

Gideon 4

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- [0 : 0 0] Let us read in the Old Testament Scriptures in the Book of Judges, Chapter 6.
And we'll read from verse 21. We'll sing now in Psalm 86.
Psalm 86. And we'll sing from verse 12.
The tune is Evan. We'll read in the New Testament in the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter 6.
Second Corinthians, Chapter 6. It is blessing to that further reading from his own word.
- [1 : 2 7] We'll sing now in Psalm 32. Singing from verse 7.
The tune is Argyle. Let us turn now to the passage we read in the Book of Judges in the Old Testament.
Judges, Chapter 6. And following on from what we dealt with last week in the history of Gideon, I want to deal particularly tonight with the passage beginning at verse 28.
through to the end of the chapter. Last week we dealt with the call and the commissioning of Gideon to the task of delivering Israel from the oppression and the opposition of the Midianites.
We noticed that this oppression had continued for about seven years and had weakened the resolve of the Israelites and had unnerved them.
- [3 : 0 8] They were in a very distressed and depressed condition. And God called. God heard their cry as he called to them.
This is really the history of the Book of Judges. At time and time again, the Israelites fell into grievous sin and then cried to the Lord.
And the Lord heard their cry and sent them deliverance. And usually in a calling, someone to act as a judge, as a leader in their interests.
And Gideon was called by God. Gideon was a farmer, an agriculturalist. And it was in the course of threshing his corn that the angel of the Lord appeared to him and strengthened him for the task of leading Israel against the Midianites.
And you remember how that in response to Gideon's utter amazement that he should be chosen, how God confirmed to him the word of his calling and confirmed that word again by the miracle that he performed when the meal which Gideon had provided for him was consumed by the fire on the rock.
- [4 : 4 6] Well, Gideon began his work. And this is where we left it off last week and where we begin this week. Gideon began his work at home.
In his own, as someone has put it, in his own backyard. Gideon's father had erected in his garden an altar to Baal and had a kind of wooden pole or plank which depicted the god the Asherah.
And to that altar and to that shrine, it looks as though the members of Gideon's family, perhaps what we will call today the members of the clan, it was to that shrine and that altar that they gathered in the practice of their idolatry.

And you know that it was idolatry and the development of idolatry that had brought Israel into its sorry spiritual condition.

Well, when God called Gideon, Gideon began his work of deliverance in his own home or in his own backyard.

[6 : 10] And he began it by tearing down the altar of Baal, destroying the shrine, and erecting there, in accordance with God's command, an altar to the God of Israel, on which he offered two bullocks, a two-year-old and a seven-year-old bullock belonging to his father.

And you remember that in trying to apply that part of this passage last week, that I suggested to you that it teaches us the lesson that we must all learn and all seek to put into practice.

That in the exercise of our God-given faith, we must begin at home. And I suggest to you that perhaps that may very well be the most difficult place of all for a person to begin his service in the work and in the name of the Lord.

It is far easier, for example, if I may seek to elicit in this way, and I know this myself from personal experience, it is far easier to distribute tracts in a district well away from your home than it is perhaps in the very street where you live.

far easier to offer your service for a Christian organization in some country perhaps abroad than it is to be engaged in evangelistic outreach within your own congregation, within your own, indeed, maybe even within your own denomination, certainly within your own area.

[8 : 14] The pressures are less for the simple reason that the people don't know you. But it's very difficult to begin where you are known best of all, and that is in your own home, in your own area, amongst your own kith and kin.

And perhaps there are people who are confronted with the claims of Christ tonight who may be afraid to respond to these claims for that reason, that they're afraid of what it is going to involve them in, at home, with the people that they know best.

You know the thought that crosses the mind of a person perhaps who may be wrestling with the question, and there are people who have wrestled with it, and they will acknowledge that tonight. People perhaps who think in terms of maybe coming out to a prayer meeting.

Well, it's not too difficult to think of that as such. What makes it difficult is the thought of the consequences of coming to a prayer meeting.

What is so-and-so going to say? How will I react, or how will so-and-so react, and how will I deal with that myself? There are problems, and there are difficulties.

[9 : 39] Well, Gideon tore down the altar that was erected to Baal and erected an altar to God. And this is how commitment to Christ always manifests itself.

There are the two sides to it. There is the tearing down on the one hand and the building up of the other. And you know the way in which the New Testament emphasized this for us in well-known words?

Repentance and faith. You see, repentance isn't just a child flopping on his or her knees beside the bed and saying, Oh Lord, I'm sorry for my sins.

That's not repentance. Repentance, as someone has put it, is being so sorry for your sins that you're prepared and determined to abandon your sins.

Prepare to tear yourself away from them. And prepare and determined to tear away from yourself the things in which you found contentment and solace before the Lord lays hand upon you.

[10 : 45] You see, there is the difficulty. That is why you have always tears associated with repentance. Because of the pain, the agony, the difficulty that is involved in tearing yourself away from the practices and the habits and the pursuits of the past.

That's one side of it. But there's another. There is the building up. There is the erection of the altar to God, which involves the joy and the peace and the contentment that you have in service.

And that is why Gideon called this place where he had built the altar Jehovah Shalom. That is God, Jehovah, the God of the covenant is the God of peace or the God that brings peace, the God who gives peace.

It's amazing. How, and again, according to what the Bible says, great peace of the who love thy law. There is no greater peace known amongst men than the peace that comes through obedience.

Difficult though the path of obedience may be, there is always peace from God as a result of committing your way to him.

[12 : 11] Peace flows into the soul when the break is made with the past and a life of new commitment is begun.

And that is why someone referred to this incident in Gideon's life has been an expression of adoring gratitude and of believing hope.

The die was cast. He had made his move and he had publicly, albeit at night, he had publicly identified himself.

He had made a public proclamation that the God of Israel was his God. Now as we leave this point and go on to the next one, there is a very simple question that addresses itself to you and to me.

Have we made this act of identification? Has there been this tearing down and this building up in our own life?

[13 : 14] Have we committed ourselves to God and to his service? The second point we notice is this.

But as a result of having done this, Gideon encountered opposition. Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together and went over and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

Now there was opposition from the Midianites. But there was also opposition from within his own borders. When the men in the area discovered that the altar had been cast down the following morning, that the shrine had been destroyed and the altar had been built to God, they were furious.

And they immediately identified Gideon as the man who was responsible for this. Now the point I want to make here is this in applying it, is that though there is great peace and contentment in a life of commitment to the Lord, that doesn't mean at all that the life is going to be all one, a life of peace, that it's going to be a bed of roses thereafter, that there are going to be no problems and no difficulties.

No, no. There will always be opposition. People will always align themselves in one way or another against those who are committed to Christ and to his cause.

[14 : 47] Now of course, the classic example here is the example of Christ himself. We, those who are committed to the Lord, our followers, our followers, our disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he has set us an example that we should follow his footsteps, that we should follow in his footsteps. And you know what happened to him.

Because he was in this world associated with the cause of God, sent and commissioned by God, and because he claimed to be doing the will of God, that drew immediate opposition to himself.

He had opposition from various quarters. He had it from the religious leaders of this day, he had it from the civil authorities, and he had it as well from Satan, from the devil, using these agencies.

And also from the devil without use of any agencies at all. And it was Jesus who told his disciples, you remember he said, that the disciple is not greater than his master, nor is he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

[16:00] For if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. Very often, young Christians particularly, are discouraged the moment they discover opposition.

It's comparatively easy being a committed Christian in the company of committed Christians. Comparatively easy. It's great being in that kind of environment.

And it's good knowing that you're associated with people who are committed to the cause of Christ. I suppose in some respects that you would love to spend your day in the company, every hour of the day and of the night.

But of course life doesn't go on like that. You've got to go out into the world. You've got to rub shoulders with people at your work, or in school, or in college, or at home. People who don't have the same commitment as you, who don't have the same interests, who don't have the same sympathies, nor the same concerns.

And you're going to meet opposition from these quarters. Christ met it. And you and I will have to meet it as well.

[17:16] And so we discover that the Christian life is made difficult, and the battle has to be waged. Now I read here tonight in 2 Corinthians, as a matter of fact, I may as well tell you I read the wrong passage.

It was my intention to read 2 Corinthians 4, part of it, and then chapter 7. And what Paul says there is this, and I'll just paraphrase it in a word, what Paul says there is this, when we were in Macedonia, I said that's in the area of Philippi, and Colossae, and other places, when we were in Macedonia, we had terrible struggles because of the faith.

He would put it today, you and I would say this, that Paul went through the mill because of his allegiance to Christ. And what he said was this, without were fightings, within were fierce.

That's, you see, some people have a picture of Paul as a man who never had any problems in the world. He would preach anywhere. He would. He would preach to anybody, and he would. He would stand up for the faith of Christ at all times, and he did.

But you see, the picture that they, that they color as a result of that is this, there's a man who had no difficulties, no problems. But that's very wrong. Paul had to meet many difficulties and many problems.

[18:42] Without were fightings, within were fierce. And so it is with you and with me. And don't you be surprised if I may speak just a word for a minute in the passing, particularly to those who are young in the faith.

Don't you be at all surprised if you will find that as a result of what you are to contend with from the outside, there are fears from the inside.

There will be struggles. There will be disappointments. There will be tears because of the opposition. But then thirdly, this man was equipped by God for this task.

As they gathered against him, we read in verse 34, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. Now the word that is used for this is very interesting.

It is this, the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon. It's as though the Spirit of the Lord fell upon him, wrapping him round in this protective kind of casing.

[19 : 51] Now you know as well as I do that this wasn't in the form of anything particularly outward that manifested itself in connection with Gideon.

It wasn't as though the Lord pinned a badge on his lapel or perhaps put a certain crown upon his head and said, there you are now. People know you for what you are. Don't you worry.

That wasn't the way that God dealt with him. God gave him what God gives every Christian. He gave him the Holy Spirit. Now we live in a day when a lot of arant nonsense is being spoken about the giving of the Spirit.

And you know, this kind of teaching has been abroad for quite some time. It has now come into Stornoway.

And I make no apology for using that term that you hear a lot of nonsense spoken about the ministry of the Holy Spirit today in the life of the committed believer.

[21 : 03] And the problem that is wrong with every member of the Free Church of Scotland or every member of the Church of Scotland is this. And in the Free Christian Church of Scotland the problem with them all is that they haven't got the Spirit in its fullness.

This is what we all need. And together with that we need the gifts of the Spirit. And if you don't commit yourself to the Lord submit, let go and attempt to cover your life you will have any problems.

You wouldn't have any difficulties at all. And I would urge you to be on your guard against that kind of teaching that is very often associated with the charismatic movement.

Be on your guard against it. What does the Bible teach us about the Spirit clothing a person? I'll put it like this.

Why does the Spirit take possession of a person's heart and life? What does the Spirit do when he takes possession of him? Is the Spirit there to lift him above these sufferings and these problems and these difficulties and that opposition that he has?

[22 : 21] Does the Spirit come into his life so that he will sing from dawn to dusk and he won't have any feelings as Paul had fighting without and fears within?

Is the Spirit take possession of him to banish all these things forevermore from his life? Not at all my friend. Not at all. Listen to what Jesus said about the Spirit after all he's our guide.

when I go he said I will send the Spirit and the Spirit is going to do four things. His Spirit is going to come to comfort the Christian and lots of things involved in the comfort and he's going to come to convince the world of sin of righteousness and of judgment.

The Spirit comes into a person's life to reveal to him first of all his need as a sinner and then to reveal to him the remedy for his sin Christ who died for sinners.

and the Spirit always does that. That is always his work in the life of the Christian. Together with that the Spirit is there to guide him to lead him as a Christian.

[23 : 27] In what way? For what purpose? Particularly in his battle with sin. He's waging a battle. The biggest enemy that you have in the world tonight is your own sin.

Your own sin. Not the sin in the person beside you but the sin within you. And you wonder how am I going to cope with this? What am I going to do with this? I never knew I was this type of person.

I never knew my heart was so evil. My mind so dark and so black. My thoughts so often accompanied with the spirit of hell.

I never knew that I was like this. But you see my friend the Spirit enlightens you. Gives you knowledge of yourself. death. And very often the discovery that you make isn't one which is going to fill you with comfort concerning yourself.

But the Spirit also discovers something else for you. That Christ is the Savior for sinners. And this is the way in which the Christian wages the battle with sin.

[24 : 33] He's not allowed. the Spirit will allow him to forget that he's a sinner. But mercifully the Spirit will not allow him to forget either that there is only one remedy for his ruin and that is Christ as the Savior of sinners.

And the sinner the believer who has the Spirit of God comes under the influence of that Spirit as a sinner needing salvation saved by grace and he comes constantly to Christ.

So the teaching that you need the Holy Spirit to fill you today so that you have no problems tomorrow is a lot of arant nonsense completely contrary contrary to the very teachings of the Word of God and particularly to the teaching of Jesus.

The Spirit clothed Gideon and the Spirit told Gideon what to do with his fears what to do with his problems what to do with the opposition.

He told the Spirit it's the Spirit of prayer says the Bible taught him to pray as he teaches us to pray taught him where to go with his problems taught him what to say as he tried to articulate his situation and his condition to God.

[25 : 59] the Spirit came upon him as a Spirit of faith leading him as a believer constantly to Christ.

And you know one other thing on this for those who tell you that you need this once for all experience of the filling of the Holy Spirit let's remind you of what Paul said to the very Ephesians for whom who were exhorted by him to be filled keep on being filled this is what he prayed for them may God grant that you be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man daily we need the Spirit every day show the application for you and for me here tonight confront it with our own problems you have used and I have mine you've got your difficulties I have mine you may have difficulties at home at work and school or whatever you meet opposition the enemy is becoming powerful you're discovering your own weakness you're beginning to be afraid will you continue will you survive that is why God has given you the Holy Spirit to teach you to commit your way daily independence upon himself and fourthly that moved

Gideon to action and you know what he did well we read there in verse 35 quote in 34 what he did the Spirit of the Lord came upon him clothed Gideon and look at what is said Gideon blew a trumpet and Abiezer was gathered after him and he sent messages through it to all Manasseh and Asher and Zebulun and Naphtali when they heard the trumpet came to Gideon those of you who are acquainted with the Bible know the importance of the blowing of the trumpet in the spiritual history of Israel it did two things particularly it called Israel to war and it also called Israel to worship it was a call to arms on the one hand it was also a call to worship on the other and in many places today even in the armed services I believe the musical instruments are used at times for this purpose to call people to encourage them in war many a soldier has said that the sound of the bugpipes in conflict energised them and encouraged them it is also used at times to call people to worship well this is what

Gideon did he blew the trumpet a call to arms and a call to worship in the face of the opposition that came from 120,000 men of the Midianites and as we discovered he only had 30,000 men so he blew the trumpet gathered people to him and this is the way the Bible speaks as well of what the gospel does the prophets speak of it like this and the New Testament apostles speak of it like this the trumpet or the preaching of the gospel the declaration of the word of God must not be given an uncertain sound it must like a musical instrument played properly so the gospel must be preached in purity and in sincerity and when it is preached like that this is the effect it has under again the power and the ministry of the Holy Spirit it gathers people together it's a call to arms and a call to worship and I suggest to you that those of you who are here tonight as believers in

Christ this is what the gospel has done in your own life and this is what it is doing in your own life under the influence of this sound this certain sound that has come to you with the power and the authority of God you have been brought as a result to it to a commitment to Christ and to the worship of Christ from time to time Kirk sessions in this congregation and in other congregations listen to the testimonies of men and women boys and girls who want to make a profession of faith in Christ and invariably this is what you hear that when the Lord lays his hand upon them the thing that became important in their lives was the preaching of the gospel they love the preaching of the gospel and so often people say this that when the Lord came into their lives and opened their ears to the gospel and their hearts and their understanding they would sit listening to the gospel all night and very often the only note of disappointment in their lives was when the service came to an end

[31 : 32] I suppose I want to say this that unfortunately there are people here tonight who don't feel like that under the gospel at all perhaps my friend this may have been the longest hour of the day for you for others it may have been the shortest and when God blesses the gospel to your heart you don't feel the time long under the gospel at all the gospel trumpet gathers people together and you know that in the face of all the very often what has been adverse criticism of some of the young people in our town on a Friday and Saturday night I wish at times of course there's no harm in wishing unlike that that wish will ever be fulfilled

I wish at times that the media would also focus attention on this that in the very town where there is so much adverse criticism of the young in many respects justified I wish that they would focus attention on something that they don't want to focus attention on that in that same town there are many many young people drawn to the hearing of the gospel not just in this congregation but in other congregations in our town and indeed in our island but of course you don't expect to get that thrust that emphasis and yet this is what the gospel has been doing and been doing here year after year after year for generations people are still coming to the gospel the gospel is still being effective in the lives of young as well as old and people are still responding to the call to arms people are still prepared to commit their way to the

Lord Jesus Christ people are still prepared to worship the living God in accordance with that world and let those of us who are involved and this applies to every believer who has the privilege of sounding the trumpet never be ashamed to sound it it is God's prerogative to bless that sound and there are many who will yet testify to this oh greatly blessed the people are the joyful sound that know in brightness of thy face O Lord they ever on shall go and this is the question for you as I leave this and go on to the last point here this is the question for you have you responded to the sound of the gospel trumpet has the word of God been blessed to your heart do you love the truth do you want to hear more of the truth is the truth searching you out meeting your needs directing you away from a life of sin to a life of service and commitment to the captain of all salvation to the

Gideon of the New Testament to the Lord Jesus Christ the gospel gathers to his standard and appeals to people to submit themselves in adoring worship to his lordship and then finally this most interesting of accounts that we have at the end of this chapter Gideon's request for a sign from God and you know that this is what always referred to us Gideon putting out the fleece and you know there's no need for me to go over it it's there written for you two things he asked of God and he almost prefixes his request with an apology Lord just let me say this to you if you really if you have really called me so that by my hand thou will save

Israel let me ask just this I'm going to put out a fleece tonight and I would like in the morning to come out and see that that fleece is filled with dew and all the ground round about to dry and the Lord granted his request and then Gideon said to well as we say I'm terribly sorry for putting like this but would you just confirm that if I reverse the order if I put out the fleece tonight will you grant that all the ground round will be full of dew and the fleece will be dry that's all I want for confirmation that you're really going to save Israel through me now let me say this I find it difficult to know how to apply this passage and this teaching perhaps you've heard some people in conversation or in company saying well

[37 : 21] I put out a fleece and what they're really saying is this I asked God for a sign that I was really a Christian or particularly a sign that I really ought to do this I haven't got time to go into this just now but one of the Wesleys I think it was John had a particularly trying experience in this connection in wondering whether he should marry a particular woman and so he put a test to God he made a bargain with God well if things go like this I'll take it that I ought to marry her but if things don't I'll take it as a sign from you that I shouldn't and it was he was led to reject her he felt that the Lord didn't mean him to marry at all in the course of time he married a woman and the marriage was a disaster an absolute disaster you see there are times when you and I ought to exercise our

God given common sense especially common sense which has been illuminated by grace to know what to do in a given situation and one of the problems and I'm afraid that it is coming into modern day evangelical Christianity one of the problems that is going to confront us today is this very problem of looking for signs seeking guidance by the employment of certain means and one of the things that I find difficult with this passage is this that Gideon determined Gideon dictated to God how God was going to answer him you see he had the means the fleece and then what was going to happen to the fleece and what was going to the ground a lot of people spiritualize this by making the fleece Israel and the ground the Gentiles and so on but I'm afraid that I find that extremely difficult and impossible to accept and

I don't like over spiritualizing the word of God anyway I think there are great dangers in it but I think that this has lessons to tell us at the same time and one of the lessons is this always in the history of the human race there is the tendency to with the Jews we preach to them but no matter how much you preach and no matter how clear you make the teaching they will all respond we want a sign we want a miracle confirm prove that what you're saying is right with a miracle there are people in this church tonight like that there are people who want to be Christians no doubt and they say to themselves yes I would see the miracle if only I would have this sign and sometimes you dictate to God what it is going to be as Gideon did and how it is going to be some of us were here the other night in

Christian fellowship how some people in the throes of conversion thought that they would accept conversion or thought that they were converted if something wonderful happened in their lives and some of us some of us used to lie awake at night you go to bed and you were afraid to sleep because of your sleep you may miss the sign some people used to wait for the miracle they were going to see something on the wall or perhaps see a light in the darkness some an exiled of Tartasor on the Damascus this miraculous thing and it's wrong it's wrong for people to dictate to God yes I would become a Christian if only you would give me this and it is there that I find it difficult to understand why Gideon should do this but then I've got to think of something else

I've got to think of the day in which Gideon lived he didn't have a Bible like you and I have and then I've got to think of the situation which he found himself he was a farmer perhaps you would call Midian a crafter and here he was all of a sudden in charge of 30,000 men facing 120,000 Midianites and God says to him I'm going to save Israel through you he wasn't even a soldier he had probably never seen a battle in his life and here he is going to battle perhaps therefore he should say Lord just this one sign Lord just one more and I won't ask for another you can think you can understand I think you can sympathize with him to that extent and there I find it difficult to fault him because of the circumstance in which he found himself very difficult very trying and then I remember something else that

[42 : 37] David to my mind a greater man than Gideon said to the Lord Lord confirm to me the word that I heard from thy lips confirm it say that it was right and for those of you who are here tonight perhaps perhaps afraid that you're not a Christian or perhaps wanting to believe above all else that you are a Christian my friend I won't fault you whoever else will if you're crying tonight from the depths of your being oh Lord show me a sign for good I would like to think that that rather than be an expression of unbelief is an expression of faith albeit weak and whoever will fault faith

I won't no matter how weak it is to that extent I can sympathize with Gideon and I can sympathize with you because I know what it is confirm show me show me just this sign and then there's one other thing on the other hand I would counsel you to be your guard here I come back to it earlier don't look for what we would call props to your faith

I had the privilege at one time I didn't know it at the time I had the privilege of speaking just days before he died to the man whom I followed in I I didn't know at the time and no one did that he was on his deathbed and strangely enough he was speaking to me about this very thing and about an experience he had once in preaching in our congregation in Glasgow and when he preached seemingly that night there was a man in that congregation who approached him afterwards and said to him you know he said as you preached tonight I had a wonderful experience and he told Mr.

MacDonald that he had seen a light bright shining light encompassing the pulpit in which he sat now it so happened that the man whose pulpit he was occupying died very shortly afterwards and here he was himself within a year of that on his deathbed as well and this is the point that he made and I always remembered I was quite struck with what he said do you know he said I think that he said I didn't have that experience at all that night but I think that that man in the congregation needed he needed he needed he needed he needed that and this is the word he used do you know he said there are times when people need props for their faith and

I think that was particularly true of the Old Testament saints they needed props for their faith they needed as it were the extras us they needed the tokens they needed the signs but my friend you and I we've got a privilege they didn't have we've got the completed revelation of God in his word we've got the Old Testament and the New Testament you've got a Bible in your pocket on the shelf at home in your living room on your desk beside your bed that's what God has given you to direct you to guide you the word of God is the rule by which God guides us the only rule to direct us how we enjoy and how we glorify and enjoy the Lord perhaps one of the reasons why you're so anxious tonight about signs is that you're not doing enough in looking for

[47 : 58] God and his word perhaps we're not reading it enough we're not studying it enough we're not as acquainted with the word of God as we ought to be so I would like to leave it at this and applying this and I hope I'm not wrong in doing it I hope I'm not that be on your guard against the danger of putting out a fleece be on your guard about dictating to God how you are going to know a certain course of action be on your guard that you're not dictating be on your guard about looking for special signs because I say this we don't need the props as they did but the wonder of the grace and the love and the contesention of God is that from time to time he gives us in his mercy in his love props along the way but they are the exception rather than the rule and

I don't need to tell a soul and storm away tonight what they have to do to become a believer it is to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ I don't need to tell you where that is laid down it is in the word of his grace neither do I need to tell you what to do with your life and how to live your life and where to go and how to worship and how to serve it is there in his word you have there all that you will ever need let us pray Lord Lord bless to us thy work keep us in life here and help us to honor thee as we acknowledge thee in all our ways and forgive our sins for Jesus sake Amen and who have re her how do a love