

Dark Times. Broken People. FAITHFUL KING.

Week 4

Judges 6

The story of Gideon is unique on many levels. More information is recorded concerning Gideon in the book of Judges than any other judge. And he is the only judge whose personal struggles with faith are recorded for us. Consequently, his story serves as a great encouragement to those of us who struggle with fear and insecurity in our faith, those of us who walk and question whether God can use us for Kingdom purposes.

I. Same Song, Second Verse – Judges 6:1-10

Once again, we read something to the effect that “the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (Judges 6:1). The Midianites were the main oppressors, although they were assisted by the Amalekites (and probably some marauding nomadic groups from the Arabian desert) for seven years. These enemies did not occupy Israel. Their tactics were even more nefarious. Every year at harvest time they would descend and set up camp in strategic places. “They would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it” (Judges 6:5). They ransacked every village and plundered the land, forcing the Israelites to leave their homes and seek shelter in caves. The people were starving, and the land was decimated. Such devastation caused Israel to cry out to the Lord.

God’s response to Israel’s pleas in Judges 6 was unique. This time He did not respond with deliverance through a judge. Instead He sent them a prophet to confront them with their sins. Sadly, their cries to God were not ones of repentance, but remorse for the oppression of their enemies (see 2 Corinthians 7:10).

One Commentator notes:

There is no record of corporate repentance following this speech. Readers would not necessarily expect God to rescue Israel; He seemed to be giving reasons why he would not act in their behalf. They are simply left to ponder their rebellion without any expectation of redemption. Thus the next segment is unexpected and serves to reinforce the unmerited nature of God’s provision for His covenant people; when they were faithfulness, he remained faithful to them (W. Gary Phillips, Holman Old Testament Commentary: Judges and Ruth, p. 96).

II. A Valiant Warrior – Judges 6:11-35

In this section we meet Gideon “beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites” (Judges 6:11). Ordinarily this task was done on an elevated threshing floor. Once the wheat was crushed it was tossed into the air, allowing the wind to scatter the chaff while the heavier grain fell to the floor. The “angel of the Lord” (considered by Bible scholars to be a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus) appeared to Gideon. In the form of a man the Lord spoke, hailing him with the moniker of “valiant warrior.” Appearances would suggest otherwise. The Lord instructed Gideon to “deliver Israel from the hand of Midian” (Judges 6:14). His instructions were met with excuses and a fair bit of anxiety on the part of our improbable soon-to-be leader and judge of Israel.

Despite the unfaithfulness of Israel and the initial timidity of Gideon, God called and encouraged Gideon to deliver his people. God's longsuffering with Israel was illustrated in his longsuffering with Gideon (W. Gary Phillips, Holman Old Testament Commentary: Judges and Ruth, p. 94).

The Lord's deliverance does not rise or fall on the ability of any human instrument, but on the power of God—a truth that was apparently lacking in Gideon's theology. We can make the assumption that Gideon was not a man accustomed to walking by faith. Thankfully God was prepared to patiently work this supernatural attribute into Gideon, His sovereign choice to be a judge and deliverer in Israel.

The Lord promised His presence and assured victory through Gideon. Gideon responded with the need of a sign to confirm both the message and the Messenger were from God. Without the full revelation of God through His written Word or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is ours on this side of the Cross, we can understand Gideon's hesitancy, but we would hope he would have operated in a greater realm of faith! Beloved, were it not for the FAITHFULNESS OF GOD, Gideon would have been dismissed!

Gideon prepared an offering (a costly thing to do in light of the scarcity of food) and placed it on a rock. The Lord consumed it with fire and then vanished from sight, confirming His deity. Gideon, aware he had been face-to-face with God was once again gripped with fear. He knew he should have died, having looked upon the face of the holy God (see Exodus 33:20). God reassured our reluctant hero that he would not die. Obviously, faith-walking was not a regular part of Gideon's life, but God was patiently training His timid warrior to trust Him. How grateful we are for this record of God's patience in dealing with Gideon. It builds hope and courage in us who often suffer from the same maladies! "Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it The Lord is Peace" (Judges 6:24).

Wiersbe observes, "God had to give Gideon a message of peace to prepare him for fighting a war. Unless we're at peace with God, we can't face the enemy with confidence and fight the Lord's battles" (Be Available, p 51).

Knowing Gideon was frightened at the prospect of being named the leader of the Israelite army, God assigned him a faith-building task right in his own home. That same night the Lord gave Gideon instructions to pull down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah that was beside it. Adding to the weightiness of this God-sized assignment was the fact that this altar belonged to his own father. This bold action would force Gideon, a less-than-courageous character, to take a stand in his community before engaging the enemy on the battlefield. On top of the ruins of the idol Gideon was to build an altar to the Lord and present an offering of his father's prize bull. Judges 6:27 says, "He was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, [so] he did it at night." Gideon was afraid, but he chose to obey and take a very risky public stand against Baal and his worshippers.

Then Israel's enemies set up camp in Jezreel. "So the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" (Judges 6:34) and he rallied his forces.

III. Fleecing God – Judges 6:36-40

While Gideon's confidence in the Lord should have rested in His Word and His Spirit, his natural proclivity towards fear again overwhelmed his faith. We dare not judge Gideon too harshly. He was, after all, a farmer not a fighter! We can all readily identify with him, but we need to learn from him to trust and obey the Lord.

Remember Paul's words to Timothy? "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). God is faithful. He can be trusted. He is able to progressively recreate us more and more into the image of Christ through the process of sanctification, aided-at least in part-by our obedience and faith. Two more times Gideon asked God for a sign by "putting out the fleece." This is not a biblical method for determining the will of God. It is an approach used by people who lack the faith to trust God and His promises.

"Those who take Gideon's request for a "fleece" as a model for divine guidance are ill-advised. Gideon's request was not an expression of faith but a questioning of God's promises and power" (W. Gary Phillips, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Judges and Ruth*, p. 104).

Even though Gideon had received God's promise of victory, was empowered by the Spirit of God, and was surrounded by thousands of soldiers, he defaulted to his natural tendency. He doubted God. Gideon said, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor" (Judges 6:36 emphasis mine). Gideon wanted another sign. God had promised victory, but Gideon could not bring himself to receive the truth and obey it. Despite Gideon's lack of faith, God delivered an extremely wet fleece to confirm His plan to the reluctant leader.

Unconvinced, Gideon made a second request, similar to the first, but in reverse. He requested the fleece to remain dry and the ground be wet. Gideon recognized he was acting in unbelief when he asked God for yet another sign. He said, "Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more" (Judges 6:39). Gideon was experiencing a fresh wave of doubt and fear as he approached the showdown with Israel's enemies. The fact that God was inclined to honor Gideon's request is further proof of the unimaginable patience of God. Psalm 103:14 says, "For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust."

Phillips explains, "Gideon's problem was a low view of God's revelation and of God's power, perhaps in tandem with an exaggerated view of the enemy's power" (*Holman Old Testament Commentary: Judges and Ruth*, p. 100).

What a testimony to the patience and faithfulness of the Lord! He sees the supernatural potential available through obedience and faith in each of us and is willing to work those qualities into our faith-walk. He sees us complete as Christ-valiant warriors for His Kingdom! And He is willing to use unlikely candidates such as Gideon and people like us to set His glory on display. "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many might, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:26-28). Beloved take heart, in the midst of dark days and broken people, we serve a FAITHFUL KING!

