

Gideon 3

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[0 : 00] We continue singing in the same psalm, Psalm 78, singing from verse 5, the tune of Babel Streams.

Let us read now in the Old Testament scriptures in the book of Judges, chapter 6.

That reading from this word. Psalm 74. We sing from the beginning of the psalm to the tune Sheffield.

Let us turn now to the chapter we read in the book of Judges, chapter 6, reading at verse 11.

Judges, chapter 6, verse 11. And there came an angel of the Lord that sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abbe Esrite.

[1 : 43] And his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress to hide from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.

Now we resume our studies in the book of Judges.

And I would like for the next two or three Sabbath evenings to have a look with you at this very interesting and renowned character, Gideon. Let us recap a little.

The refrain, as it were, was repeated time and time again in their history. They forsook God and the worship of God.

Because of that, God brought chastisement to bear upon them. In their chastisement, they cried to the Lord. And in response to their cry, God sent them a deliverer or a judge.

[3 : 20] And the book covers that history when he provided judges to rule over Israel.

For all purpose, we're looking at the four who are referred to as men of faith in the letter to the Hebrews.

Namely, Barak, Jephthah, Gideon, and Samson. We turn tonight to the third, Gideon.

Now, the events that took place during the lifetime or the beginning of this, when he burst on the page of history, took place about 50 years after the famous victory of Barak and Deborah over Sisera and Jabin.

For over 40 years, the land of Israel had rest and peace, lived in comparative tranquility.

[4 : 23] And then we come across the ruins of the Midianites, a marauding band of Arab Bedouins, who invaded Israel, particularly the territory belonging to Manasseh, Naphtali, and Zebalan.

And their brand of oppression was particularly wearisome.

They didn't allow the Israelites much time to sow the seed in springtime, and certainly no time at all to reap it at harvest time.

And for a period of seven years, these tribes suffered greatly under the oppressive heel of these Midianites.

We read in this chapter that such was their presence in the land of the time that they actually encamped there. They were like grasshoppers in the land, so numerous were they.

[5 : 32] They brought all their stock with them. They brought their animals with them. And what happened was that the Israelites more and more and more were pushed out of their own land and moved, as this chapter tells us, into caves and into dens.

Where they found pieces of land that they could cultivate in private or in secret if possible, they did that. Where they were able to thresh their corn in secret, they did that.

And as a matter of fact, it was while threshing his corn in secret that Gideon was visited by the angel of the Lord.

Now, I want to look far a little with you tonight at two or three things in the hope that as we go along we can apply them and see we can derive some spiritual teaching from them ourselves.

First of all, the condition out of which Israel at this time cried unto the Lord. Then secondly, the way in which God answered them.

[6 : 41] He answered by saying a prophet whose preaching only deepened their sense of alarm and their lack of heart.

And then we have an account thirdly of the way in which God called Gideon. And then finally, I look at the way in which Gideon was commissioned by the Lord for his great task.

First of all then, the situation out of which we read here in verses 6 and 7 and 8, Israel cried unto the Lord.

Now, this, as you say, as I said, was the refrain that was repeated during these 400 years or more. Israel would fall into idolatry, leading them into ungodly practices, into a life in which they forgot God's goodness to them in the past.

And they then became impenitent. And because of that backsliding, because of that impenitence, if God would then bring chastisement to bear upon this people.

[7 : 56] And it was as a result of that chastisement that they cried unto the Lord. And the first point I want to make is this, that God's chastisements are always reformatory.

This is the reason why God chastises anybody, in the hope that, as a result, they will turn to himself.

Now, take, for example, the classic story that you have in the New Testament told by Jesus himself, the story of the prodigal son. Now, one of the things that Jesus is there highlighting is this, that very often it is as a result of some crisis in one's life that one turns to the Lord.

And you see this enacted time and time again in our own day. You see, this world and the pleasures of this world and our ability to enjoy this world are fine, as long as nothing changes, either in the world or in ourselves.

But once the world changes or once we change, when things begin to turn against us, when things are upset, when the crisis time comes, very often, men then, and only then, cry to the Lord.

[9 : 28] It's not very well for some people to say, of someone who's becoming, who has become a Christian, who's become concerned about Christian things, it's not very well for him because, things have gone against him, and what else has he got left?

Very often they say there's a people in middle age, well, they've had their fill of the world, now they're turning to the Lord, they've got nothing left. It's quite correct. What they're saying is quite true. They have nothing left.

And they recognize that in the crisis, there is a God to whom they can turn. And were that not so, if God hadn't revealed himself as a God of mercy, as a God of grace, as a God who is ready to forgive, our lives would be filled tonight with nothing but despair.

There'd be no hope for you or for me, if God hadn't revealed himself as a God whose ear is open to the cry of the poor. And that is why God so works in providence, works in a person's life, begins to turn things upside down.

And a person almost feels as though God is working against him. But only that that person may cry to the Lord. The classic example is the prodigal son.

[10 : 49] It was enacted over and over again in the history of Israel. And you have the same thing in Psalm 107. That's the refrain in Psalm 107. Experience after experience, differing in nature, but calculated to result in the same end product.

Then they cried unto the Lord. Now that's not just true in the case of those who are unconverted and who are coming to the knowledge of the Lord.

That they discover that in the weariness of their own lives and the wearisomeness of practices which used to so engross them and so thrill them, things have changed.

Life is becoming a drudgery now. Things aren't what they used to be. It isn't just that person who cries unto the Lord in his distress.

The Christian is made to do it as well. They also feel rucked and miserable and poor because their own pride and their own spirit of independence and very often unbelief, their lack of watchfulness and the ability with which idolatry can so easily re-enter the life.

[12 : 15] All these things make it difficult at times for the Christian to retain the sense of the newness of his faith.

He can become terribly formal. God can chastise him by leaving him under the power of that sin. If he has neglected his spiritual life, God can leave him with his neglect.

And so, he loses the cheerfulness and the joy and the zeal and the interest even that he once had in the things of God.

He can lose his appetite for spiritual things. And you see this as well enacted time and time again in the history of the Christian church.

People drift and there is nothing easier in the life of the Christian than to drift away and to slip away from God and from the things of God.

[13 : 28] And that person's soul can then be invaded as the Israelites, as the Midianites invaded Israel, can be invaded easily. And he can become a prey to so many temptations.

His life can become one of spiritual barrenness, a wasteland. And Ichabod lies written large across his soul.

The glory of God has departed. Let me give you an example of this. In Galatia, there was a time of great spiritual reviving and refreshing.

Many years afterwards, Paul wrote him a letter and he asked him a question. Where is the blessedness you once spoke of?

Where is it? He was asking them to look at their lives and to find out if it had gone, if it had disappeared. Remember the words of the hymn writer.

[14 : 36] Where is the blessedness I had when first I knew the Lord? Where is the soul refreshing view of Jesus and his word?

All too often, a time of spiritual fruitfulness can be nothing but a memory in the life of a blight or in the blighted life of a backslidden or a lapsed believer.

The same applies to them. And it can be particularly difficult for that type of person who has sinned against light and against knowledge because the justice that God is going to bring to bear upon him will be commensurate with the light and the knowledge and the privilege that he had.

And that is a very serious and solemn thought. Now then, secondly, how did God answer this cry?

Well, in a very strange way, God sent them a prophet. Verse 7. And what the prophet did was this. He reminded them of their sin. He reminded them of what God had been to them and what God had done for them and how God had delivered them and how they forgot God and how they had turned to other gods.

[16:07] Now, quite simply, what he did was he reproved them as they cried out of the depth of their own conviction.

Here's this prophet coming from God. he speaks to them and what he does is he drives the wedge of conviction deeper into their heart. It doesn't come with relief.

You and I very often have a mistaken view about the meaning of preaching, about the nature of preaching. That preaching should always be without you to comfort the people who are before you, without you to making them feel good.

A person is coming to church if he feels low, if he feels down in the spirits, he should leave that church walking on air. Sometimes he does, maybe.

But the theme is that you and I think that that is the way that preaching always ought to affect the person. You know, my friend, there are times when you and I need to come face to face with the reality of our own situation.

[17:11] There's too much thinking amongst us of feeling good, walking on air, feeling wonderful. That preaching, that preaching ought to make us that. Not necessarily.

If you're far away from God tonight, perhaps the kind of message that you need is a message that will drive home that conviction to your heart. Make you feel not good, but bad.

Make you feel worse. Make you feel awful. Remember the people of the day of Pentecost, as Peter preached to them. They were cut. The word of God tore them to pieces inwardly.

And this is what the preaching of the prophet did in Israel. Deepened their sense of conviction. And you know how this happens very often. A person come back to the unconverted person I was speaking about earlier.

Life has turned against that person. Things have become a drudgery. He's oppressed. He knows. That he needs something he doesn't have.

[18:14] Very often his thoughts go to God. Perhaps he'll come to church. Or if he was coming to church, he'll come in a different attitude. And he'll come on here. And what is he here? Does he feel good when he's left?

Oh no, he feels a thousand times worse. You see, his own sense of sin and conviction is deepened in his heart by the message of the word of God.

So this prophet reminded them of their sins. Remind them of what they had been. Remind them of what they had done. Brought before them the enormity of their sin.

And I say this to you. It is far better to be reminded of that than not to be reminded of it at all. Far better for God to break the silence that is in your soul by a message of conviction than to leave you under the judgment of that silence of soul.

There is no person who's in a worse condition here tonight than the person who has been left by God and to whom God doesn't say a word. One of the most pathetic individuals in the whole of the Bible is Herod who tried to poke fun at Jesus in his last house.

[19 : 43] And this is what is written of Herod and of Jesus attitude to Herod. Jesus answered him not a word. There was a silence of God's judgment judgment on that man's life.

What about you tonight? Is God speaking to you? Is God arousing within you a sense of sin?

Is God deepening that conviction in your heart? Is the word of God bringing you face to face with the reality of your own situation as a sinner before God?

Or are you sitting here tonight contented in your spiritual silence that has gathered over your soul?

If that is the case my friend pray that God would break that silence. It would be an awful judgment to die with that silence hanging over my soul.

[21 : 01] Thirdly there is Gideon's call here. Now here's this man at that particular time in that political and historical setting in Israel here's this man probably threshing the corn in this area of the wine press at Ofra hiding away from the Midianites in the hope that he could gather the seed at the harvest and keep it for the survival of his family and perhaps even of that particular neighborhood in which he lived.

And as he's threshing his corn he lifts his eye and there sitting under the oak tree at that wine press a strange individual a man with a staff in his hand.

Now the chapter makes it very clear to us that Gideon himself recognized that this was a divine visitor. Now if you had been there or picture yourself and you have seen just now you're hiding away from an enemy and to all intents and purpose you're on your own working away and then when you lift your head there's someone you've never seen before perhaps your thought immediately would be this one of the enemies you're trying to avoid maybe thought I don't know but he might have been open to the thought suggestion that this was a midday night the very man that he would want to avoid but of course it wasn't a midday night it was the angel of the Lord God now I haven't got time to go into this tonight but sufficient for me to say here that this is one of these frequent reference in the Old Testament to the person referred to as the angel of the covenant and that was none other than the second person of the Trinity the

Lord Jesus Christ we believe in one God Father Son and Holy Spirit three persons in the God head one God but three persons it may interest you to know that one of the things that Iraq would level against the so-called Christian nations tonight in the conflict in the Gulf is that they are convinced that they have the right religion because they worship one God we worship three gods that's what they say but we worship only one God but there are three persons in the God and the second person is the Lord Jesus Christ who took our nature who was in this world as a man in the form of a man and this was Christ revealing himself to Gideon in a form that he was able to recognize identifiable as a man the

Lord the angel of the covenant the second person the son of God the Lord Christ taking to himself a form that Gideon could recognize that's who he saw and one of the things about the call of Gideon is that God came to him when he was busy at work busy at work and minister I hope you don't think that a person who's been called by God is a person who has nothing else to do so he might as well respond to God's call I mean what else is there for him very often you'll find that when God calls men in the Bible he calls men who are engaged busily at work Moses was David was John was Matthew was James and Peter all were busily engaged at their own work when the Lord lay his hand on them so was Gideon thresh in the corn and the Lord came to him and he said two things to him that Gideon found terribly difficult to believe or to understand first of all the

[25 : 11] Lord is with you verse 12 and you are a mighty man of valor in the same verse and Gideon response is quite predictable the Lord is with us how can you say that how can you say that the Lord is with us when here for seven years we've been oppressed by these enemies and you notice that when he speaks he identifies himself with the cause of God in his field us you say the Lord is with me how can he be look at what's happened to us and you know this is our wonderful mark of grace in the life of this man he was a man of faith as the Hebrews tells us he had the grace of God in his heart how do you know well for one reason he identified himself with the cause of God in that area in that land God with us look at what has happened to us he says to this angel he identified himself he was a part of

God's cause in Israel a very simple question my friend in the application of this to you and to me can you identify yourself tonight with the cause of Christ in Stornoway and in the island of Lewis do you find yourself a part of God's history in this area God did it for them we know in the past God saved those who were before us God made Christians here before has he made a believer of you are you one of them can you pray for the peace of Jesus for the peace of God to rest upon this area do you pray for the preservation of the Lord's day in Lewis and Harris and elsewhere do you pray for the extension of his kingdom do you pray for revival do you pray that people be saved do you pray that your children would be converted that your parents would come to the

Lord are you part of the kingdom of Christ here on earth are you in his cause where are you you are either there or you are not you may be standing in the perimeter fences at what tonight but my friend that's not enough and there are far too many who are prepared to take the easy way out I'll take so much of an interest I'll go so far but I will not identify myself with the cause of the Lord I know because you're not a man you're not man enough to do it you're a coward at heart God alone can give you the grace to identify yourself with a cause as Gideon did and that's how he answered he responded at once and he showed how much the cause meant to him how much does it mean to you the second thing that he found difficult was this you're a mighty man of

Allah you're a strong man you're a courageous man oh how could he be when he was there in the secrecy of that area of her afraid of the Midianites threshing his own core and here was a struggle that this man had in the exercise of his faith he speaks to the angel and he said did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt but now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites he knew his history he knew what the past was like he knew of the glory of God revealed in and through this people he knew it and he loved it how much of your spiritual history of this island do you know and do

I know for that matter I agree readily with the people who say that part of the problem with us as a church today and I speak in the free church of Scotland is that our people and particularly our young people don't know our history quite right it's quite right history has become one of the Cinderella subjects of our day and it's an awful thing when our people lose their history of course there are things which make us distinctive otherwise we wouldn't be in existence and it's a distinctiveness of our testimony that we love and don't tell me my friend that that doesn't matter at the end of the day it does matter it does matter but how much of the glory of God's work in history do you know of in this land in this island in this town is

[30 : 40] Gideon you is history and the point I want to make is this you see there are two ways in which people can react to a glorious past you see people can react to a glorious past in a critical way if I were to put it like this to you I could very easily if heaven was like me the world would be a better place I hope that God by his grace never allow me to say it to bring you a spirit of censoriousness in which you find fault with everybody except yourself and what you do in there is you parade your own righteousness and your own self righteousness and you are attracting people yourself and you encourage them to be like you and you are saying if you were all like me the world would be a far better place that's not the way in which Gideon said this at all he spoke of the glory of the past and he moaned at the situation of the present and that's the way in which you and

I should speak of it by all means let us know it let us learn it let us acquaint ourselves with our knowledge of it let us request that history often and let us mourn that things today aren't what they ought to be and aren't what they were but let us put the blame fairly and squarely for that at our own door I don't like the kind of critical spirit with which people speak of the past pouring as it were scorn and cold water over all the efforts of today I don't like that do you and I don't think it's biblical either to do it like that there are other people who speak of the glory of the past particularly with reference to young Christians and they say to them you you're not a passion for the people were in the past and that young

Christian is worthy of him he'll be the first to agree with that instead of pouring instead of making it difficult for them encourage them encourage them let us think of the glory of the past let us be well let us lament that things let us be way in the present situation and let us lament the present situation but let us long for better things let us ask God to revive that glory thou thou have

I have sent thee go in this thy might I have sent thee the Lord was strengthening him giving him strength and courage in the face of all the enemies in the face of all the difficulties in the face of all the demands that will be placed upon in the face of all the threats to which you would be exposed the strength of God was communicated with him and then there was this I am with you and you and I my friend will need no more than that I know that there are people who find it difficult to come out on the side of the Lord to take that step because they feel exposed isolated alone what am I going to do in the face of all the problems that of necessity how am I going to manage you won't on your own have not

I said this is what he said to the disciples in the great commission lo I am with you always in the face of all the problems that we're going to confront them only one thing was necessary as Paul said if God be for us who can be against us it be wonderful to feel you know I often feel this myself and every minister I'm sure feels this it would be wonderful to think that every single person was with you every single person behind you every single person wanting you every single person loving you every single person praying for you only an idiot would think that that were true but then you see in the face of all the problems if he is with us that's all we need that's all we need have not

[37 : 10] I sent thee has the Lord laid his hand on you has the Lord looked on you and has the Lord communicated that strength to you I am with you well my friend if he is you need no one else you need no one else and yet I'm sure that there's something else that you want like Gideon Gideon needed encouragement because he was absolutely amazed oh my Lord how can I save Israel behold my family is poor in Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house he didn't feel sufficient for this he didn't feel adequate he wasn't worthy he wasn't equipped who me same response you get from Moses

Jeremiah many others who is sufficient said Paul for these things you may be tonight feel that maybe you would take a stand on the side of the Lord if you felt better if you were worthy if you were good if you were better equipped than you are wait for these things and you'll perish as you wait none of us is good enough none of us is strong enough none of us is equipped sufficiently but God can do what we can't and that's what Gideon discovered as he asked for this token oh well he said to him if I have found grace in thy sight if you really mean what you say then show me a sign that what you're saying is genuine and he then went off and this was the custom of the day you remember that

Abraham did the same for the angels who came to visit him all to Sodom and Gomorrah he made them a meal that was the practice amongst these people if a stranger came a stranger was showing great respect if he would receive and accept a meal so Gideon said to wait here until I give you something to eat so he went away and he prepared a meal with a kid and unleavened cakes and so on and he brought the meal to the stranger remember what he had said before he went to prepare it now I would like you to confirm to me show me a sign that will confirm that what you said is really genuine I know some people may mark of unbelief on the part of God why would he not accept the word of the Lord well my friend

I said to you earlier on that even if you are sure tonight that God has sent you that God has called you that God has blessed you that God has saved you I'm sure of this that you wouldn't mind that token from God tonight to confirm that he has saved I think show me a sign for good that those who hate me may see it even the minister tonight who's assured that God has called him to preach the gospel and he climbs up pulpit steps wherever he preaches I'm sure that one of the things he says in his heart oh God show me tonight even though he knows that he's been called show me prove to me that you have called me speak through me to someone you who are saved by his grace you want a token for good oh

God speak to me in the service give me an understanding of the word help me to sing this psalm to know the meaning of this passage speak to my heart confirm to me the faith that thou hast given to me thyself that's all that Gideon asked Lord confirm to me what you have spoken do you not pray for that would you not like tonight a sign from God that you are a Christian mind you where you and I go wrong is this that we try to tell God the sign that we want do it like this or do it like that we should leave it in his hand and one other thing as we see in a minute maybe the sign that God does give you won't be a very comfortable one what Gideon saw filled him with fear alas my lord he said alas I have seen thee same with Isaiah when he saw the glory of God in the temple I feel terrible he said

[42 : 27] I'm broken in pieces I need forgiveness and I need cleansing well what happened was this the meal came it was spread out but the angel didn't take it at all he used it made Gideon spread it out on the rock then he touched it with the staff that was in his hand and it was consumed by the fire by the divine fire and there was confirmation to Gideon that this was the Lord indeed speaking to him and he was afraid you see don't run away with the idea and I haven't got time to develop this don't run away with the idea that every time God speaks to you it may make you feel wonderful it may fill you with fear and this what happened here filled Gideon with fear at all filled Gideon with fear as well he trembled and then the angel spoke to him and said to him fear not shalom he said shalom be unto thee fear not thou shalt not die this means that

God was communicating his peace praying his prosperity and success on Gideon and you know if God lays his hand on you like that you will reciprocate the same thing towards the things of God you will say with the psalmist pray that peace and prosperity may be upon the spiritual Jerusalem may peace and felicity be theirs who love the Lord is that your prayer for the church of Christ and the world tonight do you pray for peace not only in the gulf peace in stirring peace in home prosperity from the Lord in the lives of all whose life you touch yourself well that's what happened to Gideon because there he built an altar a memorial of his thankfulness to God and he called the name of the altar

Jehovah Shalom God of hosts the covenant God who is the God of peace who brought peace to himself made him long for peace in Israel made him long for peace the peace of God that passes all understanding to pervade all of society and then that same night we'll read and I'm finished with this that same night Gideon went to work in the name of the Lord where did he begin he began at home his father had an altar erected to bear the male divinity of the Canaan in his own garden he also had a shrine built to that God Gideon's father so at night Gideon with ten men tore down the altar broke up the shrine built an altar to

God and sacrificed a bullock to God the God of his father one of his fathers bullocks sacrificed to God what does that teach us well I think it teaches us one or two things and with this I leave it my friend if God calls you by his grace to serve him see that you begin to serve him where it is most difficult and I suggest to you that the most difficult place of all is in your own home very difficult I sympathize with people who find it difficult to talk about the things of the Lord to their kith and kin my friend I can enter into your experience it is difficult begin begin at home set up your own altar where it is most difficult where it is most difficult at home if it be that they don't worship the

God that you that has saved you there introduce that God to them try by the grace of God to tear down the altars that are erected there to other gods introduce them to your God and it's not easy if it be that in the mercy of God he has enabled you to do this and that your loved ones respect you for it thank God for that mercy because there are people even in Stornow tonight who find it almost impossible to erect an altar to the God of Israel in their own home almost impossible but you begin you try to introduce it there and so

[48 : 09] I close with an inevitable question whose altar is erected in your home have you torn down the altars that you had erected before the dearest idol said another I have known what dare that idol be help me tear it from its throne and worship only thee is this God your God Gideon's God has it become you let us pray Lord have mercy upon us and bless to us the word of thy grace and to thou in thy mercy apply thy truth with conviction to our hearts be our guide and our shield and part us with thy blessing forgiving sin for

Jesus sake amen have love PRO me to my