



June 20, 2021 - "Fearful Man, Faithful Follower" - Judges 6:22-40

OPEN

This is a significant weekend. We are celebrating Father's Day. And we are in "phase 2" of our provincial restart plan. Are you excited to meet people again? Be careful of "onomatomania" – the frustration caused by being unable to remember a name! Here is another definition – "an optimist is a poorly informed pessimist". At first glance, what we see about Gideon may seem like shifting from pessimism to optimism. But there is much more at play.

Do you battle with fear when deep down you want to be a faithful follower of God? Do you identify with Gideon? Do you feel under the threat of God's enemies? Do you feel inadequate? Gideon, as we know from Judges 6, was fearful but became a faithful follower, by God's grace.

The **problem** (6:1-10) - God's people were living with the consequences of disobedience...they cowered in fear from marauding Midianites.

The **person** (6:11-21) - God called Gideon, weak though he was, to lead Israel to victory against their enemies. Though Gideon initially rejected God's call, he came around. First, he had to overcome the lie that God had failed Israel. Secondly, Gideon had to abandon the lie that he was not useful to God.

Today, we see further **preparation**. It is natural to focus on Gideon. After all, the story builds towards an epic battle (chapter 7) from which he emerged as a hero who "through faith conquered kingdoms" (Hebrews 11:32-33). We must see God's expectations, not just how Gideon acted. In Judges 6:22-40 there are four divine expectations that shift us from **fearful** to **faithful**.

DIG

[1] Reverence for the holiness of God – vv. 22-26

At the conclusion of Gideon's call, he had a powerful encounter with the "angel of the Lord" and feared for his life. But God assured Gideon of His peace and safety (v.23). As a result, Gideon honored God with an altar that he named "Jehovah Shalom" (v.24).

This reminds us of Moses's burning bush experience (see Exodus 3:1 – 4:17) or Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-19).

Reverence for God's holiness also required action. God told Gideon to tear down the altar of Baal (a Phoenician deity) and the Asherah pole (a Canaanite fertility goddess) – see vv. 25-26. He was to sacrifice the bull used to tear down the altar and burn the wood from the pole. This was an act of purification and returning to revere God.

[2] Realignment with the glory of God – vv. 27-32

Calibrating is aligning an instrument to a non-negotiable standard. This is what had to occur for God's people. Though Gideon obeyed God's instruction, he did so fearfully at night (v. 27). What was the result? The people wanted to kill Gideon! Joash defended him, arguing Baal could take his own revenge if he was real (see Elijah's comments in I King 18:27). So, Gideon was named **Jerub Baal**, "let Baal contend".

This serves as a backhanded confirmation to Gideon's efforts to bring realignment with God's glory. This initial step of obedience – faltering though it may have been – was another step towards the victory which God would eventually bring through Gideon on the battlefield.

Do not despise small steps of obedience - before David destroyed a giant, he proved God's power while tending sheep (see I Samuel 17:34-37).

[3] Resolve for the purposes of God – vv. 33-35

The movie "[Enemy at the Gate](#)" documents the battle of Stalingrad during WWII when German Major Erwin König and Soviet sniper Vasily Zaitsev had a historic "duel". Who were Gideon's "enemies at the gate"? Ethnically they were Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples making their annual invasion (v.33). Ultimately, they represented Israel's failure to live in full possession of the land of promise (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

The "Spirit of the Lord came upon (literally, "clothed") Gideon." When he called his countrymen to arms – blowing trumpet or **shofar** – they responded. Did Gideon's defiance of Baal inspire them? More than that, God honored his initial obedience with the strength of resolve for God's future purposes.

[4] Reassurance by the grace of God – vv. 36-40

Despite all that God had done to call and confirm Gideon, reassurance was requested. This feels like a step backward. In the face of what he saw as overwhelming odds, Gideon opted to "test the waters". He asked God to make a fleece saturated but the ground dry (vv. 37-38). Then he asked God to make the fleece dry and the ground damp with dew (vv. 39-40).

Why are we exposed to Gideon's indecision? Should we follow his example? We know from other Scriptures that we should not be putting God to the test.

Rather than viewing this story from Gideon's perspective, we must see what God was doing. Notice that God was caring for Gideon's need is that God cared for him like a patient, loving Father. As Gideon looked for caring reassurance, God brought him along with patience and grace.

REFLECT

What is the take-away for us from the preparation of Gideon for the amazing victory over Midian? Well, let's be honest, we are not that different from Gideon. We also need to move from being fearful to being faithful.

Consider again what we are taught in this passage. Where are you at in this progression of growth...

Reverence for the holiness of God

Realignment with the glory of God

Resolve for the purposes of God?

Reassurance by the grace of God?

- ***Is society our problem?***

There is no question that we live in a secular society. (read "Are These Post-Christian or Pre-Christian Days" by Steve Jones in *Thrive* – [find it here](#))

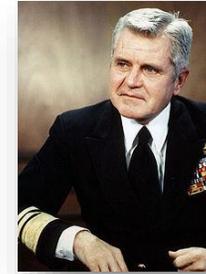
What was said of Gideon's time can be said of ours today. Through successive generations the testimony of God's grace and goodness becomes diluted (see Judges 2:10,18-19). But ultimately, it is not the spiritual vitality of our society that is the question. Much more important is what Christians believe about God and how they act on that belief!

- ***Is ability our problem?***

If Gideon's story teaches us anything, it is that God uses people quite apart from their ability. I believe that it is better wrestle with the reality of your inferiority than to rest on the myth of your ability.

I Corinthians 1:26-31 makes it clear God is not looking for the capable but those who will be responsive to His call. Followers of Jesus are the "called-according-to-His-purpose-ones" (Romans 8:28).

In his book, ***Spent Matches: Igniting the Signal Fire for the Spiritually Dissatisfied*** (Thomas Nelson, 2015), author Roy Moran writes James Stockdale, a US officer imprisoned in the Vietnam War.



When asked which prisoners didn't survive their long ordeal, Stockdale said without hesitation, "Optimists." The prisoners' use of milestones such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years to build expectation for the date of their release became their worst enemy. The rise and fall of hope led to loss of hope and, for some, loss of life... "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end – which you can never afford to lose – with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality whatever they might be."

When we are on the road from 'fearful to faithful' we simply cannot ignore our fear through some blind optimism. We must be honest about the gap between God's call and our obedience. But as we humbly acknowledge this, God will fill us with His power to prevail.

Are you ready for God to use you today?