

Gideon - The Reluctant Hero

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Date: 17 June 2018

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to Judges and Chapter 6. I didn't read Chapter 7, but obviously we're going to go into that chapter as well.

As we look at this man, Gideon, I have been looking at some Bible characters with you over the last few Sundays, the different people. We looked at Ananias, we looked at the contrast between Bartimaeus and Belshazzar, we looked at Caleb and looked at David and at Elijah and Felix and now looking at Gideon.

And there's always so much to learn from these characters. But if we could home in just on verse 14 of Chapter 6, and the Lord turned to him and said, Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian.

Do not I send you. Have you ever been asked to do something that you feel is way beyond you? That you've been asked to, whatever it is, and you say, well, somebody else should be doing this. This is not something that I feel that I can do or that I'm able to do. Well, that is certainly the way it was for this man. We find that there have been quite a number of people in the Bible that God called to do certain things.

[1 : 33] And they were very, very reluctant to do. For instance, Moses, when God called Moses and he said, I'm appointing you to go and take my people out of Israel.

Moses was saying, oh, not me. Send my brother. I'm not eloquent. My brother, send him. Same with Jeremiah. When God called Jeremiah, Jeremiah said, I'm but a child.

I'm not able. I'm not fit for the like of that. And Gideon, of course, is another who's in exactly the same category. And we would call Gideon a reluctant hero.

He became a great hero of Israel, but he certainly was a very reluctant one. And we find that as you go through the book of Judges, that it's one of the things that it highlights to us is the astonishing grip that sin has upon our lives.

Because we find in the book of Judges that a pattern, a returning pattern takes place all the time. God's people, the Israelites, they find themselves wandering far from God.

[2 : 45] In the time of Joshua, God had said to them, when you go into the land of promise and you settle there, you have to keep a distinction away from the nations round about.

Because if you become involved with them and interact with them, I guarantee you, you'll begin to follow their ways and practices.

And it won't be long until you will lose sight of me and you'll begin to worship their gods. And as long as Joshua lived and those who had come with Joshua and crossed the Jordan and settled in the land, everything was fine.

But after the death of Joshua and the elders, the older people who were around at that time, gradually, bit by bit, there was an interaction with the other nations.

And very quickly, just what God had predicted happened. And they began to follow their ways and their practices. And they began to worship the other gods, the Baal, the Asher, all these other gods of the other nations.

[3 : 53] And as they drifted away, God, remember they were his people, God allowed other nations like the Philistines and the Midianites to come up and to create havoc in the land.

God didn't hand them over to destruction, but he handed them over in order to bring them back to himself. He handed them over so that their lives would become so difficult that they would then remember the Lord God and begin to cry to him, to call upon him.

And remember, God wants us, God made us for himself. And the worst thing that we can do in life is just to go through life and forget about God, to receive all his benefits, but to ignore him.

God wants us to be in communication with him, to be talking to him, to be thanking him when he answers our prayer and even when he doesn't answer our prayers.

God wants us to be in the Bible. We're told in Scripture, what do you have that you did not receive? Now, that's a really humbling statement. In other words, everything that we have in life, and whether that's the abilities that you have to get on in life, all the different provisions that have been made in your life, God has given you these abilities and he's given you these resources.

[5 : 22] And so often we, that's part of what he found fault with Israel. He was saying to them, you are saying, because God could read their hearts, you're saying, it's by your own wisdom.

It's by your own strength we've done all this. God's saying, no, it's not. I'm the one who has actually done all this for you. And so God is having to bring his people back over and over and over again and remind them, I am your God.

Everything that you have, you have because of me. So that's what was happening here at this particular time. It was Midianites who were coming up.

And what they would do was they would wait until Israel had planted all their crops, and they were ready then to gather their crops and they would invade. And they were, as it tells us, you could hardly number them.

They would just swoop down and they would take all their resources, everything that they had, all their crops, and disappear. And Israel would be left devastated.

[6 : 27] And this was happening year after year after year. And the book of Judges, if we were to go through this book, it's a cycle that repeats us over and over again.

Somebody has called it their sin, their servitude. First there's the sinning, then under oppression by another nation, then there's supplication calling to God, and then there's salvation where God delivers.

And that's what the book of Judges is all about. All the different judges, like Gideon, like Jephthah, like Samson, people who were raised up by God to deliver his people after they returned to him and started calling to him.

So that's really the pattern of this book, the book of Judges. So Israel, as we see here in a bad way, and this has gone on for seven years.

Now that in itself is quite incredible, because it shows you the grip that sin has on you, that it had on the Israelites and has on us. Seven years.

[7 : 35] You would say to yourself, if this happened one year, you'd say, oh, I've got to take a tumble to myself. But then the second year, and then the third year, and then the fourth year, and you'd say to yourself, surely by the fourth year, they would be saying to themselves, all right, Lord, forgive me my sin.

I must turn back to you. But no, fifth year, sixth year, on and on and on it went. And it shows to us the incredible grip sin has.

You know this, we don't want to give up. The power of sin is so great that there's something that just goes right deep in within you. You know that you should be asking the Lord to break that power, that grip within you.

And yet there's something still within you that wants to hang on to it. Isn't it a strange thing? I love my sin, but I hate my sin. That's what a Christian is like.

The good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not. That's what I do. Even the Apostle Paul said that. And that is why we really need God's power, in order to break this love, this grip, this power that sin has in us and upon us.

[8 : 52] And so the book of Judges is a picture. The Old Testament, so many of the incidents and experiences and stories are pictures really of what is happening within our lives, within our Christian walk.

And so we find that eventually Israel cry to the Lord. And the wonderful thing is that despite how Israel have turned their back on the Lord, have forsaken Him, have indulged themselves in all the wrong ways and in all the wrong practices, and have set up idols, and you see for Gideon there, there was a, they were worshipping the Baal, there was the altar and the Asherah.

It was all there. God was forgotten. And yet as soon as he cried to him, the Lord comes back. And he begins to answer the cry.

We can't get over God's patience with us, His mercy towards us. But God loves His people to this extent. And so we find that the Lord is going to send a deliverer.

And the deliverer is Gideon. And it's one of the wonderful things about this episode is that Gideon is somebody that was really a nobody in Israel.

[10:17] If you had gone into Israel and you had gone up to some people and said, you know what, I'm looking for this man Gideon. And they would say, no, I don't know.

But if you were more specific and you went to the tribe, remember that Israel was set into different, amongst, they had different tribes, different locations. And if you went to the area of Manasseh, where the tribe of Manasseh was, because Gideon was of the tribe of Manasseh, and you went up to some of the people and you'd say, I want to speak to Gideon.

They said, oh, sorry, don't know Gideon. Because Gideon tells us, when the Lord called him, he said, oh, he says, not me. He said, I, our home, our household, is the least in all the tribe of Manasseh.

Amongst all, amongst all the different families. Our family is the least. And amongst our family, I'm the least. In other words, I am the so bottom of the pile that nobody really knows about me.

I am the ultimate Mr. Nobody. But you know, that's what the Lord loves to do so often, is that he takes people, people that are way in the background, and he thrusts them in to do the work.

[11:41] And I wonder why the Lord does that. Well, he often does that, because here are people who are not out for themselves. They're not out to make a name for themselves.

They're not out to take honor to themselves. They don't want the glory themselves. In fact, they don't even want to do it. But God is making sure, by taking a passion like this, that God is able to take all the honor and all the glory to himself, and that God's name will be honored and glorified through it all.

And that's why the Lord will often take the reluctance. Those who don't really want to, but feel that God is calling them in to do it. And that doesn't mean that it's going to be plain sailing forevermore, because you know, sometimes you think if God is calling you into something, that from then on, it's going to be dead easy.

That there won't be any hassles. In fact, the very first thing that God asks Gideon to do is to smash down the altar to Baal and the Asherah and to build an altar to himself and to sacrifice to him.

Gideon was so scared, he did it by night. But the next day, we didn't read all that because the time was short, but the next day, the people in the village were wanting to kill Gideon because of what he had done.

[13:05] They'd all ganged up, and they came to the father's house and they said, we want to kill this man. See what he's done. It was the same with Moses when God called Moses and Moses, oh, I don't want to do this.

And eventually, he was persuaded and he went and he went to Pharaoh and he said, God says, you have to let the people go. Pharaoh said, who?

And rather than let the people go, he intensified the slave labor. Things became far worse and Moses goes back to the Lord and says, what have you done?

So we needn't be surprised if when you're persuaded that God is taking you into a particular work or to do a certain thing, that from then on, everything's going to be plain sailing. But the thing is, at the end of the day, he will not only take you through it, but he will make you victorious in it and he will do what he wanted to do through you.

That's the way it works. He will take the honor to his name and you'll be able to see, I have been an instrument in his hand. It hasn't always been easy. God didn't say, doesn't say it's going to be easy.

[14:16] But he will still achieve his purposes through you and take honor to his name. And that's exactly what happened with this man, Gideon. And of course, the angel that is speaking to Gideon here, we believe, is none other than the Lord himself.

We believe it is an appearance of what we would call theophanies, appearances of the Lord Jesus, Christ himself, because the way that he interacts and speaks with Gideon, we see that this is not even an angel, it is truly the Lord.

Anyway, we find that when Gideon finally says, oh, well, I'll have to do what the Lord says, we find that Gideon wanted to be absolutely sure.

And you can understand it because the Midianites, there were over a hundred thousand men that come up. There was a vast, vast, vast number.

And here's this little, well, I don't know, little, I have no idea, but this man who's so insignificant in his own land. And he's to lead Israel to deliver.

[15 : 28] So he says to the Lord, Lord, I want to be really, really, really, really sure. And this is the different, or sometimes the difficulty with faith, is there is a place where faith will leave the absolute concrete evidence behind.

We want to have everything so clear to us that we know that it's one hundred percent, everything's a hundred percent certain. But faith doesn't work like that.

Faith takes us a step beyond so that we have to, we have to really, we call, we use the expression stepping out in faith. And literally, that's it.

It's like what we've been looking at the life of Abraham. That's literally what Abraham did. He stepped out in faith. He wasn't even sure where he was going. God said, I will show you. And we do that repeatedly.

So often, sight and sound and all these things, they're there. But then faith takes you that wee step further. And here's Gideon and he's having a struggle with his faith.

[16 : 41] He believes God, but I says, Lord, I want, I want something more. So Gideon asks for a sign. And it's a sign with a fleece.

Now we even, to this day, use the expression sometimes people who say, I put out a fleece and try to find God's will. But what Gideon did was very literally, he took a fleece.

And he said to the Lord, I'm laying the fleece of wool on the floor. If there is dew in the morning on the fleece and the ground all round is bone dry, then I know for sure, Lord, that it is you that has spoken to me and that you will use me to deliver Israel.

In the morning, got up, and the fleece was so wet when he wrung it that it filled a bowl of water.

You'd say to yourself, oh, there you are, Gideon, you've got your sign.

But you know, the thing is, once you start going down the road of signs, you want another and another and another. That's why it's so important to go on God's word. And we mustn't, I'm not going to take away from Gideon's faith because his faith is remarkable.

[17 : 53] And he deserves his place in Hebrews 11. He's one of the men who's highlighted there. There are men and women in Hebrews 11 and they're noted because of their faith. Gideon's there and rightly so.

But he struggled. He really struggled at the beginning. So then he says to the Lord, don't be angry with me but I want to test you. I want, this will be it.

I will be 100% guaranteed, assured, if you'll do it the other way around. In the morning, I want the fleece to be bone dry and I want the ground all round to be soaking.

And that's exactly how it was the next morning. So Gideon, Gideon knew that the Lord was calling him. Now again, when we come to it today, we've got to remember this.

Gideon didn't have a full Bible like you and I have. He had the first five books of the Bible. He had the law of Moses. So we have to make excuses for Gideon there.

[18 : 57] The Word of God is our rule. It is in fact, a shorted catechism says that, what is the rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

The only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him is the Word of God. Now of course, the Holy Spirit will incline us and influence us never, never against the Word of God.

Remember that if you're being inclined in a particular way against, definitely against God's Word, you can guarantee it's not the Holy Spirit that's guiding in that direction if it's going opposite to God's Word.

But it will always be in keeping with God's Word. And God again will often guide us through the opening and closing of doors. Sometimes it takes quite a while to work out what God is saying, what His will is.

But it will always be first and foremost through the Word. And it will be, in other words, the road that you're going will be in keeping with His Word and there will be, you would pray and hope that the Holy Spirit will guide you in that way and that His providence will guide you in the right way.

[20 : 13] The one thing I always say with regard to God's will is this. God is far keener that you will discover His will than you are to find it. We always say, I want to know God's will.

And we, yeah, we mean that, but sometimes, sometimes we're not 100% down that road because sometimes God's will is not the will we want. So, I always, I'm absolutely persuaded that God always wants us to know His will.

We sometimes are less keen to know His will even though we say we want to know His will.

Anyway, today we have the Word in all its fullness and Jesus said, I am the way, I am the truth and

the life.

But if we went to chapter 7 and we're only going to do this for five minutes as we come to conclude, we find that Israel gathered together.

The whole, we get this, Gideon and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped and so on. And the Lord said to Gideon, you know this, Gideon, you have far, far too many people.

[21 : 23] And Gideon was thinking to himself, I don't. And the Lord told him what to do. Anybody who was afraid, anybody who wasn't up for the fight to go home.

And a huge number just went. And there were 10,000 men left and Gideon thought, there's over 100,000 Midianites, 10,000?

Poor, we haven't a chance. The Lord said to him, still far too many. Gideon is sort of saying, am I hearing right? Too many?

The Lord said, take the men down to the river and ask them to drink. And they didn't know but they were being tested. And those who bent down and drank the water flowing in the river, that's what 9,700 of them did.

300 of them scooped up the water into their hands making it like that and drank it that way. The Lord said to Gideon, the 300 that have picked the water up in their hands and drank it like that, that's your army.

[22 : 34] Send the rest home. So Gideon sent the 9,700 home and he was left with 300 men. And Gideon must be saying to himself, what is going on here?

And then the Lord said, I want to encourage you. Take your servant, go down into the Midianite camp tonight. And as he went down into the Midianite camp, of course they went down, it's the middle of the night, and they were obviously tiptoeing.

And as they came along, they heard two Midianites talking. And you see that in chapter 7, verse 13. There were these, 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.

And his comrade answered, this is no other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Josh, a man of Israel. God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp. It's really quite extraordinary how this happened.

[23 : 46] And Gideon, when he heard that and the interpretation, see what he did if we go to chapter 7, verse 15. And as soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dreamants' interpretation, he worshipped.

I love that. Here he is in the very heart of enemy territory, just himself and his servant, and there's over a hundred thousand enemies round about.

And he's so overwhelmed with what God has enabled him to hear that there and then he stops and he worships God.

And that's a great example to you and to me. I'm sure that often in your life God has done something. And you say to yourself, maybe you're out, maybe I don't know where you might be and you say, oh you know, when I get home I'm going to have to worship the Lord.

I'm going to have to stop and give God thanks. But you know, if you leave it, by the time you get home, it's not the same. This is where we should be in just an instinctive way of doing exactly what Gideon did.

[24 : 59] It's just stopping and saying, Lord, thank you. You are the God of heaven and earth. What you've just done for me is wonderful. And that is, this will strengthen our faith.

And Gideon, his faith was strengthened because he came straight back. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, arise for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand.

When he worshipped God, that's kind of where everything sealed. He knew he was the living and true God was with him. So may we be in the habit, wherever we are, of stopping and giving God praise, honor, thanks for what he does.

And then Gideon divided up the men, this is what he did, into three bands of a hundred. And he said to them, when I give the signal, and they took with them a jar, and they put a flaming torch within the jar, hiding it, and Gideon said, when I give the sign, you will all take your jars, smash them on the rocks, you wave your torches about, and you cry out that this is for the Lord and for Gideon.

the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. And that's exactly what they did. At the given signal from Gideon, they all smashed their jars on the rocks, wave the torches about, and shouted.

[26 : 33] And the Midianites woke, and of course, blind panic, grabbed their spears, and they started fighting amongst themselves, because they didn't know who was who. And yet, each man was out for himself.

Self-preservation kicked in, the instinct, and they began killing each other left, right, and center. And then all Israel gathered and chased after them, and God delivered them.

And you know, it's an amazing story, where God shows his own power, and what he is able to do, through a person who's willing to submit to him.

Here is this man, Gideon, and this is why it is such an inspiring story, because I'm sure all of us feel Gideons, that we feel we're insignificant, and what could I do?

Well, the Lord shows that anything is possible when we are available for him. And it's so important that the church is of that spirit and mind, and that we say to the Lord, Lord, show your power through us.

[27 : 48] Not that we're anything of our shells, and forbid, Lord, that we will try and take the glory to our shells, or that we will bask in any honour that we think we might be getting, but that we will give all the honour, all the praise, all the glory to you.

Lord, work in us, work through us, and make us, for your name and for your glory, a blazing fire of love and of power in the community.

God is able to do that, but we must be nobodies, really, in order that God will make us somebodies, or make, not so much to make us somebodies, but that he will be displayed through us.

May we seek to have that spirit within us. Let us pray. Lord, our God, we pray that as you show us through men and women of long ago, you have collected these experiences in your word, and we're told in the New Testament that they are there for our example.

They have been deliberately set there so that we learn from their lives, and we learn from these incidents and these stories, and we are able to see that you are bringing spiritual lessons to us.

[29 : 12] We pray that we might have hearts that are ready to learn, that we might have teachable spirits, and that you will equip us and enable us to go forward, remembering that our warfare is not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual, and help us to understand that. Gideon and his men were able, through what happened, is demonstrating that it is not by might, and it is not by power, but it is by your spirit.

And so may your spirit work in us and through us, individually and as a congregation, and that you will bless us all. Bless the tea and coffee in the hall afterwards, and take away your sin, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Our concluding singing is from Psalm 3, the third psalm in the Scottish Psalter, the tune is martyrdom, and we sing from verse 3, it's on page 3, everything's 3, Psalm 3, verse 3, page 3, the tune is martyrdom, but you are my protector, Lord, you are a shield, you are a shield, oh, that's in sing, Psalm, sorry, Psalm 3 in the Scottish Psalter, everything is not 3, page 201, yet thou my strength and glory art, the uplifter of my head, I cried and from his holy hill, the Lord me answer made, I laid me down and slept, I waked, for God sustained me, I will not fear though thousands ten set round against me be, the tune of martyrdom, these verses,

Psalm 3 from verse 3 to the end, yet thou my strength and glory art. yet thou my strength and glory art, the uplifter of mine head, I cried and from his holy hill, the Lord me answer made, I laid me down and slept and slept I wake, for God sustained me,

[32 : 06] I will not fear, though thousands ten set round against me be.

Arise, O Lord, save me, my God, for thou my foes hast struck all on the cheek, poor, and the teeth of wicked men hast grown.

Salvation doth appertain unto the Lord alone, thy blessing, Lord, forevermore thy people is upon. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forever more. Amen.