

The Story – Gideon

We are back to our series The Story. Turn with me to Judges 6. Three Sundays ago we talked about Joshua and the battle of Jericho. This morning we jump ahead from the book of Joshua to the book of Judges. Joshua and his generation had tried to possess the land God had given them. They were supposed to defeat and drive the Canaanites out of the land. Remember God was judging the Canaanites because of their immorality and their worship practices which included child sacrifice. The problem was, while Joshua and his generation defeated a lot of the Canaanites, there were numerous people and cities that were left untouched. As a result, the Israelites were corrupted by these people. They began to compromise, marrying the Canaanites and adopting their gods, their worship practices and their values. As the book of Judges opens, Joshua is dead and the people are now on their own without a national leader. Sadly, there is one verse that summarizes where we are in the book of Judges and in Israel's history. Referring to Joshua and his generation the bible says, **“After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord...They forsook the Lord...they followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them.”** Judges 2:10-12

God's people, the people called by his name, who were supposed to live holy lives and serve the Lord, have forgotten God. They don't know him, they don't know anything about him, they don't know what he did for their fathers and grandfathers, delivering them from Egypt, and providing for them in the desert. They start living just like the wicked people around them. As a result, God allows the Israelites to fall victim to their enemies. They sin against God and God allows raiders to come in and plunder the Israelites. These marauding groups steal their food, their tools, their weapons, their wives and children. As a result, the Israelites cry out to God. They recognize their sinfulness and their mistakes, repent and ask for God's help. God answers and sends them a deliverer the bible calls a judge. This is not like a courtroom judge. This is more like a military leader, someone to lead them against their enemies. God delivers the people through this judge and then there is a period of peace.

The book of Judges covers a period of about 400 years. Sadly, during that time God has to send them judges to deliver them over and over again because they keep going through these cycles of sin, then oppression by the enemy, then repentance, then deliverance, then it starts all

over again. They can't seem to get it right, to live consistent, holy lives, obedient and pleasing to God.

One of the judges that I have always loved to preach about is Gideon. His story is found in Judges 6. The Israelites are in one of those cycles. They have sinned against God and for seven years the Midianites have been tormenting them. The Midianites would come from the East, sweeping down like a plague of locusts, invade the land, steal everything they could steal and then leave them destitute, starving, broken. Interestingly, the Midianites were apparently the first to use the camel in warfare. For seven years it happened repeatedly. The people finally cried out to God and God decides to raise up a judge, a deliverer. The person he chooses is hardly the guy we would choose. His name is Gideon.

The story opens with Gideon hiding from the Midianites, threshing wheat in a wine press. I don't know anything about threshing wheat, but I'm pretty sure you thresh it on a threshing floor, in a wide open space where the wind blows away the chaff. You don't thresh it in a wine press! Gideon is hardly a picture of bravery and courage when the angel of the Lord appears to him and says, "**The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.**" Gideon is thinking, "boy have you got things confused. First of all, the Lord isn't with us. If he was, would I be hiding from the Midianites threshing wheat in a winepress? Secondly, there is nothing mighty or 'warrior-esque' about me." The angel tells Gideon that he is to go in the strength he has and save Israel from the Midianites. "What strength? I come from a long line of cowards. The tribe of Manasseh may have a lot of territory, but my family is the weakest family in the tribe and I'm the least of my family. I was voted most likely to fold under pressure. I'm not your guy, trust me! I can't save Israel. I can't even save this little bit of grain from the Midianites."

The angel tells him, "**The Lord will be with you and together you will strike down the Midianites.**" Gideon prepares some food for the angel and then, insecure and uncertain, he asks the angel for a sign that this is really God talking to him. The angel touched the food with his staff and fire consumed the meat and bread and then the angel disappeared from his sight. He is frightened by what he has seen and yet I think Gideon is still thinking, "if you could just send me a sign. I want to be sure this is God calling me."

Gideon eventually is convinced it's the Lord. He sends out a call for men to come help him fight the Midianites and 32,000 frightened, desperate men respond. God tells him he has too many men. "Really? Too many to fight the Midianites who have troops beyond numbering?"

Gideon says, anyone that is frightened can go home and 22,000 men leave. Not exactly reassuring is it? God says, 10,000 is still too many. God has Gideon whittle the troop down to 300 guys. It's a wonderful story in Judges 7. God tells Gideon they are going to defeat the Midianites using trumpets and empty jars with torches hidden in the jars. Gideon divides the men into three companies of 100 each. At his command, coming from three different directions, they blow the trumpets, break the empty jars exposing the bright torches and shout, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon." Disoriented by this sudden sound and light show, the Midianites jump up and run for their lives. In the dark and the confusion the Midianites fight against each other and Gideon and his men win the battle.

If you are still following along with us on the reading guide, then you know the story and you even know the rest of the story and the sad ending to the story of Gideon. However, let me point out four things in this story that I believe the Lord wants us to hear.

God chooses unlikely people – like you and me! Gideon was not on anyone's "most likely to succeed" list. There was nothing about him that would make you think he would be a military leader. By his own admission he was the least of his family. Judges 6:27 tells us Gideon was afraid of his own family as well as the men of the town. He wasn't brave, he was insecure and full of doubt and questions. All the way through the story God is having to encourage him, reassuring him he really is with him. But God saw something in Gideon the rest of us couldn't see. God saw it and chose him in order to call the best out of Gideon.

God sees something in you today that perhaps no one else can see! He sees potential in you. He knows what you can become, what you can accomplish, even if no one else sees it. Even if everyone else in your family or in the church tells you you'll never make it, you'll never amount to anything – even if everyone else tells you you can't do it, God sees what can be. He is telling you that his call makes the difference.

God may not be choosing you because you are brave and strong. Like Gideon, he may be calling you because you are weak and frightened, but he knows you will rely upon him and trust him. God chose you because he can use you. God is choosing you to change things in your family. God is choosing you to make a difference in the lives of your friends. You know that saying, "if not you, then who? If not now, then when?" God is choosing you. Unlikely, never been chosen before, overlooked by everyone else, but God sees something in you. God chooses

unlikely folks like you and like me to do his work, to accomplish his purposes. God chooses you! Here is the second thing:

Fold your “I can’t” into God’s “I will.” Gideon just sees the impossibility of the task. He asks, **“But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family.”** **The Lord answered, “I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites together.”** In response to “Lord, how can I? I can’t.” God says, “I will.” “I will be with you.” You’ve heard it before. It’s not so much about your ability as it is your availability! Are you available to God? Are you willing to be used by God? If you are, God says he will be with you. He will work with you and through you. Judges 6:34 says, “Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.” God makes the difference by his Spirit. Three hundred men can’t defeat an army of Midianites, but 300 men and God can put any army to flight.

You can’t win the battles you are facing in your life on your own, but you and God together can conquer any devil, any demon, any addiction, any challenge. You can’t but God can. Fold your “I can’t” into God’s “I will” and believe him, trust him. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Remember, the God you serve said, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Nothing is too difficult for me.” The third thing I want you to see:

Obey God. Regardless! We saw this with Joshua at Jericho. God’s methods and his strategy for military operations is a bit unorthodox. Marching around cities and blowing trumpets till the walls fall down, that is not your typical military strategy. Surrounding the enemy camp and then shouting, breaking jars, waving torches and blowing trumpets again, yeah, that’s not high on the military strategy either. Neither is sending out a kid with a sling shot against a giant or a dozen other stories in the bible. But what we learn is, God’s ways are not our ways. God has a plan and a purpose and we need to trust him, obey him and then leave the results to God. He knows what’s best. He knows what we need. If it doesn’t look like what we expected or what we planned, trust him anyway. Obey God because ultimately, that is the path that leads to victory, the path that leads to life and hope and peace. The wages of disobedience and sin is death the bible says, but the gift of God, the gift he gives to all that obey him, that gift is life eternal.

You hear me say it quite often, but the life we are called to is counter-cultural. The Jesus life, the Jesus filled life runs counter to the values of the American culture. It often runs counter to the politics and the economics of American culture, but we are called to obey God, regardless!

Finally, the fourth thing I felt the Lord wanted us to hear today, **It's time to break the cycle!** Before Gideon led the people against the Midianites, before the battle, there was another act of obedience, another battle that had to be fought. God told Gideon to go to his father's house and tear down the altars that his father had built to Baal and the other gods. He was to build a proper altar to the God of Israel, take the wood of the idols and their shrine and build a fire with it and offer a burnt offering of sacrifice to God. When the townspeople discovered what had happened to the idol and the shrine they were ready to kill Gideon but his father, Joash said, "Listen, if Baal is really a god, he can defend himself when someone tears down his altar. Let Baal settle the score with Gideon."

The point is this: God wasn't just concerned with Gideon defeating the Midianites and chasing them out of the territory. God didn't just want to deliver his people from oppression, he wanted Gideon to break the cycle. He wanted the people to recognize their sin and turn to God and begin to live a life of obedience to the Lord and his word. He wanted Gideon to break the cycle and call the people not just to a life of freedom from war, but to a life of obedience to God. God was calling Gideon himself to a consistent life of obedience. "Burn up the idols so you've nothing to go back to and follow God! Break the cycle Gideon." That was the challenge before him.

God is calling you, but it's not just to a moment of victory. God doesn't want you to just feel better on Sunday morning or Wednesday night. He isn't calling you to himself so you can have a better day, he is calling you to eternal life! He is calling you because he wants you to break the cycle! He isn't calling you to put on some spiritual cosmetics so you can cover up the sin that reeks havoc in your heart and life, he is calling you to break the cycle and live free. He is calling you to break the cycle of sin for your sake and if you are a parent, then for the sake of your children as well. He is calling you to obedience so you can break the cycle. No more generational adultery, divorce, addiction, bondage and sin. No more generation after generation of broken homes and families and lives. It's time for you to break the cycle! "But it's too late." No it's not. It's never too late. You can't change the past but you can start making obedient, faithful, consistent, God-honoring choices now and that will effect your present and your future and not only yours, but again if you are a parent, it will change the destiny of your children. They won't have to bear the heartbreak and disappointment you've had to bear. You can break the cycle!

“But I can’t do it. I’m not strong enough.” Remember what the second point was? Fold your “I can’t” into God’s “I will.” Gideon couldn’t do it either, but God was with him and God made it happen. God will be with you. He is going to empower you and enable you. He is here to help you make the right choices. He is here to help you make redeemed choices, maybe for the first time in your life, but it’s not too late. Are you ready to break the cycle? When Gideon said yes to God, “The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.” If you will say yes to God, I believe he will help you, his Spirit will empower you and equip you. What you can’t do on your own, God will be there to help you and it will happen. God has chosen you. He is calling you to a holy life, a new life, a consistent life and by his power you can do it. Decide today you are going to obey God, take a stand and break the cycle!