

Judges 6:11-32 – “Gideon: God Makes His Man”

(Pew Bible Page: 901)

Intro: I recently read a biography of Winston Churchill, the celebrated Prime Minister of England during World War 2. It was a fascinating story, focusing entirely on Churchill’s obsession with danger, risky behavior, and warfare. As I read the accounts of Churchill’s foolhardy behavior on battlefield after battlefield as a young man, one theme began to stand out: that man should have been dead long before World War 2 began. Another fact became apparent as well: Churchill was perfectly prepared to lead England in the war against Nazi Germany. To my mind, the truth was obvious: the Sovereign of history had been preparing Winston Churchill for his greatest moment long before that moment arrived. The story of the man whose life we begin studying tonight is a very similar story. Gideon wasn’t nearly as courageous as Churchill, as we’ll see. In fact, the only thing smaller than Gideon’s courage seems to have been his faith – at least in the beginning. And yet, Gideon ended up in Hebrews 11:32 – “Faith’s Hall of Fame.” How in the world did that happen? Let me suggest to you that in Gideon, and indeed in all the judges, God intentionally chose flawed men to deliver His people to show beyond doubt who Israel’s true deliverer was. God did it for Churchill; He did it for Gideon; and He is doing it in you. God is making His man, every day. Just as He did for Gideon, He is doing this for you.

Proposition: The story of Gideon is the story of God creating faith and courage in a man that had neither at the time of his calling.

(vv.1-13) When God came to Gideon, Gideon was a man typical of his generation – the generation after the passing of Joshua. Note Gideon’s beliefs revealed through his reaction to God’s messenger. The messenger of God came to Gideon, disguised as a traveler on the road, a stranger unknown to Gideon before their encounter. And that stranger brought a message of hope to a man beating out a handful of grain in a winepress, because he was so terrified of the Midianite menace. Gideon was hiding, hoping to have enough grain for a meal or two for his family when this stranger showed up saying, “*The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.*” The message is a play on Gideon’s name: one of the meanings of “Gideon” is “Mighty Warrior.” But Gideon doesn’t sound like a mighty warrior. Listen to his faithless response:

“If God is [really] with us:”

- Why has all this happened to us?
- Where are all the miracles we’ve heard about?
- Where is He? Because it certainly doesn’t look like He’s with us!

In short, Gideon is a man without faith in what he has been told about God. Clearly, he has been told *about* God, but he doesn’t yet *know* God. And yet, this is the man God chose to deliver His people from the Midianites. How did God bring about the transformation that landed Gideon in “Faith’s Hall of Fame”?

(v.14) God took the initiative to appear to Gideon – At first, Gideon did not recognize that the traveler sitting under the oak tree at Ophrah was divine. He appeared to be just an ordinary human stranger to Gideon. While Gideon poured out his unbelief in answer to the stranger’s “*The Lord be with you, O*

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mighty man of valor,” the stranger seems to have had his face turned away from Gideon, hiding His appearance. After Gideon’s outburst of doubt, God “*turned to him,*” we are told. In other words, the Lord began to show Gideon His face – He began to reveal Himself to Gideon. Gideon seems to have been slow on the uptake. First, he called the stranger, “*Sir,*” (v.13) a respectful term for an unknown fellow human being, but then Gideon changed the term and called Him, “*Lord,*” (v.15) clearly showing that he was at least beginning to suspect that this stranger was something more than a human being. The opening of Gideon’s eyes to God had begun. When Gideon began to suspect who was talking to him, he protested his inability to carry out what he was clearly being commanded to do saying, “*Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.*” Like Moses before the burning bush, Gideon frankly recognized that in his own strength there was no hope of Israel being led to freedom. Gideon is not mistaken about this. He is quite right. As we’ll learn from reading on in Gideon’s story, when God called Gideon, Gideon was not only a skeptic, but he was a coward. The story of Gideon is the story of God creating faith and courage in a man that had neither at the time of his calling. This is a story of God’s grace. How did God develop His man?

(vv.15-16) Gideon’s faith and courage would come from God’s presence with him – It is interesting that God did not deny Gideon’s objections. God passed over Gideon’s human weakness, assuring him that God Himself would provide all that Gideon needed. God promised Gideon three gifts to see him through the task He was commanding Gideon to accomplish: God’s presence, “*The Lord is with you*” (v.12); His purpose, “*Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian*” (v.14); His power, “*But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man*” (v.16).¹ Gideon received the personal promise of God that victory over the Midianites would come, not because of who Gideon was, but because of who God was. God would win the victory through his doubting, fearful servant. All Gideon needed was to do what he was told. God’s presence with him, purpose for him, and power to him could not fail if Gideon would faithfully obey God’s orders.

(vv.17-24) Gideon’s faith, though real, was weak – Faith begins when we see for ourselves the face of God, and God had granted Gideon faith. But Gideon’s faith was weak, very tender, very fragile. He doubted that he could do what God promised; he doubted that it was really God that was speaking to him. Gideon asked for proof that God was the one speaking to him through this “stranger.” **Judges 6:17–18 - 17** *And he said to him, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. 18 Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you.” And he said, “I will stay till you return.”* God patiently complied with Gideon’s request for a sign. Preparing food for a traveler was a normal part of middle eastern hospitality, so we might wonder why Gideon would propose this as a “sign” that the visitor was divine. The meaning of the word Gideon used for “*my present*” gives us understanding. The word he used in Hebrew was one used to mean, “an offering, or sacrifice.” Gideon seems to be thinking, “If this stranger really is God, will He accept me and my sacrifice?” Gideon went to prepare the food and brought it back in a basket and a pot. What happened next revealed to Gideon beyond all doubt his visitor as a theophany or

¹ McQuaid, Elwood. “*Not to the Strong*” (1991) page 74. Friends of Israel, Bellmawr, NJ.

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Christophany – a pre-incarnate appearance of God in Christ. The meat and bread were laid out on a rock, and the broth poured over it. The tip of the staff in the stranger’s hand touched it and fire came out of the rock, consuming the sacrifice. And just as quickly as that occurred, the stranger vanished from view. Gideon got the message: God had accepted him and his sacrifice. But now, came a new problem: Gideon’s faith had been affirmed, but his fear was hardly assuaged. Now, he feared that he would die, for he had seen God with his own eyes. God put Gideon’s fear behind him, by speaking to Gideon words of assurance: **Judges 6:23 - 23** *But the LORD said to him, “Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die.”* Gideon demonstrated the reality of his new-found faith by building an altar and worshipping the Lord. And Gideon, now a man of small but real faith, from this point on begins to hear from God personally.

(vv.25-32) Gideon’s faith was real, but he was full of fear – He was not yet the courageous man we know he would become, so God set him a task that would challenge his new-born faith: He was commanded to go and destroy his father’s community altar to Baal: **Judges 6:25–27 - 25** *That night the LORD said to him, “Take your father’s bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it 26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order. Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah that you shall cut down.” 27 So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night.* Here was a test of Gideon’s faith. Faith is trusting and obeying God when He gives you His Word. Would Gideon act in faith? *“Without faith it is impossible to please God,”* James tells us. God tested Gideon’s new faith right away by instructing him to tear down Baal’s altar and build an altar to the Lord. Gideon obeyed but did so at night so no one could see what he was doing. He took this course out of fear, we are told. And Gideon’s fear continued when the sun rose and the people of Ophrah discovered what he had done. They demanded of Gideon’s father, Joash, that he bring out Gideon to be killed for destroying their idols. Joash, who apparently was the leading man of the town, refused saying, *“Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down”* (v.31). Through this, Gideon obtained a new name: “Jerubbaal” meaning, “Let Baal fight, or decide” which soon became an honorable title for Gideon, “Baal Fighter.” But here is the point: Where was Gideon while all of this was going on? Hiding behind his father, apparently. Like King Saul, he must have hidden himself in the baggage while everyone was looking for him. Gideon was a man of small faith and great fear at this point. The story of Gideon is the story of God creating faith and courage in a man that had neither at the time of his calling.

[APPLICATION] What can we learn from God’s dealing with Gideon? Let me suggest a few things.

We all start where Gideon’s faith journey started – Gideon was a skeptic, doubting what he had been told about God. Gideon was a doubter questioning whether he could do what God called him to do. Gideon was a chicken, hiding behind his idol worshipping father when danger came. A skeptic worships only his own understanding; a doubter sees only his own weakness; a chicken fears man more than God.

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We all start our faith journey exactly where Gideon’s faith journey started. “The best of men are men at best,” someone has said and not one of us begins our Christian life appearing to be a candidate for inclusion in “Faith’s Hall of Fame.” We might be tempted to read Gideon’s story and mutter under our breath, “God sure didn’t have much to work with when He picked Gideon to be His instrument.” I am reminded of Jon Dunn’s famous line in his poem, “For Whom the Bell Tolls.” Dunn reminded his readers to “Ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for you.” If we know ourselves at all we’ll realize that when we look at this picture of Gideon, we find our own reflection staring back as if from a mirror. Ask not, “Who is Gideon.” Gideon is you. And me too, by the way!

God takes the initiative to call us to Himself – God is truly the hero of our story because not one of us in our natural condition seeks God. If left to ourselves, we would ignorantly fall straight through Hell’s gates. But God, wishing to make known his presence, purpose, and power, does for us what He did for Gideon: He comes seeking us before we ever have a desire for Him. As with Gideon, He usually shows up in our lives as a stranger – perhaps a neighbor, friend or family member who just keeps bringing up that guy called Jesus. Sooner or later, He turns to us the way He turned to Gideon, and we begin to suspect that Someone is speaking to us through our acquaintance. Once we come to know Him, we find that He continues to meddle in our lives, strengthening our faith, calming our fears, and changing our character so that we look increasingly like His Son, Jesus. It’s as if He has had a plan for our lives from before the beginning of the world. Imagine that!

God is the only Hero in our story – As we read the Bible for its plain-sense meaning, we discover a surprising fact: the Bible goes out of its way to sully every one of its would-be heroes, but one – Jesus. Abraham prostituted Sarah, twice. Isaac did the same to Rebekah. Joseph was a smart-Alec teenager. Moses committed murder. King David committed adultery with another man’s wife, then killed the man to cover up his sin. Elijah ran from Jezebel. Daniel was a probably a eunuch. Need I go on? The Bible itself tells us these stories. The point is this: God is the real Hero behind every story. When we fail to realize this; when we say to ourselves and our children, “Dare to be a Daniel” we set ourselves up for failure. If we make super-heroes of men like ourselves, ignoring their weaknesses, pretending they were faultless – and then tell ourselves that we should be that way too, the outcome is inevitable. We will live in perpetual discouragement, always feeling that we are failures, disappointments to God. We must read our Bibles as they are intended to be read. Mankind is fallen and broken; whenever anything good is done by a human instrument it is ONLY because that instrument is in the hands of a blessed redeemer. When we realize this, we begin to see ourselves and our world as we should. Who are we? Fallen creatures, content to beat out our little handful of grain in the winepress of our fears and failures, until God comes along and gives us the whole vineyard as an act of sheer grace. When we realize who we are, and we realize who the true Hero of our story is – then we really live!

Conclusion: I hope, like me, you will be encouraged by tonight’s message. You and I are little people. Most of us are unknown to the world at large in which we live. But God has a plan for your life and mine, just as He did for Gideon. When we fail, that is to be expected. When we prove to be useful to God, it’s because of His presence, purpose, and power at work through us. And what a privilege is that!