

Gideon: An Altared Life Part 1 – Judges 6:1-16

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Different Today*

1. We're doing something a bit different this morning.
2. Instead of a typical sermon in which we dig deep into just a few verses, we're going to begin a character sketch of a man named **Gideon**.
3. Gideon makes a great study because he well represents many of us in this room this morning.
4. He was just a normal guy, living normal life, when all of a sudden God invaded His world & said He wanted to use him in a dramatic way.

B. *Setting the Scene*

1. We have a lot of ground to cover, so let's get started.
2. This all takes place after Israel has taken possession of the Promise Land.
3. The tribes have been dispersed to their various territories, charged with the task of rooting out the last of the Canaanites hold-outs.
4. Those hold-outs proved tougher than the Israelites were willing to deal with, so instead of **expelling** them from the land as God had commanded, they allowed them to stay.
5. The result was just as God had warned: The incredibly wicked practices of the Canaanites began to influence the people of God until soon they were doing the very same things.
6. The Jews turned from the worship of God to serve the idols of Baal & his consort Asherah.
7. So God **disciplined** them by allowing them to be **oppressed** by their enemies.
 - a. After years of oppression, they **finally** came to their senses, repented, & cried out to God.
 - b. His answer was to raise up a **deliverer**, called a **Judge**, who led Israel against their enemies, restored **liberty** & the **worship** of God.
 - c. But **as soon as** that Judge died, the people would once again turn from God to idols.
 - d. The book of Judges sees this cycle repeated again and again.

8. Gideon was one of the Judges; a deliverer God raised up to bring freedom and renewal to the people of God.
9. But he seems an *unlikely candidate* for a hero as we read his story

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II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

¹ Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, ² and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains.

1. The Midianites were distant relatives of the Israelites. Midian was a son of Abraham.
 - a. After Sarah died, Abraham re-married a woman named Keturah, who bore him another 6 sons! Midian was one of them
 - b. Gen. 25 tells us when Abe realized his days were few, he sent his sons to the East with many gifts so they could start new lives there.
 - c. He didn't want them *contending with his son Isaac* for the main inheritance.
 2. There in the East, the descendants of Midian grew into a numerous people of nomadic shepherds.
 - a. Usually living in small autonomous groups that wandered around looking for pasture,
 - b. Every once in a while, a powerful chief would rally them into a unified nation.
 - c. It was during one of these periods of unity that they became strong enough to invade the lush pasture lands of the west.
 3. Of course, God *permitted* all of this because He was *using* the Midianites as a tool to break Israel of her hard & wayward heart.
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4. There's a *couple things* for us to learn from this . . .
 - a. **First** - From the perspective of the Midianites, it was just a *happy coincidence* they were growing united & strong at the same time Israel was weakening.
 - 1) This *coincidence* meant they got to move out of the dry,

arid wilderness of the East into the lush, green lands of the West.

- 3) They got to move out of their tents into houses.
- 4) From God's perspective, there was *no coincidence at all* – it was all the *result* of His work.
- 5) V. 1 is clear – **“The LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian” BECAUSE, “the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD.”**
- 6) Though neither the Midianites nor the Israelites realized it, all that was happening was directed by God to accomplish His purposes among His people.
- 7) Midian was merely a tool to discipline His erring kids.
- 8) Let's never forget that our God is the Lord of history.
 - a) It's His hand on the wheel of world events.
 - b) He steers the course of all things.
 - c) It may be difficult to understand sometimes how what's happening in our lives or in the world could be a part of His plan - but it is!
- 9) We read this story & understand the role the Midianites played because God has given us His perspective here.
- 10) Know this – the day will come when we will have God's perspective on everything that's taken place in our lives, & realize how it was but a tool He used to shape us into the image of Christ.
- 11) Right now in Israel – Who knows, might very well be a door God is opening for us to share the Gospel.
- b. **Second** – When trouble comes into your life, when some attack of Midian sweeps in, don't be too quick to assume it's just opposition from the devil you need to stand against.
 - 1) **Temptation** needs to be resisted. Lies that would deceive us need to be rebuked.
 - 2) But **trouble** may be a tool God is using to correct us.
 - 3) So when trouble comes, instead of automatically rebuking it, ask God if there's something wrong He's seeking to correct.
 - 4) Ask Him if the distress you're experiencing is **His discipline** seeking to turn you back to Him.
 - 5) Look **how long** Israel endured the Midianite oppression before they woke up and cried out to God in repentance – 7

years!

B. Vs. 3-6

³ So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. ⁴ Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. ⁵ For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. ⁶ So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.

1. The Amalekites were also relatives of Israel; they were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother.
2. Like the Midianites, they were nomadic shepherds of the region east of Israel.
3. When the Midianites opened the door of conquest into Israel, the Amalekites came in too & assisted the Midianites in harassing the people of God.
4. It was incredibly discouraging for the Jews because any time they planted crops, the Midianites & Amalekites would sweep in to steal the produce at harvest time, or burn their fields so they couldn't make a living.
5. Whenever they grazed their flocks in decent pasture, the people of the East would raid them & take them away.
6. As the people were on the verge of starvation, they cried out to God.

C. Vs. 7-10

⁷ And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD because of the Midianites, ⁸ that the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; ⁹ and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out

before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ Also I said to you, “I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.” But you have not obeyed My voice.’ ”

1. God heard the cry of the people for help, but it wasn't a sincere cry of repentance;
2. They just regretted the *consequences* of their sin, *not the sin itself*.
3. But now that they have at least turned to God, He responds by sending them a message through some unnamed prophet.
4. The prophet makes it clear to the people that the distress they're experiencing is the discipline of God for having forsaken their covenant with Him.
5. Once they understand the *real cause* of their trouble, they knew the solution – *repent* and turn back to God.

D. Vs. 11-16

¹¹ Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites.

1. Gideon belonged to the tribe of Manasseh & lived in a small village called Ophrah.
 2. One day as he's working, an angel appears to him.
- ¹² And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!”
3. Now, that's a pretty encouraging greeting!
 - a. I don't know about you but if an angel appeared to me and said, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!” I'd be pretty stoked!
 - b. What guy doesn't want to be a man of valor?
 - 1) I mean – I don't even know what the word “valor” means, but it sounds good!
 - 2) It sounds like courage & strength.
 - 3) Valor! I picture a knight going forth to battle!
 4. But wait – look where Gideon *is* when the angel greets him.
 - a. He's in a winepress, threshing wheat.
 - b. Winepresses were located in an area protected from the wind,

- so that debris wouldn't blow into the press as the grapes were being crushed.
- c. They were usually found in the bottom of a little ravine or in the midst of a stand of trees that would block the wind.
 - d. Wheat was threshed on the ridge of a hill, in a place where a steady breeze blew so the chaff could be carried away as the wheat was beaten, then tossed in the air.
 - e. You didn't thresh wheat where you pressed wine because the necessary conditions weren't there.
5. But if Gideon had threshed his wheat in one of the usual places, it would have been like sounding a trumpet to the Midianites to come & rip him off.
 - a. Working on the top of some rise, he would have been a dark silhouette against the sky.
 - b. Visible from a long way off; the raiders would have come running and stolen his work.
 6. So he's in hiding, threshing grain *covertly*.
 7. And as he threshed, wasting hours because of the poor results, he had to have been frustrated & feeling powerless.
 8. It's in the midst of all this that the angel comes with his announcement - **"The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!"**
 9. We can just see Gideon . . . [look around to see if someone else is there. **"You talking to me?"**]
 - 13 Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."**
 10. At this point, as we shall see, Gideon doesn't see himself at all as a mighty man of valor.
 - a. But his response shows there's a lot more *chutzpah* in him than he realizes.
 - b. You know what chutzpah is don't you?
 - 1) It's a kind of "clever daring."
 - 2) Chutzpah is being on trial for killing your parents, then throwing yourself on the mercy of the court because you're

an orphan.

11. To the angel's announcement that the Lord is with him, Gideon shoots back – "Well then why do things suck so bad?"
 - a. **"If God is with us why isn't He doing all the stuff we've been told He did for our ancestors?"**
 - b. **"That God performed lots of miracles for them, but we've not seen any lately."**
 - c. **"He's left us to fend for ourselves and handed us over to these raiders from the East who've taken over."**

12. Do you ever wonder something similar to this?
 - a. You know what the Bible says & what Christians would tell you - that God loves you and will not forsake you,
 - b. But you're beset with trouble & say, **"If God loves me and is with me, then why am I going through all this?"**
 - c. **"If He's done all the stuff the Bible says, why don't I see a shred of His power in my life?"**
 - d. **"I don't need the Pacific Ocean parted or to be able to walk on Lake Casitas, I just need some help with my marriage, with my kids, with my finances, with my job."**
13. That's a question probably all of us have to deal with at some time or another.
14. Let's see how God answered Gideon . . .
14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"
15. Notice that the angel turns out to be none other than God Himself.
16. And the reply He gave Gideon *wasn't* a direct answer to his question.
17. Instead, it was a *solution* to the problem.
18. To Gideon's challenge of, **"If the Lord is with us, why is bad stuff happening?"** God says, **"I'll use *you* to end that bad stuff."**

19. One of the most troubling questions people ask is, **"If God is all loving and all powerful, why is there evil in the world?"**
 - a. While some use that as *convenient excuse* for *rejecting God*,
 - b. Those who *sincerely* want to *understand* are challenged by the Spirit to instead of sitting around arguing about it, to get up and

go *do something* about evil & injustice.

- 1) They feed the homeless. They build shelters for low-income families.
 - 2) They contribute to relief works & orphanages in Uganda.
 - 3) They volunteer at the local Crisis Pregnancy Center.
 - c. They don't sit around and debate philosophy, they become part of the solution.
 - d. It's the height of hypocrisy to point at the existence of evil as the reason for rejecting God, then doing nothing about that evil!
 - e. They charge God with the very thing they themselves are guilty of – doing nothing about evil!
 - f. God's solution to the problem of evil is the Cross, & to give to this evil world men and women who's lives have been transformed by the power of the Cross, who then go forth to redress the wrongs.
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20. This brings up the important issue of honest & dishonest doubts.
- a. Gideon had an honest & sincere doubt. When the Lord said He was with him, Gideon expressed his doubt – but it was a doubt seeking an answer.
 - b. **Not all** doubts are honest – many are *dishonest*, in that they aren't going to believe no matter what answer is given.
 - c. Dishonest doubt is nothing more than a *mask for unbelief*. It doesn't matter *what* you say, the person *isn't* going to be persuaded because he/she's already decided to reject the truth.
 - d. It's pointless to get into arguments with people who have dishonest doubts.
 - e. I know, I've wasted many hours in fruitless debates with unbelievers who've hidden their unbelief behind a guise of spiritual curiosity.
 - f. I've learned to pray when someone expresses their doubt in the form of a question; asking for discernment whether or not they're sincere in wanting an answer or if their question is merely an invitation to pointless argument.
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21. God's response to Gideon's challenge was to *make him* the solution to the problem.

15 So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the

least in my father's house."

22. Like Moses, Gideon tried to beg off the assignment.
- a. He didn't see himself as qualified.
 - b. It wasn't that he was lazy, threshing wheat in a winepress proves his problem wasn't a fear of hard work.
 - c. He simply didn't see himself as a leader or warrior.
 - d. In his own eyes, he was a nobody. And as the world reckons it – he was.
 - e. Though He was from one of the larger tribes of Israel, his family was small and in his own home, he was an also-ran.
23. But that's not the way God saw Gideon. God saw him for who he *really was*; A mighty man of valor.
- a. He was the one to bring deliverance to Israel.
 - b. He was both a leader & a warrior, though neither identity was known by Gideon yet.
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24. And so it is with us my dear brothers & sisters.
- a. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul – 1 Cor. 1:26-31 [NLT]

26 Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. 27 Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, 29 so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God. 30 God alone made it possible for you to be in Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom. 31 As the Scriptures say, "The person who wishes to boast should boast only of what the Lord has done."

- b. It's crucial we understand that God *sees* what the work of His grace will accomplish in us.
- c. And He *deals* with us on the basis of that.
- d. We really are not what we think we are; these dirt-suits we

- wear are not the real us,
- e. And the daily routine of this world is not our real life.
 - f. We are sons & daughters of God. We are a bride preparing for her wedding.
 - g. If we could see what God sees when He looks at us, we'd suck in our breath & go speechless with wonder at the beauty & power.
25. Michelangelo referred to sculpting as “the making of men.”
- a. He said when he looked at a block of marble, he could see the shape of the statue inside.
 - b. He didn't think of sculpting as *creating* a figure; for Michelangelo, the figure was *already there* & sculpting was merely the act of removing the excess & unnecessary rock.
26. That's precisely what God is doing in you and I – making us into *real* men & women.
- a. He sees in us what we *ought* to be, what we were created to be.
 - b. The Fall & sin has encased us in much that would harden us & keep us from becoming all that God wants us to be.
 - c. But the Holy Spirit patiently takes the mallet & chisel of God's Word, and through the experiences of our lives, cuts away all that which keeps us from becoming what God created us to be.
27. When the Lord first appeared to Gideon, He called him a mighty man of valor – because God knew him better than he knew himself.
- a. Gideon didn't feel like a mighty man.
 - b. But God knew he was, and that discovering who he was would require a challenge big enough to call forth from him his special identity.
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28. What was true of Gideon is true for each of us.
- a. God wants you to discover who you really are.
 - b. But discovering it doesn't come by sitting on the couch, remote in hand, watching “Fear Factor.”
 - c. God has a tailor-made challenge just for you that will help you come to see who you really are.
29. Gideon saw himself as a nobody; less than a nobody really.
30. But God told him – “NO! *You Gideon*, are my pick for greatness!”
- a. This was Gideon's moment. God *put* him there right at that

- time.
- b. You and I live at a crucial moment in history, when the world is rushing headlong toward the last days.
 - c. Never before has the challenge of standing for God been more urgent.
 - d. The day is far spent, and evening comes when the light will fail and earth will be plunged into the spiritual darkness of the Tribulation.
 - e. Now is the time for the people of God, normal, everyday believers, to rise up as mighty men & women of valor, and shine the light of Christ so the last few who need to come to faith will find their way home.
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16 And the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.”

31. To Gideon’s claim that he was a nobody, God said, “It’s not about you – all that matters, what guarantees your success is *My presence*.”

III. CONCLUSION

A. “As One Man”

1. In v. 5, we’re told that the people of the east covered the land like a plague of locusts.
 - a. They were *everywhere*.
 - b. The challenge of ousting them seemed a complete impossibility.
 - c. How could so many be defeated & convinced to leave the fertile fields of Israel for the arid wilderness of the eastern desert?
2. Implied in Gideon’s objection to the call of God on his life was that as a nobody with no position, he was *disqualified from leading*.
 - a. It would take a huge army to repulse the invaders.
 - b. And *no one* was going to follow poor, ole lil’ Gid!
3. You see, when God told Gideon he was to be Israel’s deliverer, he immediately began thinking of how to fulfill his call *in the ways the world would do it*.
4. A Midianite hordes could only be defeated by a *bigger* army.
5. But Gideon knew that raising the necessary troops was beyond his

- skill-set, it wasn't in the cards he'd been dealt in life.
6. God answers Gideon by saying, "I don't need an army, just you!"
 - a. "And while you see a horde of enemies, each & every one being its own challenge, I see just one challenge."
 - b. "Your victory over them will be like fighting, not many, but one."

B. God Wants to Use You!

1. There are needs all around us today.
 - a. The land is covered with a horde of challenges that seem overwhelming.
 - b. Public schools boards need someone to stand against the silliness of teaching evolution & homosexuality.
 - c. City councils need someone to stand against the infiltration of gambling.
 - d. Media outlets need someone to stand against the growing tide of pornography.
 - e. Someone needs to stand against the insanity of abortion on demand.
2. I know a really effective way to deal with all this, maybe not be seeing an end to it today, but how we can see all this turn around tomorrow.
 - a. It's by teaching & training the children & youth of today, before the Midianites & Amalekites of this world rip them off.
 - b. God is calling some of you, just like He called Gideon, to teach Sunday school
 - c. Or maybe He's calling you to get involved with the junior or senior high school.
 - d. [Timo – husband, father of 4, teaches junior high every Wednesday, coaching freshman football.]
 - e. This is why we need to press on in our building program and get land and build a new facility, because this community NEEDS a junior & senior high school that produce graduates who know who to think & live Biblically; men & women who can take their sphere of influence captive to Christ.
3. God has already called several of you to teach, but you've responded as Gideon first did,
 - a. "What - Me? Who am I? I can't teach! I'm not qualified. I wouldn't know what to say or do!"

- b. God says the same thing to you He said to Gideon, “Don’t worry, I’m with you.”
- 4. Preparation does not qualify you to serve.
- 5. It’s ***God’s calling*** that qualifies. And who He calls, He equips.

C. More

- 1. We have many more important lessons to learn from the story of Gideon, but we’ll leave those till next week.
- 2. Let’s end today by opening ourselves up to the truth that God doesn’t need or want celebrities or great stars to do His work.
- 3. He doesn’t need or want them because we expect such people to do great things, and God gets no glory.
- 4. God wants to work through the also-rans, the nobodies, those who **KNOW** they’re disqualified according to the world’s ideas – so that when the work is done, it’s obvious it was God who **REALLY** did it.
- 5. Moses spent the ***first 40 years*** of his life becoming a ***somebody*** in the world.
 - a. It took ***another 40 years*** of leading a small flock of stupid sheep around the desert to turn him into a ***nobody***.
 - b. Then & only then could God use him for his ***last 40 years*** as one of history’s all-time greatest men.
- 6. God intends Moses and Gideon, not to be heroes we put on a pedestal; He intends them to be ***templates*** for our lives.
- 7. God wants to use **YOU!**