

Judges 8:22-35 – “Gideon’s Finish”

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Intro: The story is told of David Morgan, a minister in Wales greatly used of God during the 1859 Welsh Revival. For a period of around two years, Morgan journeyed through every part of Wales, preaching with unusual power as much as two or three times a day. During the outpouring of revival Morgan participated in, it is estimated that perhaps as many as 100,000 souls came to faith in Christ. At the end of two years, suddenly the power that had been given to Morgan was withdrawn. It had come mysteriously, and its going was just as mysterious. David Morgan himself gave this account; Before the revival began, he wrote, “I went to bed one night just David Morgan as usual. I woke up the next morning feeling like a lion, feeling that I was filled with the power of the Holy Ghost.... [Two years later he said] I went to bed one night still feeling like a lion, filled with this strange power that I had enjoyed for two years. I woke up the next morning and found that I had become David Morgan once more.” He lived about fifteen more years and exercised an ordinary pastoral ministry.¹ Sometimes, God picks up a man and uses him greatly, but then seems to lay him back down again after the victory is won. Being greatly used of God today is no sign that you will be greatly used tomorrow. Many men who are used of God for a while seem to run out of gas at the end. Not everyone who starts well, finishes well, unfortunately. Sometimes that’s God’s plan for their lives as it was for David Morgan; and sometimes it’s a result of their neglect of their relationship with God. But it does happen, and that is what seems to have happened to Gideon, as we’ll learn tonight.

Proposition: God uses us in spite of ourselves, not because of ourselves, so we must be on our guard to ensure we finish well.

Billboard: (vv.22-27) Gideon’s Good Words and Bad Works
 (vv.28-32) God’s Grace despite Gideon’s Failure
 (vv.33-35) Gideon’s Legacy

(vv.22-27) Gideon’s Good Words and Bad Works – To be greatly used of God is to invite great temptation. After Israel’s spectacular victory over Midian, the people of the northern tribes attempted to make Gideon king. **Judges 8:22–23 - 22** *Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian.” 23 Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.”* Israel recognized that the leadership of the judges was not resulting in consistent peace and prosperity for the nation. They reasoned that what they needed was a king, like all the other nations around them, and Gideon looked like just the kind of man they wanted. This is the same demand the people would later make of Samuel the last Judge God gave Israel: “Give us a king like all the other nations,” they demanded. Samuel recognized their request for what it really was – a rejection of God’s kingship over them. God alone was their king, dwelling between the cherubim on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Gideon, to his credit, also seems to have recognized the folly of what Israel was asking. He firmly rejected their request, refusing the crown, both for himself and for his children after him. Gideon said

¹ Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. “Preachers and Preaching,” pg. 338-9.

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the right words, and if he had left things at that, all would have been well and good. But unfortunately, Gideon didn’t leave it at that. After rejecting the crown with his words, he accepted it with his actions. In verses 24-27 we see Gideon arrogating to himself the prerogatives of a king: **Judges 8:24–27 - 24** *And Gideon said to them, “Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil.” (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25* *And they answered, “We will willingly give them.” And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. 26* *And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels. 27* *And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.* Notice what Gideon did after refusing the Kingship:

- (vv.24-25) He accumulated royal wealth - **Judges 8:24–25 - 24** *And Gideon said to them, “Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil.” (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25* *And they answered, “We will willingly give them.” And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil.*
- (v.26) He accumulated royal trappings - **Judges 8:26 - 26** *And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels.* The crescent ornaments, purple garments and collars that were around the necks of the camels were symbols of kingly authority Gideon accepted for himself.
- (v.27) He accumulated royal prerogatives - **Judges 8:27 - 27** *And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.* An Ephod was a priestly garment used for receiving guidance from God. It was only to be used by the priest but was often kept close to Israel’s kings as 1 Samuel shows us. Gideon apparently used this ephod, though he was not a priest, and kept the ephod in his home, though he was not a king. The ephod “became a snare to Gideon and his family,” and the nation, we are told.
- (vv.29-30) He accumulated a royal harem - **Judges 8:29–30 - 29** *Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. 30* *Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives.* To have a harem was one of the prerogatives of oriental kingship.
- (v.31) Most tellingly, he named his son, “Abimelech” - **Judges 8:31 - 31** *And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. “Abimelech” means “My father is king.”* We are not told if this was Gideon’s idea or someone else’s but Gideon at least went along with naming the child, Abimelech.

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[DOCTRINAL POINT] Gideon failed because his actions did not match his words. He said all the right things but denied what he said by the way he lived his life after winning the victory. Gideon said good words, but practiced bad works.

(vv.28-32) God’s Grace despite Gideon’s Failure – God still used Gideon to bring freedom to Israel, even though Gideon failed in these matters: **Judges 8:28–32 - 28** *So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon. 29* *Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. 30* *Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. 31* *And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. 32* *And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.* This is a remarkable “sandwich” of blessings and failures – God blessed Israel with peace and blessed Gideon personally apart from his failures. But in between these two notes of blessing is a layer of brewing trouble: 69 of Gideon’s sons would be murdered and the nation troubled by Abimelech, as chapter 9 tells us that he determined to make himself king after Gideon’s death. Some observations on this sandwich: In the Book of Judges, God seems to have worked in distinct periods of 40 years of blessing. As you read the book note how God often gave Israel peace for 40 years after raising up a Judge to deliver the nation from their enemies. This is the last 40-year period of blessing in the Book of Judges. Each Judge who came after Gideon brought peace to the nation for succeeding shorter periods of blessing, until under Samson, the nation seems to have experienced hardly any real relief from her enemies. Secondly, though Gideon did not finish well, God allowed Gideon to experience during his lifetime the personal blessings of wealth, prestige, family, and an honorable passing.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] In spite of his failures, God used Gideon to bless Israel and kept Gideon personally in peace all the way home. The only explanation for this is the grace of God. God graciously used Gideon and blessed him to the end of his life, in spite of Gideon’s poor finish.

(vv.33-35) Gideon’s Legacy – Though Gideon was greatly used of God, he left no positive legacy to his nation. **Judges 8:33–35 33** *As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. 34* *And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, 35* *and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.* Israel was not better off when Gideon died, but worse. The cycle that we witness in the Book of Judges continued. Each time God raised up a Judge in answer to the people’s pleas, the relief was only temporary and achieved no lasting moral improvement. When the Judge passed from the scene, Israel descended into a moral darkness deeper still than they had known before the cycle began.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] We must be on our guard to ensure that we finish well. We leave a positive legacy behind us when God’s people are better off for our having lived among them than they were before we came to them. Leaving a Godly legacy is no accident.

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[APPLICATION] What lessons can we learn from Gideon’s story? Here are four things to bear in mind as we come to the end of Gideon’s account.

1) To be greatly used of God invites great temptation. To finish well we must keep a sharp eye on our hearts. It is far too easy for us to begin to “believe our own press.” When we have a little success doing something for the Lord, when things work out as we asked in prayer for them to work, we may forget who really won the victory. It is too easy for us to fall into the trap of thinking, “I’ve got this! I know how this works. Done it before and I can do it again.” Be careful! Remind yourself often that “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” That Jesus told us, “Without me, you can do nothing.” That of the two men who went up to the Temple to pray, the one who prayed, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner,” went home justified. Gideon thought too much of *himself* after *God* won the victory. Don’t fall into that same trap!

2) Our words and actions must agree if we are to finish well. Words by themselves are not enough. They must be proven true with actions. Right now, the church in America is witnessing a rash of men whom we’ve respected, who’ve help us, encouraged us, preached to us, crashing, and burning before they reach the finish line. What is going wrong? In every case it comes down to this: It became too easy to say the right words in public, while permitting oneself to become someone else in private. Pride creeps in. The devil convinces you that you’re a special case. That the busyness that keeps you from your private devotional time with the Lord is OK, because it’s God’s business you’re doing. That you’ve done such a wonderful work for the Lord that you owe yourself that secret pleasure you know you shouldn’t dabble in. Be careful, dear one! If we haven’t learned anything else recently, we ought to at least take notice of this: The things that men try to keep in darkness, God inevitably bring into the light. No one is “too big to fail” in the Body of Christ. When our actions don’t match up with the message we profess to believe, God makes it His business to bring our failures into the open. Our actions must match our words if we are to finish well.

3) To finish well is to leave a legacy that will benefit others. Nothing is more destructive to God’s kingdom than those who have been greatly used in their lifetimes, disappointing at the end. On the other hand, nothing is more helpful, encouraging, affirming, and life commending than when those we have looked up to remain faithful and admirable all the way to the finish line. We need to aspire to be those kinds of Christians. While working with the elderly several years ago, Gwen and I learned a precious lesson. Some of those we served were purely delightful, while others were more... challenging. We learned that, if you want to be one of those delightful ones *then*, you’d better be working on it *now*. Don’t wait until it’s too late to learn the secret of gracefulness. “Today really is the first day of the rest of your life!” Ask God to help you leave a legacy of blessing when you’ve crossed the finish line.

4) God doesn’t cast us away when we fail to finish well. Gideon is in Hebrews 11’s, “Hall of Fame.” Imperfect though he was, God wrote his name into his book, for your encouragement

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and mine. You may be sitting here tonight thinking, “Hey! If you think Gideon was a mess, you don’t know what I know about me!” If you’re not thinking that there’s probably something wrong with you, come to think of it! The whole point of Gideon’s story is that God isn’t looking for perfect people to use for His glory. It’s His glory that makes our lives look as good as they do! It bears repeating – God is the true hero of every story. We are just the common clay of humanity. Sometimes we’re scared to death, other times we’re foolishly boastful. Blessedly, God seems to take all of that in stride. At the end of the day, our story really isn’t about who we are; it’s about who He is, and what He can do *for* and *with* ordinary people. Should we aspire to be brave, faithful, steadfast, immovable? Of course, we should! But aren’t you glad that when you’ve blown it, “His mercy is more”?

Conclusion: Not everyone who starts well, ends well. David Morgan started spectacularly but ended in a perfectly honorable but unremarkable way – but he left a legacy we still talk about today. That was God’s plan for him. Gideon started spectacularly too but ended by causing Israel to fall back into the idolatry he had helped her escape. Not a glorious finish! I don’t think any of us will mind if God plans a David Morgan kind of finish for our story, but who wants to finish like Gideon? Let’s make it our business to ensure that we finish well and leave a legacy of blessing to the people of God. To God be the glory.