

## You Really Need a King:

*Gideon: A Mighty Weak Man of Valor* (Judges 6:1-40)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on September 25, 2016

### Introduction

- ❖ In the spring of 1855, a young 18-year-old boy moved from his rural town to the big city of Boston. He was uneducated, having only completed the 6th-grade. But his uncle owned a shoe store and offered a job selling shoes. On one condition, that he attend his uncle's church.
  - ▶ There he met a Sunday School teacher who took an interest in him. He visited the store one day and found the young man in the backroom stocking shoes. Right then and there, he shared the gospel, and as a result, the young man was converted.
  
- ❖ Soon after he applied to join the church, and it was obvious that he was completely ignorant of basic biblical truths. When asked a diagnostic question of what has Christ done for you that entitles him to your love, his response was, *“I don't know. I think Christ has done a great deal for us; but I don't think of anything in particular as I know of.”*
  - ▶ That didn't inspire much confidence that he'd been truly converted. So they put him through a yearlong class teaching him the basics of the faith. And even at the second interview, he still struggled to articulate his convictions, but by then it was obvious to the church that he was a genuine, committed Christian.
  
- ❖ Yet no one thought much of this young shoe salesman. He was just one of many new converts. **But little did they know that they had accepted into membership a young man who would grow up to be the famous American evangelists, Dwight L. Moody.**
  - ▶ D.L. Moody was the Billy Graham of the 19th-century. He had no formal training. He was unconventional. Unlike evangelists of his day, he didn't exude charisma, and he preached simple half-hour messages (considered short in those days). His grammar was unpolished, and his pronunciation was poor.
    - When we look at him – when he looked at himself in the mirror – staring back is an inarticulate shoe salesman with a 6th grade education. That doesn't inspire confidence to think he's going to do any mighty works for the LORD.
  
- ❖ **But when God looks at a D.L. Moody or a Gideon in this morning's passage, he sees beyond what we can see.** He doesn't see a shoe salesman. He sees an evangelist. He doesn't see a young man hiding in a winepress. He sees a mighty man of valor. **God sees what a man can be after he gets through with him.**
  
- ❖ I believe there's a word from the Lord here for you. **I believe some of you are preordained to accomplish mighty deeds for God.** You're suppose to perform great acts of gospel service. But something is hindering you at this moment. Maybe it's a circumstance out of your control. But more likely it's something in you. **It's self-doubt.** It's the inability to see beyond your weaknesses and limitations. You're ruling yourself out already.
  - ▶ **At the same time, there are others here trying to disciple someone** – maybe a child, a small group member, a friend – **and you see so much potential in them to do great things for God, but they don't share that vision.** They doubt themselves. They doubt their ability to be of any use to God and his kingdom.

- ❖ That's why we need to study Gideon and his story. It spans a few chapters, so we're going to tackle it in three messages. Today we're going to focus on chapter 6, and I've divided it into four parts: 1) Seeing our sin, 2) Seeing our potential, 3) Attending to your heart and home, and 4) Attending to the Word of the LORD.

### Seeing Our Sin

- ❖ Our first section covers vv1-10, and **here the emphasis is on the importance of seeing our sin.** The chapter starts with the people of God falling right back into the sin cycle. It just says they did evil in the sight of the LORD, but as we read along we discover that it's the same evil as before. They're whoring after Canaanite gods – Baal, the Canaanite storm god, in particular. This time v1 says the LORD gave them up into the hands of the Midianites.
  - ▶ We're told the Midianites, along with others, would wait until Israel had harvested their crops, done all the hard work, and then swoop in, take as much as they want and ravage the land. It went on for seven long years. It got so bad that the Israelites were forced to hide in caves what little crops they could salvage.
- ❖ So we read in v6, *“And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD.”* How does the LORD respond? In previous cycles it would say, *“And the LORD raised up so and so to deliver them”*. **But here they cry out for a deliverer and the LORD sends a preacher – a prophet with a word from the LORD.**
  - ▶ Look at v8, *“<sup>8</sup>the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery. <sup>9</sup>And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. <sup>10</sup>And I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.’ But you have not obeyed my voice.””*
- ❖ Let's break down this prophet's sermon. He's got a three-point outline. **The first point is to remind them of how their mighty God graciously saved them in the past.** In vv8-9, the prophet recounts the events of the Exodus, of how God is merciful, of his power and ability to deliver them from the hands of the mightiest nations of their day. **The implication is that if God did this in the past, then he could do the same in the present.** He could easily deliver them from the hands of the Midianites as he did to the Egyptians. So if he hasn't done so for the last seven years, God must have a reason.
- ❖ That leads to the second point in the first half of v10. **He reminds them that I am your God and we have a covenant together that demands your sole devotion.** You shall have no other gods before me. To *“not fear the gods of the Amorites”* means to not worship them. It's using the word *fear* not in sense of being scared of the gods but in the sense of revering them, worshipping them. **But that leads to the third point, the climax of the sermon, “But you have not obeyed my voice.”** You did the opposite. You feared foreign gods. You bowed down to them. You've broken covenant with me.

- ❖ **The whole point is that covenant-breakers should not be surprised at what's happening.** It makes complete sense that God gave them into the hands of the Midianites. **It wasn't an impulsive, rash decision on the LORD's part.** He wrote out these very consequences within the covenant he made with Israel. He gave plenty of warning.
  - ▶ Listen to what the covenant says. This is out of **Deuteronomy 28**. It says if Israel disobeys the voice of the LORD and chases after other gods, then she will be cursed. *“You shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you. . . . You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit. <sup>31</sup>Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat any of it. Your donkey shall be seized before your face, but shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, but there shall be no one to help you.”* (28:29-31) That's pretty much what's happening to them. God is keeping his word.
  
- ❖ Do you see what's happening? **Israel just wanted some relief.** They're crying out for relief. *“It's too much! They're taking too much and leaving us with too little. Help us. Relieve us.”*
  - ▶ Now God could easily do it. He did it before with Egypt. He did it earlier in the book with the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Moabites, and the Mesopotamians. So he could easily deliver them. And he will. **But first he wants them to understand why they're in this mess.** So he first sends a preacher before sending a deliverer.
  
- ❖ Up to this point in the book, they've already gone through four sin cycles. **It's clear Israel has yet to experience genuine repentance that produces genuine, lasting change.** No doubt they're experiencing remorse. They're experiencing regret. But those reactions are not the same as genuine repentance.
  - ▶ **But before we can repent of sin, we have to be convicted of sin. We have to see our sin clearly for what it is.** That's why God sends a prophet first. If he just gave relief, if he just took care of the Midianites and got rid of them, there's a good chance his people would've learned nothing and would've remained stuck in a cycle of sin.
    - They probably would've drawn the conclusion that it was all a coincidence. They wouldn't have been confronted with their idolatry or covenant-breaking. **So God, in his goodness and wisdom, wants his people to comprehend their sin before they're comforted and relieved of its consequences.**
  
- ❖ I believe his motive is the same today. Some of you find yourself under the heavy hand of the LORD. You're in a mess. You're filled with regret. **You've tried to move in a new direction, but you keep falling back into the same patterns of sinfulness with no real progress to show for.** You feel stuck in a cycle of sin.
  - ▶ **It's likely because you're responding with regret and not repentance.** You regret the mess that you're in, but you're not yet willing to see what's at the root of your troubles. You have yet to confront and repent of the sin and idolatry in your heart.

- ❖ God could easily bring you relief. He could easily take care of your problems. But what good is it if you fall right back into a cycle of sin? **God wants you to see – to clearly see the reality of your sinfulness that it might produce in you godly sorrow leading to genuine repentance and genuine life change** (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10).
  - ▶ This is why the LORD expects us to regularly sit under the preaching of his Word and to make it one of our highest priorities in our discipleship to Christ. **The Israelites wanted God to vanquish the occupying forces, but he wanted them to hear a sermon first.** To let the preached Word expose the sin and idolatry in human hearts.

### Seeing Our Potential

- ❖ Now go back to v10. If you think about it, when you get to the end of v10 you're expecting a "Therefore..." You're expecting God to pronounce judgment. He has every right and reason to destroy them. But the sermon abruptly ends, and instead in v11 we're introduced to the angel of the LORD, who approaches our next judge.
  - ▶ **This leads to our second section which covers vv11-24 where the emphasis now is on seeing our potential.** This becomes evident as we consider this encounter between Gideon and the angel of the LORD.
- ❖ Before we begin, **I think it's important to recognize that this angel of the LORD is none other than God.** It's what we call a theophany, a visible earthly manifestation of God. It's more obvious later in the passage, but even in v14 the author of Judges identifies the angel of Yahweh as Yahweh himself (cf. 2:1-5; 13:21-22). **Most commentators suggest that the angel of the LORD is actually a pre-incarnate appearing of the Son of God.** That means Jesus himself has come to find Gideon.
- ❖ Now if we look at Gideon with naked eyes, all we see is the youngest son of Joash the Abiezrite hiding from Midianite invaders inside a winepress as he was threshing wheat. Normally you'd do that on a threshing floor situated on a hill where there's a consistent breeze. You'd toss the wheat in the air and let the wind to blow away the lighter chaff.
  - ▶ But here it says Gideon is beating the wheat with a stick (suggesting he didn't have much to begin with) and he's hiding inside a sheltered winepress. This is not a picture of confidence. **It's a picture of a defeated man.**
- ❖ That's what makes what God says in v12 so ironic. Look at it, "*And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."*" Considering the circumstances, you might think the angel of the LORD is being sarcastic. It's like calling a really big guy "Tiny" or calling a foolish friend "Einstein".
  - ▶ Is Jesus mocking him? Is he making fun? **No, unlike us, the LORD doesn't see Gideon merely as he is – but as he could be if serving in the strength he supplies.** It's like how God could look at a childless Abram and call him Abraham, which means "the father of many". Or how he could look at an impetuous Simon and call him Peter, which means "the rock". Or how he sees the arrogant Saul of Tarsus and calls him Paul, meaning "little".

- ❖ God saw Gideon and saw a mighty man of valor. Like I said, God sees what you can be after he gets through with you. **And sometimes the hardest thing – even though is the most important thing – is to believe what God calls you, even if you can't see it yourself.**
  - ▶ When God calls you “*beloved*”, I know you don't see it. You stare in the mirror and see someone so wicked, so faithless, so undeserving of God's love. He calls you “*my child*” but all you see is an unwanted orphan. God calls you “*my faithful servant*” but all you see are your inadequacies and inabilities.
  
- ❖ I know you don't see it, much less feel it. But the LORD never lies. He's not kidding. **He sees what you can be if he's in your life. He sees your fullest potential with him in your life.** Did you notice what the LORD said to Gideon before he called him “*O mighty man of valor*”? He said, “*I am with you.*” On your own you're nothing. You're just a coward in a winepress. **But if the LORD is with you, you're a mighty man or woman of valor.**
  - ▶ I wonder if you believe this. I know Gideon had a hard time. He had a hard time seeing past his circumstances. Look at v13, “*And Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian.*”
  
- ❖ Gideon is doubtful. From where he stands it looks as if the LORD has forsaken them. But what he fails to see is that it's Israel that has forsaken the LORD. God hasn't abandoned them. **Putting you through the wringer – letting you suffer under the consequences of your sin – that's not how God forsakes you.** If he were going to forsake you, he would just leave you alone. He'd let you go on your way. He wouldn't even bother with you.
  - ▶ This is not abandonment. This is God drawing nearer. This is God raising up a deliverer. Look at v14. He tells Gideon to, “*Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?*”
    - Again Gideon's instinct is to doubt. He recounts all the reasons why God must have mistaken him for someone else. Look at v15, “*And he said to him, “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.”*” And what's the LORD's response? “*And the LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.”*” (v16)
  
- ❖ God counters with another promise to be with him. It's what he said in v12. It's literally the same thing he said to Moses when Moses questioned if he was the right man for the job (Ex. 3:12). “*I will be with you.*” It's the same thing he said to Joshua after Moses died and the mantle of leadership fell on him (Josh. 1:5). “*I will be with you.*”
  - ▶ And it's the same promise the LORD ends with in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:20). “*Behold, I am with you always.*” **The Christian may have no answers to the *what, when, why, or hows of life* – but you've got the *who* answered.** And that's enough. The LORD will be with me. That's all Gideon needed to know.

- ❖ But Gideon is not so easily convinced. In v17, he asks for a sign to prove that it's really the LORD making all these promises. So he goes about preparing a meal. He's instructed to set the meal on a rock, and then the LORD makes fire spring up from the rock and consume everything. Then it says the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.
  - ▶ And now Gideon knows without a shadow of doubt that this is the LORD, and he thinks he's about to die. *"Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."* (v22) The LORD has to comfort him in v23 saying, *"Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."* <sup>24</sup>*Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace."*
- ❖ Do you find it strange that Gideon would react this way? Do you wonder why he freaked out? But I guess the real question is, "Why don't we?" **Christians talk about being in the presence of God all the time. And we just take it for granted.** But the reality is that we too have come into the presence of the same mighty and fearful God. **And the only reason we haven't been struck dead is because of the mercy that extends from the cross of Christ.**
  - ▶ For those of you who have yet to trust Jesus for your salvation, mercy means your judgment has been delayed giving you more time to believe on Christ. And for those of you who have, mercy means your judgment has already been carried out on Christ himself. He is your Peace.

### Attending to Your Heart and Home

- ❖ And if you're at peace with the LORD, then you're ready to serve the LORD. That was the case for Gideon. But before he could go out and deliver Israel, he had to take care of matters much closer to home. **This moves us along to our third section in vv25-35 where the emphasis is on attending to your own heart and home.**
  - ▶ The point here is that before we can be of service to God and his kingdom, we first have to confront the idols in our own lives, in our own homes, and tear them down. **The LORD won't share any space whatsoever. He won't share space in your heart.** He aims to dethrone and demolish any idols he finds there.
- ❖ That's what the LORD commands Gideon to do. Another ironic aspect of this story is that God's chosen deliverer lives in a home that has on its property the town's only shrine to Baal. His dad Joash was either a priest or someone who just superintended the shrine.
  - ▶ So maybe that's why the LORD chose Gideon. He tells him to take two of his father's bulls, use them both to demolish the altar dedicated to Baal, and cut down the pole dedicated to Asherah. Then use the stones to build a new altar dedicated to Yahweh, use the wood from the Asherah pole, and sacrifice one of the bulls to the LORD.
- ❖ It says in v27 that Gideon does it, but it also says, *"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."* I know some criticize him for that and wish he were more courageous. But I think the fact he obeyed while still afraid is the whole point. **It suggests that faithfulness to the LORD doesn't require fearlessness but simple obedience.** It's not about obeying without fear but obeying in spite of fear.

- ❖ I know God has called you to do some scary things. **It's scary to dethrone an idol in your heart or in your home.** Especially if it's a person or passion or pursuit that's been controlling you for some time. Especially if you've built up a whole life and identity around it. But your obedience shouldn't wait for your fear to go away. **I'd argue that God is more honored when you obey anyway, even though you feel very much afraid.**
- ❖ Now Gideon was right to fear. He accurately predicted how all the town folk would react. The next morning they discover what happened and who did it, and they demand that he die for his sins. But his father Joash surprises us all by challenging everyone to let Baal defend himself. Let him fight for himself. **If Baal is really as powerful as everyone says he is, then let him defend the honor of his own name.**
  - ▶ Of course he can't because he doesn't exist. And the stark irony is that the LORD does, and throughout this whole book he's been doing just that. He's been fighting and defending his own name. **And now Gideon is a living reminder.** Every day they would see Gideon alive and well, walking to the store, running errands, and they're reminded of Baal's impotency and Yahweh's power. **He was a walking, talking, breathing testimony to the truth that Yahweh is the one true God.**
- ❖ Christian, make that your aim. **Aim to be such a Christian with such a reputation that your colleagues and classmates look at you and they're reminded of the impotency of the gods they're constantly chasing.** And at the same time, may your life be a constant reminder of the power and grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Attending to the Word of the LORD**

- ❖ Let's wrap up by considering our fourth section in vv36-40, **where the emphasis is on attending to the word of the Lord.** Prior to this, starting in v33, the Midianites arrive once more to ravage the land, but this time things are different.
  - ▶ This time the Spirit of God clothes Gideon like a robe (cf. Gen. 28:20; Isa. 59:17) and empowers him to be the deliverer Israel needs. **But first he needs a help overcoming his constant issue of self-doubt.** He needs assurance, so he throws out a fleece.
- ❖ You might be familiar with this story. Gideon says to the LORD, "If I'm really your deliverer, then do something for me. I'll lay out this fleece of wool, and in the morning, please have the fleece be wet by the dew but the ground around it dry." And it happened just like that.
  - ▶ But that's not enough for Gideon. He asks for an even more miraculous sign. Since wool naturally soaks up water, this time he wants the LORD to keep the fleece dry and the ground all around it wet. That would be an even stronger sign.
- ❖ **Now this is one of the more well-known aspects of Gideon's story, and it's usually taught in relation to decision-making and discerning God's will.** So Christians have been taught that one way to see God's guidance in making a decision is to throw out a fleece.

- ❖ We're encouraged to pray like Gideon: Lord, if you want me to change my career path, then let me secure an interview by the end of this week. God, if it's your will for me to date him, make him text me by midnight. Lord, should I share the gospel with this colleague of mine? If he stops by my cubicle then I'll know it's a yes. But if not, then I'll take it as a no.
- ❖ That's how a lot of Christians try to seek God's guidance. It's how they discern his will. And they justify it with our text. **But I hope you realize that this has nothing to do with seeking God's guidance or figuring out his will.** Notice how Gideon repeats the phrase, "*As you have said*" at the end of both v36 and v37.
  - ▶ So he acknowledges that he knows exactly what God said. He knows exactly what God expects of him. **It's not an issue of knowing God's will but of trusting his will.** It's an issue of whether or not Gideon will obey that will.
    - That means Gideon's actions are not to be imitated. He's not showing us a technique for decision-making. **He's demonstrating how we shouldn't respond when God's Word clearly commands us to do something.**
- ❖ I don't want to be too hard on Gideon because I know we do the same. **Many times we know what God's will is, but we fear the results of obeying that will.** We know marrying that person would be wrong. We know doing what our boss quietly asked us to do would be a sin.
  - ▶ **It's not that we don't know what to do in these situations. It's just that we fear what might happen if we do what God commands.** Putting out a fleece ends up demonstrating our doubt. It exposes our fears. It's not something to imitate.
- ❖ **Instead we ought to own up to our doubts and confess to God our fears. And ask him for greater faith to trust him more.** And take comfort in what I think are the most amazing words in this chapter. It's there in v40, even after Gideon continued to doubt the word of the LORD, it says, "*and God did so that night.*"
  - ▶ It's amazing how God didn't lash out in holy anger. He condescended. He was gentle and patience towards a mighty weak man of valor. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. So don't hesitate to approach him even with all your fears and doubts.