

The Faith of Gideon
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
November 22, 2020

Diaspora XXXVI – The Church Scattered, Thirty-sixth
Sunday

Text: Judges 7:1-8

Purpose: It took a great deal of faith for Gideon to take the Lord at His word that by his hand the enemy would be defeated. The Lord reduced an army of 32,000 down to 300 to face their enemy. It is not the size of our resources that gives us the victory; it is the size of our Lord!

The old lady handed her bank card to a bank teller and said, "I would like to withdraw \$10."

The teller told her, "For withdrawals less than \$100, please use the ATM."

The old lady wanted to know why. The teller returned her bank card and irritably told her, "These are the rules. Please leave if there is no other matter. There is a line of customers behind you."



The old lady remained silent for a few seconds, then handed the card back to the teller and said, "Please help me withdraw all the money I have."

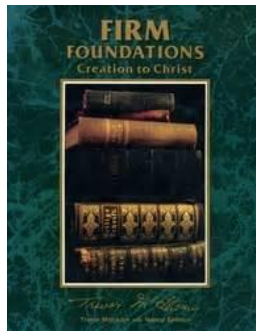
The teller was astonished when she checked the account balance. She nodded her head, leaned over, and respectfully told her, "You have \$300,000 in your account and the bank doesn't have that much cash currently. Could you make an appointment and come again tomorrow?"

The old lady then asked how much she could withdraw immediately. The teller told her any amount up to \$3000.

"Well, please let me have \$3000 now." The teller then handed it very friendly and respectfully to her. The old lady put \$10 in her purse and asked the teller to deposit \$2990 back into her account.

The moral of this tale: Don't be difficult with old people, they've spent a lifetime learning the skills.¹

Since the beginning of this year, we have been working our way from Creation to Christ. We have progressed through the story of God and how the Lord made the world and established His creation. We have covered the story of Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We followed the offspring of Jacob and the birth of the Nation of Israel. Those seventy individuals that arrived in Egypt grew into a great people numbering 600,000 men, not counting the women and children. This great growth occurred over 430 years.



Over time, the people of Israel became enslaved to the Egyptians and suffered greatly. The Lord sent Moses at the age of 80, to set the people free. Moses received the Ten Commandments from the Lord which was the foundational instruction from the Lord for the people of Israel.

After receiving the law, Moses brought them to the edge of the Promised Land. Because of the people's unbelief and lack of faith in God, they accepted the report of the ten negative spies instead of the two positive spies. The people were sentenced to remain in the desert for 40 years. Everyone over the age of 20, with the exception of the two positive spies (Joshua and Caleb), died in the wilderness. At the end of the 40 years, Moses also died and Joshua was chosen to lead the people of Israel into the land the Lord promised Abraham.

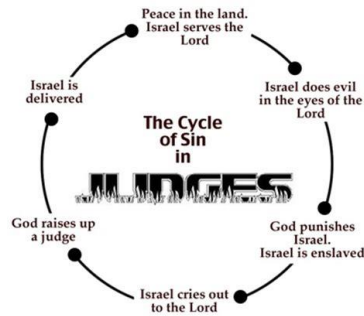
Last week we looked at the life of Joshua and how they were instructed to completely destroy the inhabitants that lived in the land. They were supposed to destroy the Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Perizzites, Moabites, Canaanites, and the Midianites. These people that lived in this land worshipped the gods Baal, Moloch, and Asherah. Each tribe or village had their own variation of these gods. Their rituals often included offering their infant children as a sacrifice into the fire. God wanted His people Israel to completely remove the temptation to turn from the one true and living God and follow after these false gods.



¹ Mikey's Funnies – A Bank Funny – Nov. 13, 2020 – Forwarded by Steve Sanderson

The people did not succeed in eliminating their enemies. Instead, they took over portions of the area and settled down with the God appointed task incomplete. They tolerated their neighbor's differences and failed to do as God instructed. The failure of this generation to do what God CLEARLY told them to do, laid the groundwork for their future generations eventual demise.

After the death of Joshua, each family practically became a unit unto itself. They were loosely connected to one another and often worked closely together, but as a whole, they drifted away from the Lord. One generation would remain faithful, while the next would drift away and worship Baal. This period of time in Israel's history was known as the time of the Judges. There arose several individuals that were gifted in knowing the Book of the Law and the various tribes of Israel looked to these individuals to interpret the law for them and obtain a word from the Lord.

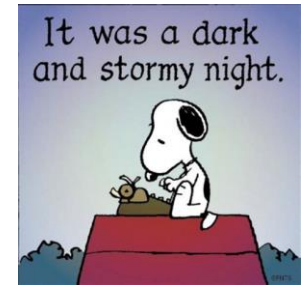


This group of Judges included: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Abielech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson and Eli. Scattered between these judges were periods of rebellion and turning away from the Lord. At times the Moabites oppressed them, and at other times it was the Midianites. This period of time covered about 450 years. Probably the most famous Judges included Deborah, Gideon, Samson and Eli.

Today, I want us to focus on one of the judges that had a great deal of faith – the man called Gideon. He is one of the individuals listed in the Hall of Fame in the Book of Hebrews (Chapter 11). What God asked Gideon to do I am not sure many in this room would have the courage to do.

Background on Gideon

You see, it was a dark and stormy time in Israel's history. (I love that phrase – it is a familiar one if you are a fan of Snoopy!) It was a dark and stormy time!



The nation of Israel had lived in peace for 40 years after the Judge Deborah lived. She, along with Barak, defeated the enemy Jabin the king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. But the cycle of peace was interrupted with oppression because the people had turned from the Lord and followed after evil. The Lord delivered them into the hand of the Midianites for seven years. The people suffered because the Midianites would come down and destroy their crops and animals, leaving them nothing to eat. It was a dark and stormy time.

The people repented and cried out to the Lord and the Lord heard them. (As you study the Old Testament, you will see this pattern repeated over and over.)

It is in this context that we find the Lord calling a timid young man by the name of Gideon. He comes from the smallest tribe, Manasseh, and he is the least important person in his family. I have found that the Lord uses the smallest, and weakest, to accomplish His greatest work.

The Angel of the Lord came to Gideon and told him he would be the one to defeat the enemy. Gideon of course wanted to protest and wanted a sign to know without a shadow of doubt that the Lord would be with him. Gideon asked the Angel of the Lord to wait while he prepared him a meal. Instead of eating the meal, the Angel of the Lord asked Gideon to place it on a rock, along with the unleavened bread, and pour the broth over it. The Angel of the Lord took his staff and touched the meal, and fire came up out of the rock and consumed the offering.

Gideon was amazed that he had seen the face of the Angel of the Lord. The Lord assured him, *“Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die.”* Gideon then made an altar and named the place *“The-Lord-Is-Peace”* or *“YHWH Shalom.”*



Gideon got the assurance he needed from the Lord that it was now his task to defeat the enemy and the Lord would be with him and he would not die. The Lord first gave Gideon peace!

Gideon was going to be a man of war, but he first needed peace within so he would be able to accomplish the victory of war. As we go out into this world and face the battles that come to us, we need the peace of God that passes all understanding. Over and over in the scripture we read of the Lord giving individuals “Peace.”

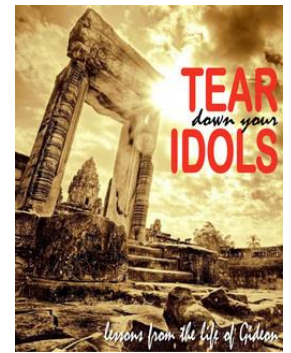
Jesus told his disciples in the Upper Room, *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do*

I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

The world longs for peace but they cannot have the kind of peace Jesus is talking about unless they have the Spirit of God abiding in them.

Putting Away Sin

The next task Gideon is told to do by the Lord is to go to his father’s house and tear down the wooden image his father had erected. His family had gotten caught up in worshipping false idols and presenting offerings to the Asherah, which was a Canaanite goddess. So Gideon took ten men, under the cover of darkness, cut down the wooden idol, and burnt it along with a sacrifice unto the Lord.



The next morning the people were angry and were ready to kill Gideon for doing such a thing. Gideon confronted the crowd with great might and courage. He challenged the people if Baal is a god, then let Baal defend himself. The people gave Gideon another name, a nickname, Jerubbaal, which means *“let Baal plead for himself.”*

With that victory behind him, he blew the trumpet calling nearby tribes to confront the Midianite army that was encamped nearby. The tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali answered the call. An army of 32,000 came to answer the call to battle.

A Second Test

Can you imagine what Gideon was thinking at this time? Here was a young man that just a few days earlier was winnowing grain, in a small hole in the ground so the Midianites would not see him. Now he has torn down his father's idols, called the nearby tribes to war, and was getting ready to face their enemies army which numbered 135,000.

An army of 32,000 sounds pretty good, but it doesn't sound like enough people to defeat an army of 135,000. Gideon needed another assurance that the Lord was going to be with him. I would want another sign that this call to war was going to be successful.

It was then that Gideon proposed this test. Gideon was going to lay down a sheep skin (fleece) and he asked that the sheep skin (fleece) be wet in the morning while the ground around it be completely dry. The next morning, Gideon went to the sheep skin (fleece) and he was able to wring out a bowl full of water. Gideon was still not convinced. He simply had to make sure!



So the next test was similar, yet different. Gideon asked the Lord to make the ground wet around the sheep skin (fleece), while keeping the sheep skin (fleece) dry. The next morning, Gideon found the ground wet and the sheep skin (fleece) dry. Maybe you have heard the phrase, "Putting out the fleece." This is where that phrase came from. It was not a test of the Lord, but it was a way in which the

Lord gave Gideon the assurance he needed to face the battle that was at his door step.

With that assurance, Gideon surrendered the battle unto the Lord. How many of us have a battle in front of us and we fail to surrender it to the Lord? How many of us have our plans, our ideas, our objectives, our agenda, and fail to consult the Lord? I believe all of us have plowed forward and forgotten the Lord. But Gideon surrendered the battle **AND** the battle plans unto the Lord.

The Battle Plan

The Lord told Gideon the gathered army of Israel was too large. If they proceeded into battle now and won, then Israel would claim the victory for themselves instead of giving God the credit for the victory. God had promised the victory and God was going to deliver the victory. God said the number of soldiers had to be reduced.

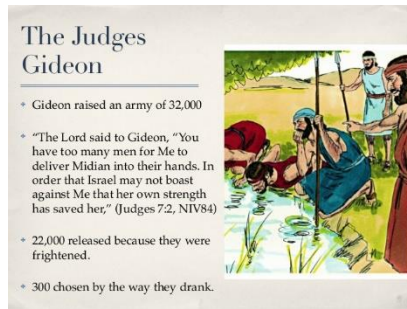
The first cut was for the fearful. Gideon said to the men that if there were any that were fearful, or concerned about their family, or simply did not feel that they should enter into the battle, they were free to leave and return to their tents. The soldiers looked at each other and 22,000 men packed their bags and left.

That left 10,000 to face the Midianite army of 135,000.

The Lord said to Gideon, that that was still too many soldiers. There needed to be a second cut.

The Lord instructed Gideon to observe how the soldiers drank from the stream of water. Those that got down on

their knees and lapped up water like a dog or an animal would be placed in one group. Those that got down and scooped water with their hand and drank water from their hand were put in a second group. The second group of people totaled 300 soldiers. It was this group of men that the Lord intended to use to defeat the Midianites. The Lord reduced his army from 32,000 down to 300 men.

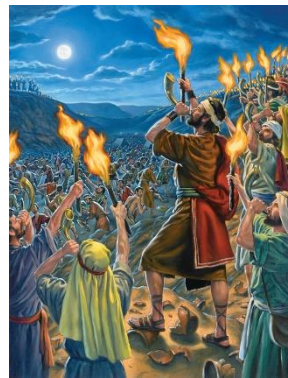


When I was in Israel a few years ago, we stopped at the stream coming out of Mount Gilead where Gideon pared down the army to 300. Several of us went down to the stream and drank from it using a cupped hand to bring the water to our mouth. It was cool clear water flowing out of the mountain.

A God Ordained Strategy

How would you defeat an army of 135,000 with only 300 men?

Gideon decided he would attack the army that was spread out in the Jezereel Valley like locusts around midnight. He divided the men into three groups. Each man had a bowl or jar with a light hidden in it and a trumpet in the other hand. They surrounded the army on all sides and



with a shout, ***“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.”*** They blew their trumpets and then broke their bowls filled with oil and light to light up the hillside.

The Midianites army below knew they were surrounded by the enemy and in a panic began to swing their swords attacking anything that moved. Little did they know they were fighting against each other and before daybreak, over 120,000 men were dead. The remaining 15,000 were chased by the men of Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh until their leaders were dead and the remaining army was scattered.

After the defeat of the Midianites, Israel lived in peace for 40 years.

Lessons We Can Learn of Gideon’s Faith²

1. The Sacrifice of Faith

Can you imagine being called upon to lead an army of 32,000 and then being asked to cut those numbers down to 300? I would have been asking the Lord a lot of questions before going into battle. It took a great deal of faith to take the Lord at His word and trust Him. Gideon had to sacrifice the pride he had in the strength of an army of 32,000 and fully trust God with an army of 300. He had to surrender his faith in himself and in his strength, and rely upon the strength of the Lord. He had to rely on the Sword of the Lord to fight for him.



² The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. III, p. 79-81

2. The Risks of Faith

Gideon had to put it all on the line. He risked all. He took a great risk tearing down his father's idol. He took a great risk calling the people to war. In doing so, he risked his family, his father's family, his neighbor's family, and his tribe's leaders. He faced losing to well-funded and outnumbered enemy. He risked his lively hood, his reputation, and his life --- to answer the call of the Lord.

We are called upon to trust the Lord. But do we?

- Do we trust the Lord with our jobs?
- Do we trust the Lord with our family?
- Do we trust the Lord with our children?
- Do we trust the Lord with our church?
- Do we trust the Lord with our finances?
- Do we trust the Lord with our health?
- Do we trust the Lord with our life?
- Do we trust the Lord with our future?
- Do we trust the Lord with our eternal home?
- Do we trust the Lord with our salvation?



Gideon laid it all on the line and trusted the Lord fully! Can you?

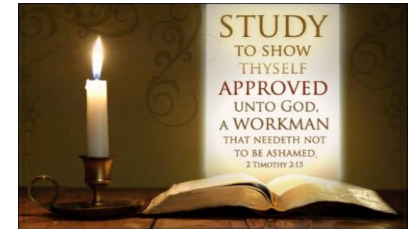
3. Verified by the Word of God

Before we think Gideon boldly rushed out to accomplish what the Lord requested, we need to remember that Gideon

waited for an assurance from the Lord. Gideon gained the assurance that the Lord would be with him when his sacrifice was consumed. Gideon was assured the Lord had the battle plans necessary for victory when Gideon laid out the sheep skin (fleece) and gained a word from the Lord.

Gideon was wisely cautious before proceeding rashly.

Just as Gideon was wise before proceeding, we need to be careful as well before we proceed. We need to carefully study the word of God. That is what we have done on Wednesday nights (when we used to meet before the pandemic). We would go through the Lectionary Bible verses in order to get the full understanding of the Word of God. That is what we would do on Sunday morning in Sunday school (when we used to meet before the pandemic). Our teachers would take the time to study God's Word, prepare their lesson on the topic covered in the lesson, and expound on it and make it applicable to everyday life.



I am looking forward to the day we gather again on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings to study God's word as a community of faith once again. It is my prayer you are still reading and studying God's word on your own during this time away.

Once you have carefully studied and consulted God's Word and you are convinced you need to take a course of action, have faith that God will lead you.

As you study your Bible, you will discover there is no other salvation except through Jesus Christ. Trust Him for your salvation.

As you study your Bible, you will discover many answers to your questions about your vocation, your family; your dating relationships, your marriage, your children, your finances, your health, and your eternal home in heaven.

The world may give you different answers for these questions, but the answers you glean from God's word have God's seal of approval on them. Faith rests upon the perfect goodness and infinite power of God. There is no surer foundation. Once we are certain that God has commanded us to do something, or not to do something, we can be assured it is for our good. We need to have the courage and faith to act upon what God has revealed to us.

Hebrews 11 illustrates the Heroes of the Faith

- Able acted on faith and offered a better sacrifice.
- Enoch walked by faith and was taken away and did not see death.
- Noah acted on faith and prepared the ark which saved his family from the flood.
- Abraham acted on faith and left his homeland to go where God led him.
- Sarah acted on faith and Isaac was born to her at the age of 90.
- Jacob acted on faith by requesting his bones be brought back to Canaan one day.

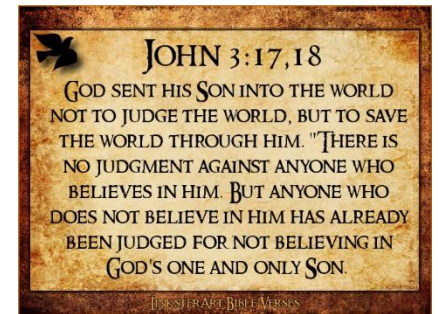


- Moses acted on faith and led the people of Israel out of Egypt.
- Joshua acted on faith and the walls of Jericho fell.
- Gideon acted on faith and defeated the Midianites with 300 men.

You can live a life of faith if you turn to the Lord and trust Him with every area of your life. That first step begins with salvation.

John 3:16-18 reminds us,
“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting

life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”



The choice is ours – we can trust God, or we can trust in our own wisdom.

Joshua's challenge to the people of Israel is also our challenge today:

“Choose ye this day whom you will serve!”
“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

LET US PRAY