over the sin for what it is in itself, for how it grieves God and how it violates our relationship with him. And when the consequences go away, the behavior just comes back.

And this kind of sorrow stays regretful, whereas repentance removes regret.

[7 : 25] Real repentance focuses itself on the only real permanent result of sin, and that is damage to our relationship with our God, with our Heavenly Father.

That's repentance. Repentance makes us able to accept the failure and to move past it because we realize that God has forgiven us and we haven't actually lost him in the end.

Real repentance means we get God. We get God. And we don't end up hating ourselves.

When someone is inconsolable about a failure, it means that they've made something other than God their real hope.

When you're inconsolable about a failure, it means that something apart from God is your real hope. And that thing is what judges would call an idol.

[8 : 38] And its loss is therefore impossible to heal unless its idol status is removed. That is, regret is about me.

How I'm being hurt. How I'm being ruined. About how my heart is breaking. Repentance is, on the other hand, is about God. It's about how we have grieved God.

It's about how his nature as our creator and as a redeemer is being trampled on. About how his saving actions are being trivialized in our life. It's been made clear to us in Judges that the Israelites are idolaters.

And God's response to the crying out to him shows that they are regretful for what they've lost. And they want it back.

We want the Midianites gone. We want our land back. We want life to be back the way it was. Like a married person who has committed adultery wants the anger of their spouse to disappear.

[9 : 50] They want things to go back the way they were before they were caught out. And they even say things like, tell me what I need to do here to make this right. Or like the child who has been punished for whatever.

You take the iPad away. And what they want to do is make up for it so they get the iPad back.

That's what they want. They want it back. They're regretful about consequences.

They're expressing regret, not repentance. And so God's aim here in sending his prophet is to move them beyond regret to repentance.

And I think we should take the time to let us, let God teach us the same lesson. Do a check on what it is that you are sorry about. Do a check on what are your regrets.

Are you sorry for the consequence of sin in your life or for the sin itself? Is it the loss of the pleasure of an idol that an idol offered?

[11 : 03] Or the damage to our relationship with God? Unfortunately, when you look at the text here, there's no sign of Israel repenting at all.

And just at that moment, you would expect God's word of accusation to move to a pronouncement of judgment.

But just when you would expect that to happen, God turns the table. Instead of judgment, what he does is the very next thing he does is he prepares to save. Instead, what we do here is we read the commissioning of the new judge.

No repentance. The commissioning of a new judge. Verse 11. The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abizarite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

Even though the people, there's no indication of repentance, God still sends his rescuer. He doesn't wait for the repentance before he begins to save.

[12:13] And this is the glorious news of the Christian faith, which distinguishes the Christian faith from every other philosophical system and religion in the world. Romans 5.8 summarizes it.

Why we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God doesn't wait for us to pull our socks up before he rescued us.

Doesn't wait for us to achieve before he affirms us. God does not begin to save us because we repent.

We repent because he has begun his saving work in us through the external finished work of Jesus on the cross and the internal work of the Holy Spirit to move us to see and savor the work of Christ on the cross for what it is, the saving act of God on our behalf.

What that means is that God is significantly more holy and more gracious than we are. He responds to a cry for help by sending a prophet to tell them about their sin and explain why they're in the mess they're in.

[13:32] But he still recruits and prepares his rescuer, even though there's no evidence of change whatsoever. This is a much more gracious response than we would give to someone who continued to hurt us and show no sign of stopping.

My goodness, it's even a much more gracious response than I give to my children. Don't celebrate me on Father's Day, for goodness sake. And yet, in all of this, God does not compromise in his holiness or his grace.

The only way we can hold these things together and appreciate God's, both his perfect holiness, his perfect standards, and his endless compassion and mercy and grace is to grasp more and more deeply the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The cross is where God's holiness, his perfect standards, and his endless compassion meet together.

And so, right at the beginning of Judges 6, in the new cycle, we see this cycle repeated again of sin and grace on repeat, sin and grace on repeat, sin and grace, sin and grace.

[14:52] The second thing we see is that this grace of God is a grace that calls us to himself. The angel of the Lord opening light to Gideon in verse 12 is that the Lord is with you.

Gideon, on the other hand, is like, pardon me? What? What? Gideon argues, how can God be with us?

Because he's put us into the hand of the Midianites instead of rescuing them like he did with their ancestors out of Egypt. Gideon seems to be implying here that what Israel needs is another Egypt-style rescuer.

What Israel needs in this moment is another Moses. God says, Gideon, that's you.

You are the salvation I am sending. You are the mighty warrior. Verse 12. Now, we make the mistake here that Gideon does as well.

[16:08] We tend to see any of our troubles as evidence that God has left us instead of asking how God is working in and through it for our good.

And that is the promise of the New Testament in Romans 8, 28. And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

And we also tend to do what Gideon does here and wait for God to do something to us and for us. We wonder why God hasn't removed a problem rather than asking him to make us a person who's able to handle the problem.

God tells Gideon that you, Gideon, are going to be the solution. You are going to be sent as the rescuer.

He's the one who God will use to solve this problem. He is the Moses-like figure. And this provokes Gideon's second disagreement with the angel of the Lord.

[17:13] In fact, he reacts here in exactly the same way that Moses did at the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3. Have a look at verse 15. Pardon me, Lord?

Me? I'm the solution? And Gideon says, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I'm the least in my family.

Gideon is economically and socially the poorest member of the weakest clan of a non-prominent Israelite tribe. How on earth can I save Israel?

How can I be a saviour? God, when we're picking teams for basketball, I'm the last guy picked. How can you use me?

And on the surface, you'd have to agree with him. We know the angel of the Lord calls him a mighty warrior in verse 12, but is that right?

[18:20] I mean, potentially the angel of the Lord here is mocking Gideon, but apparently he's not. Gideon is crouching in a winepress in fear of the Midianites.

He's not doing what you'd imagine with a wheat crop and threshing the wheat at the threshing floor. He's taking it to the winepress because it's not the season for grapes, so they won't expect to find it here.

It's like hiding the chocolate from the kids under the soap. They won't look for it there. They just won't find it there. We do need to take seriously both God's power and his word here.

If the angel of the Lord said to Gideon, you are a mighty warrior, then he is. And verse 14 indicates that Gideon will use his own abilities, but those abilities won't be enough.

Those abilities need to be combined with the promise of God because their abilities, their strength, Gideon's strength is not enough. Verses 14 and 16 says that they must be combined with the promise of God.

[19:37] Everything that Gideon needs for this task is supplied in a very brief statement in verse 16. I will be with you.

There's his strength right there. The promises that God is sending him and will be with him is everything he needs.

Basically, God has nothing else, nothing more to offer him. There's nothing more coming up here. And he can go through an enormous amount just with that promise alone that I will be with you. And it's enough. That promise doesn't provide him with the details, but it provides him with the essentials.

Nothing about the when, the how, the why, just simply the who. Me. I will be with you. So why should he believe the angel of the Lord?

[20:48] And what we see in the rest of this text is that Gideon needs the assurance of the word of the Lord here. He's heard the word of the Lord.

He needs confidence that this word is true and it's right. And so in verse 17, he replies, if now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that this really is you talking to me.

He wants to know for sure that this is God's word he's hearing. He's looking for assurance of God's promises, but when the assurance comes, it terrifies him rather than comforts him.

Gideon's reaction to the angel of the Lord following the miracle in verse 21 is the key. He now knows who it is that he's been talking to.

Verse 22. Alas, sovereign Lord, I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.

[21:54] What Gideon realizes here is that he has seen the word angel in the original language meaning messenger. I've seen the messenger of the Lord face to face.

In fact, commentators would tell you this. There are a number of factors here in this story itself and in the rest of Judges and in various parts of the Old Testament that would indicate that Gideon came face to face with the son of God himself, as Daniel did in Daniel chapter seven.

That's who he's speaking to. And he finally realizes that's who he's speaking to. And he's terrified. He's terrified.

And we struggle with this in our modern world because we think a gentle Jesus, meek and mild. We struggle with his response. We have no sense of the terror and the awesomeness of God.

We tend to think that intimacy with God is an inalienable right of ours rather than an indescribable gift. But friends, there is nothing amazing about God's grace as long as there is nothing fearful about his holiness.

[23:13] There is nothing amazing about God's grace while ever we think there is nothing fearful about his holiness. Verse 23, God reassures him that he's not going to die.

Gideon knows that according to Exodus 33 verse 20, no one can look at the holy God face to face and live. And yet he's still alive.

And so he knows in that moment that this God has provided grace for him so that he can be at peace with him. It is only God who can speak peace to the trembling.

And Gideon's response is one of enormous gratitude. God's grace to him overwhelms him with gratitude. In verse 24, he builds an altar to the Lord and calls it, the Lord is peace.

The Lord has made it possible for me to be at peace with him. And so we see sin and grace on repeat and Gideon has been called by the grace of God.

[24 : 27] And this grace is a grace that commits us and commits him to live a life of obedience to him. His grace calls us to commitment. Now that he has built an altar to the true living and saving God, what's the very next thing that Gideon has to do?

Tear down the one that he's been used to serving the false God. These two altars, the altar that he's just built, the Lord is peace by his grace to me.

And the altar to Baal, they cannot coexist. You cannot serve the true and living God and a false God, an idol at the same time. Gideon, you must destroy that other idol.

The demand is placed on Gideon here is a paradigm for all the people of Israel. It is for the follower of Jesus too. When the rich young ruler came up to Jesus and asked him the famous question, Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus didn't hand him a card, asking him to tick the box that says, I follow you. I choose to follow you, Jesus. Didn't ask him to raise a hand and pray a prayer of commitment.

[25 : 50] Instead, what Jesus does to the rich young ruler at that moment is he exposes this apparent moral man's breaking of the first commandment and called him to smash his idol.

Smash your idol, then come follow me. There can be no dual commitment, no double-mindedness. Not for Gideon, not for Israel, not for the rich young ruler in Luke 18 and not for us.

If God is to be their saviour, then Baal must go. And Baal may be tolerant, but this God is jealous. Baal may be tolerant, but this God is jealous. There can be no limping between two opinions. We cannot serve two masters.

The particular altar that Gideon is called to smash belongs to his father. Have a look, verse 25. That same night, the Lord said to him, take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old, tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it, then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height.

[27 : 17] Now, it's no surprise here that Gideon's dad has an altar and a pole for the worship of the Canaanite idols, the Canaanite gods. The Israelites, as I've said a number of times through this series, they didn't abandon, they didn't abandon the worship of God for idols.

They combined the worship of God with idols. And Gideon is essentially being told here to make the God, the true and living God who has, by his grace, called you into relationship and peace with him, to make him Lord of every area of your life.

And Gideon begins to do what the Lord told him to do. Although, in verse 27, he does it in the middle of the night out of fear with a bunch of his helpers.

But he still did it. There's an element of weakness here in Gideon. He's God's weak, mighty warrior. He still did it. Obedience to God's call here was essential. Heroics was optional. Obedience is essential. Heroics is optional.

[28 : 47] And the reaction is swift. Next morning, it would appear that one of the guys who helped Gideon kind of caved.

Not me, it was him. Gideon did it. And you would think from verses 28 to 30 that Gideon is not long for this world. Thankfully, Gideon's dad steps in with a really wise suggestion.

Good on him, Father's Day. and suggests that Baal, if this Baal is divine, then he can pretty much take care of himself. We don't need to help him.

And his words are in effect a challenge to Israel. Israel either continue to prop up Baal or worship the altar of the true and living God.

Worship at the altar of the true and living God or continue to prop up Baal who cannot help you at all. And the townspeople at this point give Gideon a nickname.

[29 : 52] Verse 32, let Baal contend with him. Jerobo Baal Baal Baal something.

That's his nickname. Great nickname. I'm not sure, you know, growing up, this is an Australian thing, nicknames. I think I've told you before, my nickname when I was growing up was Fox because my hair was like red and so, you know, Bunsen Burner, Match, Fox, all kinds of different things.

I also had a nickname a little bit older in life called Showbag, which if you've ever been to the Sydney Royal Show, you can buy a showbag for not much money, actually more expensive nowadays, but it's full of rubbish and so that might be a pointer as to why they called me Showbag.

And, but nicknames carried something, carried something. There was a guy, I remember years ago, an electrical contractor many, many years ago when I worked in the National Parks, we used to call him Alternator because he charged while he was idle and Pothole, another guy used to work with, we used to call him Pothole because he always got in the road nicknames mean something and the nickname here means something quite significant for Israel.

It sums up the struggle of the whole book of Judges. It is the battle between the real God of Israel and the idols of Canaan for the hearts of God's people.

[31 : 26] That's the battle. contending with Baal for the hearts of God's people. And Gideon has made his choice.

He is God's mighty warrior or more appropriately as I said, God's weak, mighty warrior. The power of the Spirit of God on his life is combined with his real genuine human weakness.

Gideon desires to wholly trust in God but he constantly needs assurance that this is God speaking to him.

These are God's promises are true. And that's what we get at the end of chapter 6 with this fleece thing. Verses 36 to 40 is demonstrating that he is still unsure of God's calling and God's promises on his life.

He wants to be sure that this is God speaking to him. That this God is true. What is the character and nature of this God?

[32 : 36] And so he is hesitant but he's not unbelieving. It's not an absence of faith here for Gideon. it's the caution of faith that we see here with Gideon.

And he sets out this fleece and asks God to confirm his plans by making the fleece wet but the dry the ground dry around it.

And God does it. And then he asks God to you know just one more time God you know a little bit of patience with me here to re-confirm it by reversing the instructions make the fleece dry and the ground wet and God does it both times.

Now over the years there have been many many Christians who have imitated Gideon's actions here as a sign of a way of God guiding them.

That's not what's happening here. They say things like God if you want me to buy that new car then make my car break down today. And if my car breaks down today then I know you want me to buy that new car.

[33 : 46] Or God if you want me to take that job make sure I get a call from the company today and then I'll know for sure that you want me to take it. It's your sign of guiding me at this point. That's not what Gideon's doing here.

He isn't asking for guidance from God. Gideon is specifically asking God to show him that he was not one of the forces of nature of the Canaanite gods.

But was in fact the sovereign God over all the forces of nature and therefore the gods of Canaan. But he was doing something slightly more significant than that.

He was checking that the God who he saw face to face and the God who he has been asked to and commissioned to to rescue his people from slavery from the Midianites is the same God who rescued his people Israel through Moses out of Egypt.

And he did it with a powerful sovereign display of sovereignty over the Egyptian gods of nature through ten plagues.

[35 : 20] Remember right at the very beginning I'm the God who called you out of Egypt. Gideon here is confirming that the God who sat with me and has called me to rescue Israel is the same God who did that back then.

The God who displayed, who crushed the Egyptian gods, which each one of the plagues represented, a crushing of the Egyptian gods. They were not random acts. These were ten key gods the Egyptians worshipped and God sovereignly smashed each one of them.

And he says, can you do that here for me? Can you show me that you are sovereign over the Canaanite gods of nature? Just one more time, just to confirm that you're the same God who rescued your people before.

Gideon was not looking for signs here to help him make a decision. He was seeking to understand the nature of the God who was speaking to him. He was looking to get a big picture, a massive picture of who this God is.

Is this the God who I've heard about from my father? the God who saves? The God who was mightily sovereign over the gods of Egypt?

[36 : 42] If it is, can you please reaffirm that for me? Now, Gideon did not have the Bible like we have it.

Living where we do in history, we have this advantage over Gideon. We can know Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who came into this world, who broke into history, who controlled the wind and the waves and the demons and healed the sick and set the oppressed free.

He showed sovereignty over all things. He is the God who is sovereign. And Jesus, we have in his word the Jesus who revealed the nature of God to all of humanity.

This is the Jesus who calls us by his grace and who promises to give his spirit and the Jesus who promised to never leave us, never forsake us. The Jesus said, even in spite of your sinfulness, in spite of your weakness, I will be with you.

I will never abandon you. this is the Jesus who offers us peace with God, who calls us to follow him and calls us to tear down the idols of our heart and align ourselves with him alone.

[38 : 07] And this same Jesus reveals himself today in his word, the Bible. We don't need a fleece, we need the word of God. Hebrews 1, verse 1 says, in the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he also made the universe.

The God, the son, is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. And after he provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

Gideon's request was for help in his weakness to build up his faith in God. God in his grace responded to him twice.

Twice. You see, this God is not ashamed to stoop down and reassure us in our weakness and fears as we seek to faithfully follow him.

He is patient with our weakness. He doesn't even mind humbling himself, even to the cross, in order to bolster our fragile faith and our wavering grip on his word.

[39 : 31] He knows our faith in him is feeble and it is weak. Our obedience to him is often in the dark. It is often half-hearted. It is often fearful.

And when we make the same request of him, he graciously responds. And when we like Gideon find ourselves doubting God's promises or God's presence, we can ask him again and again and again to point us to the majesty of the son.

And he points us to the fullest final revelation of his nature and his character and his purposes in the Lord Jesus. Again and again and again to see God for who he is is what Gideon needed and what Gideon received and he will do the same for us.

In fact, he is so eager to do it for us that he has provided multiple means for our strengthening in our weakness. We have his word.

It's where we find God revealing himself to us. And so as we have a core value of this church, saturate yourself in God's word, the Bible. If you do not have your face planted in the scriptures, your faith will be feeble, it will be weak and don't guarantee at all that it will survive.

[40 : 57] The word is essential. So to Timothy 3, have confidence in God's word. Everything you need for life and for salvation is found in the word.

But instead of a fleece, we also have the Lord's Supper. In communion, we are reminded of the nature and the character of God, the God of grace.

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