

Learning from Gideon

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Introduction.

- A. One of the big obstacles that we face in applying the Scripture to our lives is the sheer alien-ness of the times of the Bible. Instead of driving around in cars, the heroes of Scripture either rode horses and donkeys or walked. Instead of working at various specialized jobs in an advanced society, most of God's people back then were just plain ole farmers. They had a whole way of life that is completely unfamiliar to us. Perhaps most of all, though, whereas God speaks to us today exclusively through His word, back then, God was much more conspicuously active. He spoke through His prophets, He gave His people signs, and He worked miracles.
- B. Beyond all of those trappings of circumstance, though, there is an essential sameness between the faithful men and women of the Bible and us today. Just like God expects things from us today, God expected things from them then. Just like we often struggle to carry out God's commands, they struggled. Just like we sometimes feel overwhelmed by what we have to do, they often felt overwhelmed. Just like we have to learn to trust in God, they had to learn to trust in Him. But when they finally got it, that's when they succeeded.
- C. This is evident in just about all the stories of faith in the Old and New Testaments, but it is particularly evident in the story of Gideon in Judges 6-7. Once again, there are some ways in which Gideon was different. None of us are ever going to be called upon to lead God's people in an armed rebellion against our oppressors. However, the challenges that Gideon faced in this work are familiar. He had to deal with an appalling lack of resources, opposition from God's own people, and a foe beyond his own power in order to carry out God's commandments. In our work, we often face one or more of these things too, so the principles that guided Gideon apply to us too. Let's look to Judges this morning, then, to see what we can learn from Gideon.

I. Gideon at Home

- A. Our story begins with Gideon's initial encounter with God, recorded in Judges 6:11-17. In context, here's what's been going on: Just as they did throughout history, the children of Israel have become involved in the worship of other gods, and, as punishment, God has allowed the Midianites to come into the land and oppress them. Just like they always did, the Israelites got a clue THEN and cried out for help. God chose Gideon.
- B. Now, if one of us were writing the Bible, our Bible would be filled with fearless heroes who, just as soon as God approached them, cried out, "Here am I! Send me!" Now, of course there were some real-life Bible characters who did that, but most of them didn't. Most of them argued that God really wanted somebody else. Gideon definitely falls into the camp of those who argued. In vs. 13, Gideon denies that God is with him at all. In vs. 15, Gideon talks about how unqualified he is for the job. In vs. 17, he demands a sign that this is really God he's talking with, and in vs. 22, now that he's figured out that this really IS God, he gets afraid that God is going to squash him because he's seen God face to face. Gideon is an extremely unwilling hero.
- C. More than 3000 years later, things haven't changed a whole lot. Certainly, none of us have gotten direct appeals from God to stand up and serve Him, but the calls to action that we read in God's word are no less clear for that. God hasn't told any of us to be the savior of His nation, but the Bible still teaches clearly that all of us are part of a chosen people, and our mission is to glorify God. We don't get the chance to argue with God directly, but we still spend far too much time and effort trying to excuse ourselves from service.
- D. Brethren, we need to see that there are no non-combatants in the army of the Lord. Just like God didn't let Gideon off the hook, He doesn't let any of us off the hook either. He expects each one of us to be constantly growing in what we do for Him, constantly looking for new and better ways to serve. Just like Gideon did, we may well find that the tasks in front of us are bigger than we're prepared to handle. Who are we to talk to lost people? Who are we to teach a Bible class we've never taught before? Who are we to take a new leadership role in the church? Folks, when we start looking at ourselves and our modest abilities, we're missing the point just like Gideon did. It's not about who we are. It's about who God is. If we just trust in Him, and in His power to work effectively even through the least of us, there is nothing that we cannot accomplish.
- E. Once God finally talks Gideon into action, we see Gideon's first attack on the enemies of God in Judges 6:25-32. As we look at this context, the first thing that we notice is that Gideon has to begin his service to God not by confronting evil in a foreign land, but by facing it inside his own city and his own household. His own family was participating in the Baal worship that was Israel's biggest problem, and that's where Gideon had to start.
- F. In the same way, friends, sometimes the biggest obstacles to carrying out God's plan in the church can be found in the church itself. Satan is awfully fond of corrupting Christians and turning them into dead weight in the body of Christ, or even into active workers of iniquity. Folks, a church that is filled with Christians like that will never be the church that God wants it to be. If there is evil among us, one way or another, we need to remove it. Ideally, this occurs through the repentance of the sinner, but if church discipline becomes necessary, so be it. Likewise, friends, we need to recognize that this congregation can't afford to carry

spiritual free riders around. Every member of this congregation needs to be actively committed to working for the Lord, and it's up to each one of us to encourage our brothers and sisters to do what they should.

- G. Gideon does well in confronting the evil that surrounded him, but he performs less credibly in cutting down the idol at night, when no one could see him do it. Once again, this shows that a man who is listed as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11 still hasn't learned to trust in God. He still doesn't believe that God is going to protect him, and that things will work out if he just does God's will. Too much of the time, Christians today suffer from the same lack of faith. They've seen so much failure and so many promises that go unfulfilled in the church in times past that they refuse to commit themselves fully to the work of the church today.
- H. Having that attitude in any congregation is a mistake, but to have that attitude about Margaret St. today is foolish. Brethren, I am convinced that God is with us, and that His hand is with our hands to work powerfully for good. Literally everything that we've done this year has been a success. The Saturday morning studies that Josh Collier has been organizing have been wonderful, our six-week Bible drill program went well, our series of chain-reference sermons have really helped to equip the congregation to teach, we had an amazing singing, and best of all, we've seen three people baptized into Christ already this year, two of whom were total outsiders. If all of that isn't God's blessing in answer to our work and prayer, I don't know what is. Things are going really well here, friends, but they can go even better if every one of us gives ourselves to the work.

II. Gideon in Battle.

- A. As important as Gideon's work in restoring his people to God was, it was far from the end of what God expected of him. We see the next part of the story in Judges 7:1-8. After the story of Gideon and the fleece, in which Gideon once again shows that God hasn't convinced him yet, we see how Gideon and God deal with the army that has assembled to fight the Midianites. This army begins with 32,000 men, but through various tests, God whittles it down to only 300 men. Now, most of us wouldn't think that only 300 men would have much success fighting off an invading horde, but that's exactly God's point. God knows that if He allows all 32,000 to go into battle and helps them to victory, they will take the credit instead of giving it to Him. Instead, God sets up an army that can only win through Him, so that the victory will bring Him the glory He deserves.
- B. Friends, in the work that we do for God, this is one of the most important lessons that we can learn. Just like the army God gave to Gideon didn't make sense to human reasoning, the plan that God has provided for the church doesn't make sense to human reasoning either. Why shouldn't we gather our forces together in a denomination? Why shouldn't we spice up our worship with instrumental music? Why shouldn't we preach a fluffy, feel-good gospel that will just pack visitors in? Friends, the reason why we shouldn't is that whatever "success" we have through those things will only bring glory to ourselves and not to God. All of those things push God and His word out of the picture and bring us into it. Instead, friends, we need to recognize that the spiritual victories we win are due not to our cleverness and our hard work, but to God who gives the increase.
- C. The final part of the story of Gideon that we're going to look at this morning is found in Judges 7:15-21. This bizarre little band of God's warriors, armed with nothing more than trumpets and torches and clay jars, utterly defeats an army of Midian that began the night with 135,000 soldiers. Why? Because despite all his doubts, despite his constant search for reassurance from God, Gideon in the end put his faith on the line, and when he did, he learned that God could lead even the most outwardly feeble of forces to complete victory.
- D. Folks, this is the lesson that we need to take from the story of Gideon, a lesson that is repeated over and over again throughout the entire Bible. The lesson is that God's way works. If we faithfully do what He tells us to do, if we give ourselves over to His work, we will see results that astound us. It's not our role to look around fearfully and total up all the reasons why we won't succeed in doing God's will. Our role is to focus in on God's expectations for each one of us, fulfill those expectations, and let God worry about carrying out His promise.
- E. This is always an attitude that the child of God must have, but in the months to come here at Margaret St., it's going to become especially important. This has been a wonderful year so far, but now is certainly not the time to rest on our laurels. In addition to things like the Saturday morning Bible studies and the Bible drill, which will continue on a periodic basis, the elders have planned a number of new projects for the rest of the year.
- F. For instance, starting August 17th and running through the end of September, we're going to be replacing our Sunday night routine with something that, as far as I know, this congregation has never done before. Rather than having an assembly and a sermon, we're going to divide the congregation up into two mixed-age Bible classes: one for new converts and their families, and one covering practical topics from the book of James. These family Bible studies will run for about six weeks, and I'm confident they will prove valuable on a number of levels, but they will only be as useful as they can be if we all attend them.
- G. On an even larger scale than that, folks, is a project that we're working on now that will launch at the beginning of October. I don't want to say too much about it now, but rest assured, friends, it's going to be big. This is not going to be easy. In fact, it's going to require significant commitment from each one of us, but if we commit ourselves to this work and trust in God to bless us, it will transform this congregation. Watch for it, and, when the time comes, work for it and pray for it, so that we can be the church God wants us to be.

Conclusion. If you aren't serving God at all right now, you can begin serving Him today.