



Series: Judges - Breaking the Cycle of sin

Sermon #4: Gideon's Shaky Faith

Passage: Judges 6-8

Ok listen we are going to spend the first half of the sermon reading Gideon's story. We are going to walk through chapters 6-7. & we are going to be moving to do that. The second half we are going to pull out what we learned from it. But here's the deal. It's 2 whole chapters of scripture. Actually 3 because I'm going to pull chapter 8 into the second half of the sermon. So you better believe there are some golden nuggets I'm just gonna lightly tap that you will need to go back and explore further. Like, this whole coming week you could just walk slowly through Judges 6-8 and you'd be good to go.

Chapter 6 - The Calling of God

So get your bible out and get to chapter 6. You start in verse 11. Opening verses: Not surprising by now, Israel had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

1) They had forgotten God and 2) began worshipping foreign idols. 3) And so the Lord allowed a foreign

nation called Midian to overtake them. After seven years, 4) Israel cried out. The Lord sends a **prophet?** Normally right here would be a judge. But it says he sent a prophet.. to say "hey guys this disaster is of your own making." They wanted a miraculous deliverance and instead God sent them a sermon. Not a pleasant one either. **Because while God's acts are often incredible & memorable, his word is what gives life. NUGGET.** After this wake up call our main character arrives on the scene.

[11] The angel of the Lord came, and he sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. [12] Then the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: "The Lord is with you, valiant warrior." Now heads up, Gideon doesn't know right now he's speaking with an angel. That will be made clear in a few verses.

[13] Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, 'Hasn't the Lord brought us out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian."

Are you catching what is happening here? When this person says "The Lord is with you" Gideon doubts this and comes off even insulted by it. Why? Because he's grown up in harsh circumstances. Israel had been run out of their land into the mountains. They were being exploited economically which is why Gideon was hiding his threshing of wheat. So Midian wouldn't come take it.

Life is hard and unfair and this guy is going to say “THE LORD IS WITH US?” If the Lord is with us...WHY HAS ALL THIS HAPPENED!? Where is the God who parted the red sea? I don’t see him anywhere!

Listen, this is perhaps THE #1 reason people walk away from God.

We see our troubles as evidence God has left us.

Anybody, if they are honest, willing to admit you’ve been there? Again this is why I love the bible because its so real about the human experience. Like I said there are some things I can only tap on today and this is one of them. But here’s what I’ll say and its something we say often around here. **Nugget: The Christian understanding of God’s love & presence is built on the gospel. Which says Jesus got on the cross for you. And if he didn’t abandon you on the cross...his darkest hour. He most certainly will not abandon you in your darkest hour.** His love for you is fierce. And if you are a Christian HE IS PRESENT WITH YOU. He promises that and he CAN’T go back on his promises. If you are not a Christian...he may have you right here right now so you can finally hear that your circumstances aren’t the measuring stick of God’s love for you. Let’s keep going.

[14] The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!” [15] He said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s family.”

Ok this is one of those alarm bell moments because Gideon’s calling by God has the familiar pattern of how God calls people to certain tasks across the pages of scripture. God says go do something impossible. The individual says...that’s impossible. HOW CAN I DO THAT? In fact, I’m the least qualified of all. And does God say “Oh Gideon...you are stronger than you think. I see potential here.” **NOPE.** God says verse 16 [16] “But I will be with you,” the Lord said to him. “You will strike Midian down as if it were one man.” Noah...build an ark, I will be with you. Trust me. Abraham...go up on the mountain and sacrifice your son. I will provide. Trust me. Moses...Go to the most powerful nation on earth and emancipate 2 million people from it. “God who am I?” “you are nobody. Tell them I am has sent you.” You go in my power. Trust me. Go Ehud, Go Barak, Go David, Go Solomon...And Jesus looks at the disciples and says GO tell the good news. I WILL BE WITH YOU. TRUST ME. And that promise and that calling is for us today. Listen: Christians are sinners. Weak and often distracted. Like sheep. Our only qualification for being able to complete the calling God has for us is the promise he is with us. **AND THAT’S ALL WE NEED.** Let me say it this way: **The calling of God ALWAYS comes with the presence of God.**

[25] On that very night the Lord said to him, “Take your father’s young bull and a second bull seven years old. Then tear down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. [26] Build a well-constructed altar to the Lord your God on the top of this mound. Take the second bull and offer it

as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down.” [27] So Gideon took ten of his male servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because he was too afraid of his father’s family and the men of the city to do it in the daytime, he did it at night.

Gideon’s family is a great example here of what was happening in all of Israel. The Israelites had not entirely abandoned worship of God *for* idols, they had combined the worship of God *with* idols. They retained a formal worship of God with rituals like going to temple...but their lives revolved around worship of agricultural idols that they hoped would give them what they really needed. They had some kind of cultural connection to God, but they didn’t see how he mattered in daily life.

The evidence that they valued them comes in verse 30 when it is discovered that Gideon did it. They go to his dad and say

[30] Then the men of the city said to Joash, “Bring out your son. He must die, because he tore down Baal’s altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.”

One way to know what your idol is by how distraught you are at the idea of losing it. So Gideon’s dad says Why do you need to argue on Baal’s behalf? If he’s really a god, let him deal with Gideon. They agreed and of course baal did nothing because baal wasn’t real. And Gideon was renamed Jerubaal. Which meant “let baal contend.” It’s a mockery of Baal’s impotence.

Listen we are coming back to this but God is making a point to show Gideon how powerless false gods are. Because he’s about to send him into a foreign enemy powered by false gods. But before God uses Gideon to bring deliverance to others, he has to do some work in Gideon’s heart. **God doesn’t work through you without working in you.** BIG Nugget. In fact God’s not done working on Gideon. The end of the chapter is, what appears to be, Gideon testing God.

[36] Then Gideon said to God, “If you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you said, [37] I will put a wool fleece here on the threshing floor. If dew is only on the fleece, and all the ground is dry, I will know that you will deliver Israel by my strength, as you said.” [38] And that is what happened. When he got up early in the morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung dew out of it, filling a bowl with water.

Gideon does this one more time in reverse and again God does it. So what are we to make of this? Is this our example to follow? God...if you want me to take this job...let me get a phone call from them in the next 3 hours. People will say “I’m laying out a fleece to see if this is what God wants.” I want to be gracious here but: when Satan asks Jesus to test God in Matthew 4, Jesus rebuked him.

So what are we supposed to think about this? Is Gideon wrong or right to test God? Author doesn’t say here does he? So we need to be careful to say “BE LIKE GIDEON” when I don’t think that’s what we are going to say in the end.

Well, here’s what we know: Gideon is new to God being personal like this to him. And he doesn’t have Jesus or

the bible to tell him about God's faithfulness to his word. He's asking for supernatural revelation to see that God is who he says he is. So, what you have here is in this moment is shaky faith. He wants to believe this God will do what he's saying, but he needs to be sure this God is actually powerful enough to do it.

We, on this side of the cross, can't use this as a license to ask for some little sign. God has created a different way for us to verify his POWER & his faithfulness. We'll talk about that in a minute. Listen God was just really gracious with Gideon here.

If anything what you see is another example of the pattern in scripture that **God is patient with Shaky Faith**. Which is why when the new testament holds up Gideon and says look at what he did...by faith...you and I can say well, it wasn't perfect faith. In fact it was shaky. But at the end of the day Gideon still obeyed and the Lord took shaky faith and obedience and worked MIGHTILY through it! Should we do what Gideon did? No. Why? Tell you in a minute lets keep going.

CHAPTER 7 - The Provision of God.

Chapter 7 is the battle. Here's what goes down. THE KEY verse is verse 2.

[2] The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many troops for me to hand the Midianites over to them, or else Israel might elevate themselves over me and say, 'My own strength saved me.'" [3] Now announce to the troops: 'Whoever is fearful and trembling may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand of the troops turned back, but ten thousand remained.

Then God says there are still too many troops. So through a rather odd exercise God whittles the number of troops down to 300 men. And these 300 men are who God is going to put up against 135,000 Midianite soldiers. That's not great odds. Just like last week. And what happens?

Well after yet ANOTHER time where the Lord offers Gideon a proof that he can trust God to provide, Gideon looks at his men in the middle of the night and says

[15]... "Get up, for the Lord has handed the Midianite camp over to you." [16] Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies and gave each of the men a trumpet in one hand and an empty pitcher with a torch inside it in the other hand.

[17] "Watch me," he said to them, "and do what I do. When I come to the outpost of the camp, do as I do. [18] When I and everyone with me blow our trumpets, you are also to blow your trumpets all around the camp. Then you will say, 'For the Lord and for Gideon!'"

So the idea is these 300 men in the middle of the night, all with trumpets and torches surround the camp & blow their horns. Its during a shift change. So you have guys going back to their tents while others are waking up to the sound of horns & the sight of torches and dark figures with swords walking around. It's brilliant strategy and chaos breaks out.

[22] When Gideon's men blew their three hundred trumpets, the Lord caused the men in the whole army to turn on each other with their swords

What follows is worth reading in detail. Gideon's army never even draws a sword. They just watch as the enemy destroys itself. Gideon chases the Midianite army until he captures the two kings and kills them. Gideon stepped out in shaky faith, and The Lord held to his promise and gave Gideon the victory.

This is the 4th judge we've looked at over the past 3 weeks. Each one called out by God to a task WAY beyond their ability. Each one flawed in some way. Ehud physically, Deborah socially, and then Gideon spiritually. Yet each one put their entire YES on the table and God used their obedience to bring about his plan.

What we need to know about God's calling on our lives

God works **through us** in the world today (6.14)
Two different times God approaches Gideon and two different times Gideon makes excuses for why he's not going to step out and trust God. First, he believes God isn't really there. Then second time around he hides behind the excuse of being unqualified. He is economically and socially the poorest member of the weakest clan of a non-prominent tribe of Israel.¹ I mean how can God use him for anything?

¹ Keller, Tim. Judges for You. 74.

When Gideon says these things he is forgetting something: That God's work is accomplished by HIS POWER. God doesn't care about potential! Gideon is going to be a mighty warrior. Why? ONLY because GOD called him a mighty warrior. Gideon has no power, God's spoken word has power. God SPOKE creation into existence.

One of the most dangerous threats to your faith is responding to one of God's commands with "I can't do that." When you read: forgive as you've been forgiven... and you think "No way. Too hard. You know what he/she did to me." You are still standing in your power! You are right! You are a bitter hurt person on your own. But in Christ you are not alone. Ever. And his power is available to you, his spirit is with you, and when you cling to his love what you are clinging to is your own forgiveness. And that sets off a chain reaction of forgiveness in your own heart. See God recreates you. When God says I'm calling you to tell others about the love I have for them...you think NO WAY. That's so scary. Stakes are too high, I'd mess it up. And you are right...IF YOU WERE ALONE. Look what Paul says.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal **through** us. -- 2 Corinthians 5:20

GOD WORKS THROUGH WEAK PEOPLE! You are not too young, you are not too old, you are not too poor, you are not too weak, you are not too simple minded to be used by God for his glory today.

Hudson Taylor, the guy who is widely credited with forging the missionary frontier in China said "All God's

giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them.”

Most Christians have never shared their faith. God calls us to. But we feel afraid. And what I’m telling you is the same thing an old missionary told me once “the antidote to fear is not courage or bravery. It is trust! When complete and total trust is there, fear subsides.”

Here’s your prayer to start praying in the morning: **I am weak, God is strong. I am willing, God is able. Let’s go.** Will you pray that over what God is calling you to? I’m convinced an awakening might rise up out of a few hundred people willing to pray that prayer.

God doesn’t work through you without working in you (6.25-30)

Before Gideon is sent off to lead Israel in a great battle, God calls he & his squad to go to war against the idols in his own home. Before they can throw off the enemies around them, they have to throw off the enemies among them.

- Remember what we said earlier, they didn’t worship idols instead of God, but in addition to God.

You may not have statues, but that doesn’t mean you don’t worship something. There’s a personal reality to this. God is saying go take that thing that has been a

sacred part of your daily life and destroy it. Because it was competing with me for your worship.

And this is always how renewal works in our lives. God doesn’t help us out of our obvious visible problems like money probs, relationship probs, until we see the idols we are worshipping right there beside the Lord. We have to get rid of those first!! ²

So let me ask you: What is competing with God right now for your worship? And the way to answer that is to answer **WHAT** would give you anxiety if you had to live without it? College Students let’s be real right now. **DO YOU SPEND MORE TIME** scrolling through Instagram **OR** in time alone with God? I’m serious...**your idol may not be a golden calf but it might be a glowing screen.** you want God to change your life but are you willing to shut down anything that competes with him?

Listen God is willing and able to use you for his glory but it will require him working in you. And that’s the hard thing. Leaders: bible study leaders and those of you in or considering ministry: You do **NOT** want to be the kind of leader that tells others about a God you do not know. That’s what the Pharisees were and they are not given as examples to follow in the bible.

I promise you its worth it. It’s kind of like leg day in the gym. So I’ve heard. Allowing God to work in you before he works through you, might be tough. But those are

² Keller, 77.

the people God uses to lead others to himself. Weak, willing people.

The Cross is our fleece (6.36-39)³

Ok let's go back to the fleece. Remember that thing? Gideon asks God to prove he was with him by making the fleece wet and the ground dry? Then does it a second time? Now the way this gets abused in the church today is people think "oooh, I too can do a random litmus test to see prove whether or not God wants me to do something."

- So, I'm going to flip a coin. And God, this is me senior year of college, if you want me to marry that girl then make it land on heads. Now, I did want to ask her to marry me but I was nervous so I was looking for some divine assurance.
- I'm not saying searching for a sign is always bad ok. I am saying IF you are going to search, make it a part of the process and make the bible and your Christian community a bigger part of it.
- In fact, you kind of see Gideon knows this isn't great theology because in verse 39 he apologizes to God for asking a second time saying "don't be angry with me."

The MAIN point here is that Gideon is looking not looking to verify IF God wanted him to do this or not. He's trying to verify if God is WITH him and if God has the power to really carry him through this. The man is scared and doesn't know this God all that well.

Now, we have something much better than a fleece. We have the cross. That's why Hebrews 1 opens with [1] Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. [2] In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. -- Hebrews 1:1-2 (CSB)

How does his son speak to us in our fear of trusting God? On the cross God shows he was fully in control. He took what mankind's worst act, Crucifying the son of God, and used it to bring about our redemption. This is a God powerful enough to trust!

In the cross Jesus revealed his love to be...in a word... perfect. And Paul comes along in Galatians 3.27 and says Christians are clothed with Christ. His love...it is wrapped around us like a...funny enough...fleece. It is perfect in power - created & sustains the universe. Perfect in application -God points it right at each one of us. He loves YOU.

If you have that love...what do you really have to fear? What other assurances do you really need from him? Psalm 27.1 The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom should I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – whom should I dread? -- Psalms 27:1 (CSB)

Do you know this great love for you? You can receive it today.

³ The wording of this point is inspired by J.D. Greear's sermon on Judges 6 preached in the Broken Saviors Series in 2015 at the Summit Church.

God's miraculous provision is best seen from the front lines.

Chapter 7 is just fun right. Wild deliverance in a very unexpected way so that only God can get the glory. God did all this work to get Gideon up and ready for battle... and then DIDN'T EVEN MAKE HIM DRAW HIS SWORD!! BUT HE DID GET HIM out there.

And out there on the front lines, that is where Gideon got to see 120k soldiers get confused by 300 torches and trumpets. Gideon had to trust God enough to step out there and lead others. If you want to see God work, you gotta step out in faith at some point.

I so often see people say "Well, if God sends the money to provide for it then I'll go on that mission trip." Like I'll obey AFTER I see God provide. That's not how God works. God provides through your obedience. So that scary space between obedience and provision...that's where God wants you.

If God is calling you to go on a mission trip, to speak up about something, maybe its to help someone in need, don't wait on God's provision to determine your obedience. OBEY and then watch him provide!

God, not his provisions, must remain our first love. There is a little moment we all twinge in Gideon's war cry because he says For the Lord *...and for Gideon*. Now maybe we could write that off as some kind of cultural battle ritual. But reality is, chapter 8 reveals Gideon heads down a dark path once he is crowned as the leader of this victorious nation.

They ask him to be king, he says no because "The Lord" is supposed to be their king. But then, he starts to create a way to receive the honor due a king. The guy asks everyone to give him some gold and creates a new place for God's people to worship. A place that will allow he and his tribe to have more influence over Israel. And the result?

Then all Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his household. -- Judges 8:27 (CSB)

But Gideon was ok using some of the wealth from GOD's victory, under the guise of spiritual humility, to make himself really wealthy and powerful. But then when he used it for his gain, it became his downfall and he took all of Israel with him. EVEN GIDEON drifted away from the Lord. Isn't that crazy!

This story ends as a sober warning. Your complacency with God's blessings in your life can lead you away from God himself & his calling on your life. Don't be like the church in Rev 2. Did great ministry but forgot its first love.