

Gideon Prepared

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[0 : 0 0] chapter that we read. I'm going to spend a few moments looking at how God chose this young man. There are several times in the Bible when God comes to a young person and tells him that he has a great work for him to do and takes him and trains him and prepares him. I'm thinking particularly of David, of course, and Samuel, and here in this case Gideon. God chose Gideon to do a great work for him. He was going to be the savior, if you like, the rescuer of his people. He's going to lead the people of Israel at a very, very difficult time for them. If you have read the book of Judges, you will know how horrific it is. One of the most horrific books in the Bible. It's like a horror story. It really is truly, truly grotesque. It really is. It contains, I guess, every sordid event that you can possibly think of. Some of it is almost unreadable. I hope nobody ever tries to make a movie out of the book of Judges because it would definitely be classed as an 18.

It was absolutely horrific. It tells the story, of course, of how the people of Israel after Joshua died. Joshua is the one who led the people of Israel over the river Jordan. Moses had died by that stage.

Joshua was his successor. He led the people of Israel over the river Jordan. And as long as Joshua was alive, everyone did what was right and they obeyed God and they lived as God intended them to be, as they lived. But then Joshua died. And it was after that, quickly, things took a turn for the worst.

Then you come into the period of the Judges, which lasted 400 years in the history of Israel. And what happened was that when Joshua died, the people turned away from the Lord. And they did this by simply mixing with the wrong kind of people. And in their desire to be friends with them, they began to adopt and to copy with their way, particularly their way of worship and particularly what they call Baal worship. Baal was the principal God, the one that most people worshipped. The Philistines didn't, but most of the Canaanites, the ones who lived in Canaan, they worshipped Baal. Now, Baal was a fertility God. And in case you're wondering why it was that the children of Israel so easily departed from the living and the true God who had done such great things for them, it's all to do with our human sexuality. It's as simple as that, I'm afraid. That's as simple as that. Wherever you look, where sex is involved, there men and women will go. And you only need to open your eyes and look at the kind of world we live in. And that's exactly the same. When sex is involved, that's where people will be attracted. And it was exactly the same there. Baal was a fertility

God. And Asherah was his kind of wife or his partner or whatever it is. Of course, these were not real beings at all. They were gods. But it's very much operated on that principle, on the relationship of Baal and Asherah. And this was fertility. It's all about fertility, which extended to agriculture and fertility amongst them. Of course, we know how important it was in that era for families to grow numerous and for many sons and many daughters and all that. So the great desire, the great obsession was to have as big families as they possibly could. So fertility was the name of the game. Now, the Canaanites would meet with the Israelites just on a social occasion. They would say, well, you know, we actually believe in this, this God of fertility. This is what we do. And instantly, there was an attractiveness about the way in which, I'm not going to go into anything. You can read the books for yourself. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to go into all the details. But there was an attractiveness. And of course, there was something stimulating in the whole idea. Instead of listening to an invisible God saying, you shall not commit adultery, well, that's kind of very restrictive, isn't it? Very restrictive. But the Canaanites were the opposite. I mean, adultery was the name of the game. The more, the better, especially when it came to the worship of Baal. So slowly, year after year, the people would depart from the Lord and they would begin this alternative worship of Baal by all the wrong and all the wicked and all the sinful things that was involved in Baal worship.

[4 : 32] And of course, as a result of that, God then departed from Israel. And God allowed, he did this by allowing enemies to creep in and to invade Israel and to put them under oppression. Many people were killed and they were held as slaves and they had to pay tribute to these enemies. And of course, when that happened, the people of Israel turned back to the Lord again and they would pray to God and God would answer their prayer because he was compassionate towards his people. And he would raise up, he did this by raising up a judge or a ruler or a leader in Israel. And the book of Judges is all about those times when the people of Israel cried out in their anguish and in their pain and their suffering to the Lord. And as a result, God would raise someone up and to lead the people against their enemies. But as soon as they were successful in ousting their enemies, what happened? They would drift again and they would start worshiping Baal again. The same thing would happen time after time. So it's a cycle, it's a horrific, a nightmarish cycle of idolatry and all that went along with it. Pain and oppression, prayer, then salvation, then back into idolatry again. It was incredible. And if ever there is a picture of the human heart that decides to go its own way, you'll find it in Judges. So I would recommend to you, if you want to see a picture of human nature, even the people, the people who were in covenant with God, if you want to see a frightening picture of what we're really like, then read the book of Judges. But you'll also see a frightening picture of the consequences of such action. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. These are the closing words of the book of Judges. And it was in this dark period that you have to wonder, well, where is God in all of this? Everyone doing what is right in their own eyes.

Sometimes it would end up with bloodshed between themselves. There was civil war at the end of the book of Judges. 25,000 Benjaminites were killed in one battle. And it wasn't the Philistines that killed them. It wasn't the Midianites that killed them. It was their own people. It was the Israelites that killed them. There was civil war. These are the people of God, related to one another, supposed to be in covenant relationship with God, and they're killing one another. It's incredible. It's a horrific book. Read through it if you haven't read through it for a long, for a while on it. Certainly if it's the first time, then by all means read through it. It's all of God's work. And you have to ask yourself, well, in all this darkness, what is God doing in this? Well, that's the whole point of it being in the Bible. It doesn't just describe the heart of mankind. It describes the goodness and the grace of God because God is raising up time after time. He's raising up people who are going to lead his people.

And he does that, of course, ultimately, at the end of the book of Judges, in Samuel. Samuel spelled the end of this awful period because in Samuel, God found someone who was after his own heart. And Samuel then brought stability to the people of Israel, brought them as a nation back to the Lord, and of course, prepared the way for the establishment of the throne for the kingship, who's first of all, Saul, and then David and Solomon and Rehoboam and so on and so forth. So then, so God was going to work all the time. But often, as I said before, he works in the background, in the background, choosing people for himself. And that's exactly what he is doing here. And here he comes in the midst of a time of great darkness for the people of Israel. It was the Midianites that were oppressing them.

And they had come in their swarms. And of course, what they were interested in is their lands, their agriculture, so that they could take the fruit of that land, the produce, for themselves.

And so Israel were starving. They were left without anything. And there was nobody to help them and nobody to set them free from their enemies. That was, of course, until God chose this young man, Gideon. Gideon, he's a nobody. He's an absolute nobody. Nobody's heard of him. He's from the least of all the tribes. And nobody knows him or anything. He's not a natural choice for a leader. Not the kind of person that you would choose to be a leader. He's not the kind of person that the government would choose to be a leader. Wasn't particularly educated, as far as we know. We don't know how bright he was.

[9 : 09] He certainly wasn't strong. Wasn't physically strong. He was a young man, an ordinary young man, who was working away in the background for his father. That's the man that God chose. And that's the way it is. When God chooses someone, there's no telling who he might choose. It's not the kind of thing, not the kind of person that we would choose, naturally shining with human strong qualities, but someone who's ordinary. So that when that person rises up and when he does the work that God gives him to do, the glory goes to God and not to him. That's the important thing. And so that we're all, we all get to recognize that this is God's work and it's God's doing and it's God's compassion on his people Israel and it's God that has saved his people. That's the whole of the, that's what the story of Gideon means. It's not about Gideon. It's about the Lord. In fact, even when, and we don't need to, we're not going to read this, but when the battle takes place, in actual fact, the battle wasn't really a battle at all. It was only 300 men on Gideon's side, on the side of Israel. The battle was the Lord's because the Lord threw the Midian army into disarray. They all started fighting each other and that was how they were destroyed. They destroyed each other. So God got the glory and that's the important thing, that God gets the glory. Now, but at the same time, I want us to look today at the way, the particular way in which God prepares this young man, because who knows, he might be preparing other people, maybe some of them young. In our DNA, God doesn't change.

The circumstances change. The kind of world we live in change, changes. And yet God, we have to believe today that God is still working to bring about his promises and all that he has purposed in the Bible.

And he does that through people, people who are willing to be obedient to him and who are willing to set aside their pride and their selfishness and to give their all to Jesus. And that's what we find in Gideon, at least at the beginning of his life. What are the important things that we see in this passage?

The important things that we can take away with us. And who knows how we can put them into practice and how God is going to use them and how God is going to work within those who are prepared to put him first. First of all, I want us to see how important it is to privately meet with the Lord.

You notice, the angel of the Lord came to Gideon in private first. That means it's not obvious. He doesn't make it obvious that God is going to choose this man to do a great work for him. But he goes to the young man first of all, because he has to be prepared. And he can only do that through a private meeting with the Lord. Verse 14. Yeah, verse 12. The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said to him, the Lord is with you. He came to him privately, just the two of them. And so we have a meeting between Gideon and the Lord. I guess this was the first time Gideon ever seen an angel.

[12 : 27] And it must have given him the shock of his life, the fright of his life, when he realized that this was no ordinary conversation. It wasn't just a stranger that had come to him, but this was none other than an angel himself. But in actual fact, as you read through the chapter, it's not just an angel. Because in verse 14, as the conversation continues, it begins with the angel of the Lord saying to him, but in 14, it says this, and the Lord turned to him and said, now that's the same being.

The angel is the Lord. You notice that? The angel is the Lord. So the angel is called, he's called the angel of the Lord on one hand, and he's called the Lord on the other. In other words, this is God himself. And he's appearing in some kind of visible form. I don't know what that form was. And it's not very helpful to try and second guess what the angel looked like. We don't know what the angel looked like.

But there must have been some visible form in which the angel appeared. But he's not just an angel. He is the Lord himself. Now, what are we to make of this? Well, we do so remembering that in the Old Testament, there are several occasions when the Lord appears in some kind of visible human form.

And most people, most of those who sort of fall within the kind of thinking that I, the persuasion that I'm of, believe that this was none other than a, what we call a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. That's what I believe it was. No, I didn't say that this was Jesus come in the flesh. That was still to happen. But here is a thousand years beforehand or, or, or thereabouts. And God, the son is making himself visible in some kind of pre-incarnate form. And he is speaking to Gideon. So although it's an angel, it's the Lord at the same time. And that's how, that's why Gideon, when he realized what had happened at the end of the day, he was absolutely terrified of the notion that he had actually seen the Lord himself until God gave him some words of comfort. But what's important here, of course, is what I want to bring out is the importance of a private meeting with the Lord. If you're a

Christian this morning, the greatest privilege that you have is that you can meet with the Lord privately on a one-to-one, face-to-face, presence-to-present, person-to-person basis.

[15 : 13] And you can do it as often as you want to do. Christ has given us access to God. You don't need to go through the saints. You don't need to take some kind of, go through some kind of procedure.

You don't, you can have access to the Lord right away, whatever condition you're in. Whether you are going through a time in your life where you feel that you're strong in the Lord, or whether you feel conscious of your weakness in the Lord, or even if you feel that you're backslidden, you still have access to the Lord. It is the greatest privilege that we have, that God has come into our hearts, into our minds. He has come to join with us, and that means that we can speak to him and know for sure that we are accepted with a God who takes delight in us. Now, what do we make of that? Do we make use of that? Is it something that's precious to us? Does it happen often? And do you look forward to it? I know that it's difficult sometimes to come to the Lord in prayer. There are all kinds of different distractions, but then you remember your, then you remember, well, what distraction is there that's possibly more important than my meeting with the Lord? And how many of my, the troubles that, and the challenges and the frustrations that are going to meet with me throughout the day can be straightened out if I simply get this aspect of my life right, that I meet with the Lord privately. Does that happen?

Jesus calls it going into your closet. Well, that's an old way of saying meet with the Lord in private. It can be a closet. It can be a bedroom. It can be a kitchen. It can be a car. It can be any place because the Lord is where his people are. And if you take away nothing more from this from today, and if you simply go away today and make this a habit or return to it, because it's so easy, it's so easy to lose sight of the importance of this. But this is how God chooses Gideon.

He comes to him privately and he speaks to him privately. Do you believe that that privilege is yours this morning? I believe it is. I hope I sometimes make use of it. I know I don't make use of it often enough. Now let's see if we can make big use of this tremendous privilege that God has given us, that we can meet with him on a one-to-one basis and spend time with the Lord. Now, out of that, look at what happens. I want you to notice what God calls Gideon. The way that God thinks of Gideon compared to what Gideon thinks of himself. Look at it with me. The angel of the Lord came, verse 12, the Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.

And these were the last words that Gideon ever expected to hear from anyone, let alone an angel of the Lord, because that is not what he was. He was anything but. He was a young man, inexperienced, weak. He was only growing up. He was only learning the way of life. And Gideon said, he first of all said, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? But then he went on to say, please, he says, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh. You've come to the wrong place, Gideon says, if you're looking for somebody who's strong. My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. That's the way he felt. And in actual fact, that's the way it was in reality.

[18 : 51] And yet, in God's eyes, he's a mighty man of valor. And the difference between one and the other is simply this. I am with you. That's what changes a weak, frail, unable fellow, young man, into a mighty man of valor. The fact that God is with him and he's going to be with him. I want us today to listen to what God says about you if you belong to him. I want you to form your opinion of what God says about you from the Bible. Because what we read in the Bible is the truth. And the truth includes what

God thinks of us. Like, for example, when God says to us that we are his family. That's what he says. Behold what kind of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God.

If you're a parent here, you know the kind of love that you have for your children. You know that your children are natural aware, the most important people in your life. That's how God thinks of us. Jesus says, you are my friends. It's not my words, not me that's making myself a friend of Jesus.

It is him that tells me I am his friend. That's what he says. I have called you friends, he says to his disciples. I have called you friends. And there are numerous other places in the Bible where we come face to face with the truth about ourselves as God sees it. Now that doesn't mean that we've been made perfect. It doesn't mean that we're immune to falling and sinning. We all sin on a regular basis.

And yet, we are entitled to think of ourselves today in terms of how God has called us. Do you have that privilege? There's only one way of having that privilege and that relationship with God. And that is by trusting in Jesus. And I hope, let me speak to anyone here this morning who doesn't have that tremendous relationship with Jesus Christ. There's only one way of coming into that relationship and that's by listening to the gospel and by coming to see that you can't save yourself.

[21 : 23] You can't earn your way into heaven, not even by being the best person that you can be, but by coming to faith in Jesus Christ and trusting in him alone as your savior. And I hope that this chapter, if nothing else, it proves to us once again how enormously privileged we are if we belong to Jesus Christ this morning. I want you to notice, first of all, third, how important worship is because this private conversation and everything that takes place within it is actually a time of worship.

Look at what Gideon does. He says, If now I found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you. All right, says the Lord, I will stay until your return. So Gideon went into his house and he prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephal flour. The meat he put in a basket and the broth he put in the pot brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. Then the angel of the Lord said to him, take the meat and the unleavened cakes and put them on this rock and pour the broth over them. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. What an extraordinary action on the part of the angel of the Lord. What does that teach us? I believe it teaches us this. Well, first of all, we have to remember that the

Old Testament, if you were going to worship God in the Old Testament, it was always by sacrifice. There was a particular way in which you were to approach God. And of course, that sacrifice looked forward to the coming of Jesus who died at Calvary as our ultimate sacrifice for us. And so when we come to God, the only way that we can come to God is through sacrifice. There's only one, but not the sacrifice of a ram or a goat or a bull. It's through the sacrifice in which Jesus became sin for us. That's the only way to come and worship. Yet, at the same time, when the Old Testament believers came to God to worship him, they brought, like Gideon did, they brought elements like the broth and the flour, the flour. And in so doing, what they were doing was they were offering themselves to God. They were committing their lives to God. And that was a symbol. What they were doing was a symbol of that commitment. And that's what true worship is all about. It contains elements. What were the elements in Gideon? Well, there was the goat. And then there was the meat. And then there was unleavened cakes. And then there was the broth, whatever that meant, the broth. There was all these elements and they were all put together. The angel said, put them all together on this rock and I will put my staff out. And he touched it. And as soon as God touched those elements, they were set on fire. Now, I don't know about you, but that reminds me of what true worship is. It reminds me that our true worship in the New Testament consists of invisible elements. Not visible elements like here, but invisible ones. Like, for example, the way we've come today.

Praise is an element of worship. Our song is an element of worship in which we come and we sing of the goodness of God and make melody in our hearts like and with our mouths like the Bible tells us to. We've just been doing that, singing of the goodness and the greatness of God. We're taking part in all of that.

All of us are taking part. That's an element. In fact, that's not even where it begins. It begins before you even come in that door. As we give of our means to the Lord, we are giving of ourselves.

[25 : 39] And God loves, he says, a cheerful giver. That's an element in our worship as well. Worship does not begin when I say, let's sing. Worship begins when you open you, when you enter that door and when you put your contribution into the plate. Because it's going towards the work of the gospel all over in this country and all over the world. Like we heard on Friday night in South Africa, for example.

That's an element of worship as well. And then there's when we pray together, when we stand together, and when we come to God in prayer, that's an element of worship in which we're coming collectively and we're saying, Amen! Wasn't there a silence when I was praying for Haiti? Yes, there was. Why was that?

Because you were all agreeing with me. And so you should have been. I wish you were all saying, yes, Lord, we pray for those those poor people, believing that the Lord is able to help in some way in which we have no idea how he's able to do it, but he's able to do it somehow or other.

But we were all agreed, weren't we? That's an element of worship. And I hope we're agreed. Whatever. Whatever we're praying for, sometimes our prayer can be very same-ish, can't it? But sometimes we pray for the same things because the same things need to happen, don't they? All over the world and in various places that we've been involved. It's one thing to start something, it's another thing to keep it going. That's an element of worship as well, prayer. And when we're listening to God's word, as we explain God's word and as we receive it, I'm receiving it as well, receiving it and it changes our hearts and our minds and makes us into different people. And it starts as we listen to God. That's an element as well. Now, all of these by themselves are completely dead. They're useless. We just bring our own elements, our own worship, it's completely empty, just as empty and as dead as the broth or the goat or the flour, just elements. But then the angel reached out his staff and touched it. And it burst into flame. And we believe that as we come to the Lord today and as you come in private and as we worship God and live for him, that God, we pray that more than anything else, God will touch us as we come to him.

And bring us to life and move within us and stir us up and remind us continuously of this great gospel that we belong to and that we are ambassadors for and pray that God will really visit us in power and in his spirit. Do we not pray for that this morning?

[28 : 49] That's what he did in the people of Israel. This was God coming and awakening them and bringing them to fire, bringing his fire down from heaven. Is he not able to do the same with us?

As we look around us and as we see that all the odds are stacked against us, the influence of Christianity is waning day by day. How does that make you feel? It makes you feel despair, does it?

Does it? Since when did the success of the gospel depend on its strength? It doesn't. It never had any strength by itself.

But the success of the gospel depends on the power of God as much today as it did on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was came down in great power and the gospel was spread and people were convicted and they came to Christ.

That's what we pray for. And that's what we believe is happening. It happens in ways that go beyond, way beyond what we expect.

[29 : 50] Well, these are the elements of true worship. When we come and we bring ourselves in faith and when we ask that God will touch us and do his work in his own way, in his own time amongst us and change us.

But it means a cost on our part because just in one minute in this passage, you see that God required Gideon to stand by himself on his own.

He had to put his house in order and so do we. There are things in our lives that need to be sorted out, aren't there? Be honest. There are things in all of our lives that need to be sorted out.

There was something that needed to be sorted out here in Gideon. He had to go back. He couldn't serve God on the one hand and then go to Baal worship on the other hand. But one thing had to go and it had to be the Baal worship.

And that meant that Gideon had to separate himself from even his own family and had to stand on his own. And that was no easy thing. At night time, we read that Gideon took the ten men of his servants and he did as the Lord had told him.

[31 : 07] But because he was too afraid of his family, he did it by night. And he broke down the altar of Baal and the Asherah was cut down. The second bull was offered on the altar and in the morning there was riots.

There was panic. All of a sudden, Baal was gone. It was broken down. The altar was broken down and it was burned. It was all burned. There had been a big bonfire during the night.

And they said, Who's done this thing? After they searched and inquired, they said, Gideon, the son of Joash, has done this thing. And I want to leave you with a question today, this morning, because the time's gone.

How did they know it was Gideon? How did they know it was Gideon? I don't imagine for a moment that he went admitting to what he had done.

Because if he was going to do that, he would have done it in broad daylight anyway. But how did they know? Well, maybe there was marks in his clothing.

[32 : 07] Telltale marks could be. I believe it was the smell of the bonfire. You know how when you're in a bonfire, have you ever been in a bonfire and you're actually putting stuff into it? You're coming too close to it. The smoke gets to you. You can't get rid of the smell, can you? And I believe that Gideon, having burned down all of the altar to Baal and done such a terrible thing in their sight, that when they went around the community and asked who's done this thing, it was a dead giveaway.

It was written all over them. And you know, when we love the Lord and when we live for the Lord and when we're prepared to stand for him, it's difficult.

But it's a dead giveaway. Don't you worry about other people seeing your witness for the Lord. They will. It'll be as obvious as anything. Sometimes when it becomes obvious, it becomes difficult, as it was here.

He's taking his life in his hands. And yet, you know what happened? This was the first step in which Israel was restored to faith and trust in the Lord.

[33 : 22] It had, there had to be a first step. Do you need to take a first step today? To do what the Lord is telling us to do. To put him first and he'll take care of all the rest.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we give thanks for the way in which we've been able to come around your word. And thank you for how practical and how lively and how living your word is and how it speaks to each one of us, even though it tells us about a culture and a time in history that's so distant from where we are.

Yet we can see in your word such relevance and such, and you come to us with such power. So our Father in heaven, change us through it, we pray.

Challenge us through it and give us to see that you are a gracious God willing to forgive and willing to lead us out of our darkness and our disobedience and our laziness and willing to do great things in us today.

In Jesus' name, amen.