

## The Story of Gideon: Part II

---

Last Sunday, we started our sermon series on the life of Gideon as found in the Book of Judges. And we had left Gideon hiding in a winepress. Remember that winepress? Gideon was secretly thrashing his wheat down in that winepress because he was so afraid that the wicked, Baal-worshipping Midianites would swoop down on their camels and kill him, then steal his grain. You can't stand up of the Lord while hiding in a winepress. And, that winepress was a dark, dirty and dusty place. And yet, it was there that the angel of the Lord had appeared to Gideon. And, we determined that this phrase "**angel of the Lord**" was simply another way of referring to the pre-incarnate Jesus. And Jesus told Gideon that He was sending him to rescue God's people from these idol-worshipping Midianites. That's where we left off. So, when Jesus told Gideon that He was sending him to fight those hordes of Midianites, verse 15 & 16 tell us this: <sup>15</sup> "Gideon replied, 'But Lord, how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family.'" <sup>16</sup> The LORD answered, 'You can do it because I will help you. You will crush the Midianites as easily as if they were only one man.'" Judges 6:15-16 (TEV)

We saw last week how Gideon had complained that God had abandoned His people and hadn't sent any miracles to save them as He had done during the time of Moses.<sup>1</sup> And yet, right there in front of Gideon stood Jesus, ready to aid him in what would be a miraculous defeat of these Midianite raiders. But, all Gideon does is make excuses—he says that he's from the lowliest tribe and is the least among his own family. Basically, Gideon is saying that he's too weak for the task—"***I'm not your guy, Lord. Go find somebody else who is stronger, braver more talented as a leader, than I am.***" It's strange just how much he sounds like Moses did when God told him to go stand before Pharaoh and demand that the Hebrews be set free. You know what's even stranger still? It's funny just how much Gideon's response to God's call, it so remarkably similar to the Church's response to God's call today.

Many in the Churches across this country look around and bemoan the moral decline of our nation. And we might rightly say that over the years the Church hasn't been successful in reversing this moral decay. But, why is that? If God were to declare from Heaven the answer to that question in one thunderous word flashing down like a bolt of lightning, what would that word be? What would that one single word be in answering who is responsible for this failure? That word would be "***YOU***"! You are responsible, and I am responsible—we are all responsible. Why?—because God has called the Church to go out and make His Word known—not just ***within*** the walls of this church building, but ***out into the community around us***. Yet, there are way too many churches that really haven't done that. So many

Churches, not just here in Louisa, but in Orange and Goochland, Charlottesville and Richmond, and throughout the state, as well as across the nation—they just stand by and watch their congregations shrink and the hair on the heads of their members growing thinner and grayer. And, we just sit in the church wringing our hands over this state of affairs. But, this sad state of affairs arises from the collective failures of churches across this country to be **alive** within each one's community. And that failure derives from the fact that we have lost sight of what the "Church" really is. The Church? What is the Church? In Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth, he tells us that the Church is like a human body with many functioning parts that need to work together.<sup>2</sup> It has hands and it has feet. It has a mouth.<sup>3</sup> But, what if the hands don't work, and the feet don't run? What happens when the mouths too often remain silent—or if not, they spout out things that don't show the love of Christ, but instead spew the hate, anger and condescension of Satan. When the world around us sees and hears a complacent, hypocritical, lukewarm, "**pretend** Body of Christ"—how can it help but be turned off?

Too many in our churches tend to give Gideon-like excuses. They exempt themselves from serving by their self-proclaimed declaration that they are just **too weak**. Last Sunday, I mentioned that the Scripture rather sarcastically referred to Gideon as a "**mighty hero**," when, in fact, he was really a "**mighty zero**." But, as we will see, God has a real knack for taking "**zeroes**" and turning them into "**heroes**." God specializes in taking weak people who place their trust in Him, and uses them to accomplish great things.<sup>4</sup> And yet, this very concept is so very counter-intuitive from the way the world thinks.

For example, last year, PBS aired an eight-part literary series entitled, "*The Great American Read*," that analyzed 100 of this country's best-loved novels. In one of the episodes, authors and literary experts focused upon the most popular heroes in some of these books and gave their opinions as to why people are so attracted to them. The following are some of the comments from these "experts" that reflects how the world tends to think about a heroic figure. One of these literary experts said: "**A hero is who we all wish we were if we didn't have our own personal limitations.**" Another added: "**I think when we hear heroes or see them or read about them, we think about qualities we wish we had. Courage, strength, fortitude, bravery.**" And finally, someone explained our attraction to heroes this way: "**We'd like to believe there's like a hero gene in all of us.**"<sup>5</sup>

But, the problem is that God's people today are too willing to buy into these descriptions. Do you see what's wrong with these comments? Too many Christians have somehow bought into the worldly notion that we are bound by "**our personal limitations**" when it comes to serving God. And, they falsely believe that unless they we already naturally possess the traits of **courage, strength,**

***fortitude and bravery***, by the means of some elusive “***hero gene***,” then they can be of no service whatsoever to God. In other words, they wrongly believe that you are either strong to begin with, because you are born with the qualities of a hero—or you are just plain out of luck. But, God’s Word teaches exactly the opposite. The Bible tells us that God “understands our weaknesses”<sup>6</sup> and, thus, “gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.”<sup>7</sup> Paul assures us that “Christ is not weak when He deals with you; He is powerful among you.”<sup>8</sup> “For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:13 (NLT2) “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:10 (NLT2)

And so, rather than allowing God to use them by relying upon His power, despite their own weaknesses, many Christian simply give in to the same pattern of excuses as Gideon did. When I am driving down Rt. 15 and 33 on the way here on most any Sunday morning, I see yards full of people from the age of fifty on into their seventies. And what are they doing?—Weed-eating, mowing grass, gardening, selling their wares along the side of the road—or more often these days, simply sitting on their porch steps twiddling on their smart phones. I venture to say that if just 10% of those people in that age range within just one square mile of this church walked through our church doors this morning we’d be bursting at the seams. But, the question is how many of them received an invitation from this Church, or any Church for that matter, to come to worship. Beyond that, how many even heard the name of Jesus this week from a church member of any area church (excluding those times when His name was used as an expletive). Jesus calls you to show Christ to your family and neighbors, your bosses and co-workers, your friends and especially your enemies—***in the way that you live your life***. During the week, in discussions and conversations, don’t be afraid to interject the name of Jesus, or to use words from the Bible, or to offer prayers when the situation arises—not in some phony, pious, “holier-than-thou” way, but in absolute humility and with a resolute faith clothed in love.

There are people out there who need Jesus Christ—they need to know about Him. And if all we do is to sit around saying to ourselves, “***Well, I sure wish he or she would come to Church so they could hear the Word of God***”—that is not really going to cut it. Yeah, I pray that they’ll come here too, but God expects more of you than that—as important as those prayers certainly are. God’s stance with you is no different than His stance with Gideon. When the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon (i.e. when Jesus spoke to him), Gideon just lamented that no one was available to rescue Israel. But Jesus said, in effect, “***Look man—someone is available—and that someone is YOU! I am sending YOU! And not only that, I WILL BE WITH YOU AND TOGETHER WE’LL CHANGE THIS DISMAL STATE OF AFFAIRS, But, to do that, I need my hands and feet and mouth—which is you and the rest of my people—to get moving Gideon!***” How long will Christians in this country continue to act like Gideon did in these initial verses

of Judges 6? Fortunately, as we move on, we can see a glimmer of hope in Gideon. Pray that the Church follows suit.

Now, I know that last Sunday I was not particularly complimentary about Gideon. I pretty much presented him as he is described in the Scriptures—as a coward. But, once Jesus tells Gideon that he could, in fact, be a deliverer of his people because God would help him, Gideon at least remained open to the possibility. Gideon started to realize that he was actually conversing with the Lord, but he still had a nagging doubt. He wondered if this really was the Lord who is addressing him or some impostor? And so, he asked the Lord to provide him with a sign that would unmistakably identify His divine nature. Gideon was a bit like that father in Mark’s Gospel after Jesus drove the demon from his son—he still asked Jesus to help him with his unbelief.<sup>9</sup> This father had some faith, but still a lot of doubt. There are people in the Church today like that.

So Gideon decided to devise his own little test. He went to gather meat and bread to prepare a sacrifice to offer to this “angel of the Lord.” Gideon wanted to see if He would handle this offering as a deity would, or simply eat it up like a human being would and walk on off. If I had a time machine and could have gone back and watch all of this as it happened (not knowing how this story went), I would have bet you that Gideon would have gotten the cheapest and skimpiest bread and meat that he could have found. I would have bet you that Gideon would have been more like Cain, than Abel, and would have offered a third rate sacrifice. But, I would have been wrong. No, during a time that food was both scarce and costly, Gideon came back with the very best. To bake the bread, he brought a whole “*ephah*” of flour. That’s a lot of flour. In fact, a Hebrew “*ephah*” is equivalent to about 20 quarts of flour<sup>10</sup>—that’s would make enough bread to feed a good sized family for several days. For meat, he brought a young goat, not some old, tough and scrawny one. And though it took Gideon a good while to prepare the goat meat, and to bake all those unleavened cakes of bread, he was finally ready to present his sacrifice to Jesus. And, there came Gideon, toting a pot of goat’s broth, a basket of meat and all that bread, and laid them reverently as an offering of sacrifice before the Lord.

And, starting with verse 20, this is what happened next: <sup>20</sup> The angel of God said to him, “Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock, and pour the broth over it.” And Gideon did as he was told. <sup>21</sup> Then the angel of the LORD touched the meat and bread with the tip of the staff in his hand, and fire flamed up from the rock and consumed all he had brought. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. <sup>22</sup> When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he cried out, “Oh, Sovereign LORD, I’m doomed! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!” <sup>23</sup> “It is all right,” the LORD replied. “Do not be afraid. You will not die.” <sup>24</sup> And Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and named it Yahweh-

Shalom (which means “**the LORD is peace**”). The altar remains in Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer to this day. Judges 6:20-24 (NLT2)

This fire that consumed Gideon’s bread and meat offering reminds us of something reported in 1 Kings 18 when God helped Elijah defeat the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. It was then that God gave a similar demonstration to the people on the Mount of Carmel by sending fire from the sky to consume a water filled altar that Elijah had constructed. And Elijah followed this up by eradicating these pagan prophets, all to the great dismay of the wicked Queen Jezebel. Isn’t it remarkable how many times that God has to remind people that He is the only God? And here, God does it again with the sudden consumption of Gideon’s offering by fire and the immediate disappearance of this mysterious visitor into thin air. And these miracles were sufficient signs to convince Gideon that he had, indeed, seen and spoken with God—in the form of His pre-incarnate Son. But, because of that, Gideon was certain that he was doomed to die.

You see, it was a Jewish belief that any human being who peered upon the face of God would surely die. But, Gideon, like the world in which he lived—and like our world today—tended to see everything in a distorted, backwards way that was so very different than what God intended. Jesus had not been sent to give Gideon as a sign of death, but rather had come to give him and the people Israel the gift of life. Jesus had come for the purpose of equipping Gideon to rid the land of Baal worship and to call the people back to God. Jesus came to Gideon for the very same reason that would be stated more than 800 years later in John 3:16—“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (KJV) It’s the same reason that He died on the Cross for our distorted, backwards and evil world which we have created by our own sins.

And remarkably, Gideon—having witnessed these miraculous signs—did a very surprising thing. Although his faith wasn’t yet complete (as we will see next week, he still had a ways to go on that), nevertheless, he had definitely turned a significant corner when it came to trusting in God—because the unexpected thing that he did was this: Gideon built an altar in honor of the God of Israel. And not only that, he also named this place, “**Yahweh-Shalom,**” which means “***the Lord is peace!***” And this name reflected an inner peace that Gideon was beginning to experience, yet couldn’t quite explain. I expect that if Paul had been around way back then, he have provided the explanation by telling him that, “Letting your sinful nature control your mind [as Gideon had been doing] leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.” Romans 8:6 (NLT2) And Jesus Himself could well have

added: “Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.” John 14:27 (TEV)

What a powerful message that is for us today. Those who trust in the things of this world, but lack faith in God—well, their unbelief brings only uncertainty, fear and worry in life. Gradually, Gideon was starting to see that. He was beginning to trust God and understand that the Lord could use him to serve His plan, not because Gideon was anything special—indeed, he was cowardly by nature, and weak to boot. But, God was able to do amazing things, even with the likes of Gideon, for no other reason than He is God.<sup>11</sup> And how can this be? Well, quite simply, because there is ***nothing too difficult that God can’t handle it.***<sup>12</sup> And when we accept that fact, it brings ***great peace*** into our lives. When you accept the peace that God has to offer, you exchange it for many things that seek to drag you down. God gives you His peace and takes away your feelings of doubt. God takes away the things that worry you and helps you to see them for what they really are—as things that you unnecessarily allow to drain away life, when you should lay those burdens and fears at the Savior’s feet—allow Him to deal with them—trust Him to do that.

All those worries that had plagued Gideon while he had been thrashing wheat down in that winepress were just now beginning to dissipate as he began to open up his heart to God. Can you do that? Well, the plain answer is—yes, of course, you can! But the real question remains: ***Will you do that?*** Will you recognize Jesus as ***“the Lord of peace”***? Will you cast away those worries and allow Him to take care of things for you? Gideon did, and it made all the difference.

So, let me close with this. We can take two lessons away from this part of Gideon’s story. Lesson No. 1—don’t make excuses that you are too weak to witness for Jesus, for God loves to make the weak strong witnesses for Him. And, lesson No. 2—Get out of that dark, dusty winepress where you are thrashing over and over, again and again, all your fears and worries of life; lay them before Jesus and take up His peace. Now you might say that it’s just too hard to apply these two lessons in the society in which we live—***“Christians are just so outnumbered here in America,”*** you might complain. But you know, just last month, faithful Christians in France openly applied both of these two lessons simultaneously in a French culture that has largely turned away from God. A far higher percentage of the French population has abandoned God, than in America. In fact, in France, the number of ***“NONES”*** (that’s “N-O-N-E-S, not “N-U-N-S” as in Catholic sisters) . . . the number of ***“NONES”*** (referring to ***“non-religious”*** people) has grown to a significant majority of 58%. That’s up considerably from just 27% forty years ago. So, being weak in numbers and yet still standing up for Jesus Christ and embracing His peace is a far greater challenge for French Christians than anything facing us in this country. And yet on May 25<sup>th</sup>,

Christians in several major cities throughout France took openly to the streets in what they boldly proclaimed to be “**A March for Jesus.**”<sup>13</sup> Despite their weakness in numbers, Christ gave them great strength to witness to those in their communities that, even in the winepress of French society, He is the **Way, the Truth and the Life**<sup>14</sup>. They didn’t make excuses. They didn’t sit in their pews and wring their hands. Rather, they got on their **feet** and marched for Christ. And they used their **hands** as well, because in those hands they carried and waved signs—signs that showed their love for Jesus and the surrender of their worries to His care. Do you know what those signs said? In French, they read: “**La Paix Du Christ**” [Lah Pay Doo Crease], and in English—“**The Peace of Christ.**” Could you do that?—be the hands and feet of Jesus, like those outnumbered Christians there in France? If you are willing to do that and surrender your life to Jesus Christ, then you’ll be never be stuck in that winepress again, for **La Paix Du Christ** [Lah Pay Doo Crease] will yours—and for you, like Gideon, life will never be the same again.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
June 23, 2019  
Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor  
All Rights Reserved ©2019

---

<sup>1</sup> Judges 6:13 (NLT2) “Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The LORD brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.”

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12, 15, 18, 27 (NLT2) <sup>12</sup> The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. . . <sup>15</sup> If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. . . <sup>18</sup> But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. . . <sup>27</sup> All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 51:15 (NLT2) Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you.

<sup>4</sup> New Living Translation Study Bible, Note on “Gideon—Weak Believer,” page 462.

<sup>5</sup> PBS, “The Great American Read: Heroes” (9-28-18), quoted in Preachingtoday.com.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 4:15 (NLT2) This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 40:29-31 (NLT2) <sup>29</sup> He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. <sup>30</sup> Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. <sup>31</sup> But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:3 (NLT2) I will give you all the proof you want that Christ speaks through me. Christ is not weak when he deals with you; he is powerful among you.

<sup>9</sup> Mark 9:24 (NLT2) The father instantly cried out, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!”

<sup>10</sup> New Living Translation Study Bible, Footnote on Judges 6:19, page 463.

<sup>11</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Available (Judges)*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2003), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 115-116.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 32:17 (TEV) Sovereign LORD, you made the earth and the sky by your great power and might; nothing is too difficult for you.

---

<sup>13</sup> “Thousands of Christians March for Jesus in France,” Evangelical Focus, <http://evangelicalfocus.com>, June 17, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> John 14:6 (NLT2) Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”