



July 4, 2021 - “After Victory, Then What!?” - Judges 8:1-35

OPEN

“The Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program, was a U.S. program providing aid to Western Europe following the devastation of World War II. It was enacted in 1948 and provided more than \$15 billion to help finance rebuilding efforts on the continent. The brainchild of U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall, for whom it was named, it was crafted as a four-year plan to reconstruct cities, industries and infrastructure heavily damaged during the war and to remove trade barriers between European neighbors...”

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/marshall-plan-1>

It says a lot about a nation to see how they act after a military victory. Today we complete a survey of the life and leadership of Gideon. How did he act following a great victory over Midian? That is our focus for today.

Our series is, “**Gideon: the reluctant follower**”. This has highlighted God sovereignly choosing the weak to accomplish the impossible – in four scenes:

- **Marauding Midianites** *Judges 6:1-10 – God’s people living with consequences of sin*
- **Reluctant Warrior** *Judges 6:11-21 - God called Gideon to lead an army, weak though he was*
- **Hesitant Preparation** *Judges 6:22-40 – God’s purposes must be the focus, not Gideon’s weakness*
- **Miraculous Victory** *Judges 7 – God had to strip Gideon of all his self-reliance and self-effort*

So...**after this victory...then what was next!?** In Judges 8 we see the “mop up operations” following God’s incredible victory over the Midianites through Gideon’s meager band of 300.

This passage closes with the death of Gideon and reveals that whereas God’s conquest of Israel’s enemies was **completed**, it was also **complicated**.

DIG

[1] **Completing God’s victory – vv. 1-21**

What do we learn from “mopping up” done by Gideon? You see, after battles there is often misrepresentation – some effort to present a much different picture than the reality. Earliest war photos are from the Crimean War (1853-1856, Ottomans/allies vs. Russia).

*Roger Fenton’s photograph of cannonballs scattered across a Crimean battlefield...is titled, ‘Valley of Shadow of Death.’ Roger Fenton took two photographs of the valley from the same vantage point, on the same day. In the best-known photo, cannonballs are strewn across the road; in the other photo, the cannonballs are accumulated in a ditch on the left side of the road.*

<http://www.alteredimagesbdc.org/fenton>

Like Fenton’s first photo, the account found in Judges 8 is less than glorious. After God accomplished a miraculous victory through Gideon and his men, there was yet more to be accomplished.

The victory had to be fully **completed**.

This highlights additional challenges when we make ourselves available to God for Him to win victories through us. What did Gideon face?

- **Resentment – vv. 1-5**

The criticism came from the Ephraimites. This tribe appeared jealous of being left out of the initial victory over Midian. Perhaps they saw their assignment (see 7:24-25, ) as less deserving. Thankfully, Gideon’s diplomacy diffused the situation. But the lesson is clear. When God uses you significantly, resentment from others is not far away.

- **Resistance – vv. 6-21**

Gideon crossed the Jordan east, in pursuit of the Midianite army (v.4). When he asked assistance of Succoth (v.5-7) and Peniel (v.8-9). Gideon persisted and eventually caught up with the Midianite army – see vv.11-12. Then he returned and punished the resistance of his own nation – see vv.16-17.

Here is another lesson. When we are eager to obey God’s instructions, there will always be those who resist. Tragically, this is not enemy resistance, but it comes even from those in God’s household.

What is the answer? Persistence and perseverance. How is this produced? Think back to God’s patient preparation in the life of Gideon. His time of preparation (initial task of tearing down pagan altar – “Jerub-Baal” 6:32) and assurance led to a great victory.

Faithfulness must follow victory!

Standing in front of his missionary committee the man presented his case to be sent to serve in a foreign land. He was abruptly interrupted by an older minister who said, "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me."

So he worked with others to create the Baptist Missionary Society and in 1793 **William Carey** – “the father of modern missions” – went to India. His claim had been...and proved to be: “I can plod!”

*When he died at 73 (1834), he had seen the Scriptures translated and printed into forty languages, he had been a college professor, and had founded a college at Serampore. He had seen India open its doors to missionaries, he had seen the edict passed prohibiting sati (burning widows on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands), and he had seen converts for Christ. On his deathbed Carey called out to a missionary friend, "Dr. Duff! You have been speaking about Dr. Carey; when I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey - speak about Dr. Carey's God." [Read More](#)*

## [2] Complicating God's victory – vv. 22-35

In one Bible reading plan for the book of Judges we read this:

*Following the conquest of Canaan, Israel plunges into a 350-year period of national deterioration. A monotonous and deadly pattern develops: the people fall into sin; God disciplines them with foreign oppression; the people cry out in repentance; God raises up a deliverer; peace is restored. This cycle of sin repeats itself a total of seven times in the book. But God, ever faithful to His covenant people, extends His grace again and again by sending such leader as Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.*

We saw this pattern in Judges 6-7 with the oppression of Midian, the calling of Gideon, and victory. In 8:22 the people asked Gideon to set up a ruling dynasty. But how does this negative cycle repeat in Judges 8? There are two ways in which God's victory was complicated.

- **Distraction - vv. 22-27**

Gideon refused to become a king. But he did collect a “tax” of sorts and then created a ceremonial garment – an ephod – and put it on display in his hometown of Ophrah. The tragedy is expressed in verse 27 – “*all Israel prostituted themselves by worshipping it*” and it became a “snare to Gideon”!

Perhaps there was not a complete departure from worshipping God. Verse 28 tells us “*the land enjoyed peace forty years*”. However, there was permitted – even by Gideon – a terrible distraction from following God wholeheartedly.

- **Departure – vv. 28-35**

In verse 32 we learn of Gideon's death. But notice what followed: “*No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals*” (v.33). Once again, there was a complete departure from worshipping God. The Israelites dishonored God, His victory, and the servant He had chosen – see vv.34-35. There was more “flailing and failing” on the part of the Israelites.

After the victorious entrance into the land, they struggled and struggled to live abundantly – in joyful obedience and dependence upon God!?

Is there a cycle of sin that repeats itself in your life? There is always going to be greater steps of victory God wants to accomplish in your life. Let us not complicate His victory...but allow the Holy Spirit to bring it to greater completion!

## REFLECT

In their writing, William and Susan Bridges compare **change with transition**.

*Transition is different [than change]. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending you'll have to make to leave the old situation behind. Situational change hinges on the new thing, but psychological transition depends on letting go of the old reality and the old identity you had before the change took place.” (Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change, Da Capo Lifelong Books, 4th ed, 2017)*

The book of Judges covers the death of Joshua to the reign of Saul. In this “neutral zone” the Israelites lived post-wilderness and in the land of promise. Tragically, Israel defaulted to the dysfunction of their old reality – they did not transition meaningfully into the new realities which God had for them.

Cornerstone has experienced change! In 2018 we moved from SRT to Maple Woods. In 2019 we were evicted from Maple Woods. In early 2020 we entered pandemic restrictions. In later 2021 we relocated to Webster's Corners Elementary School. This year we faced restrictions again. But as of July 1 we are “back to normal”...or are we? The Bridges' model of transition consists of: **(1) letting go (2) neutral zone (3) new beginning**.

We are not in a “new beginning” as much as we are in the “neutral zone.” Let's avoid the temptation which says we can just “flip a switch” and “get back to normal”. God has provided us with a victory – now what? **After victory we must live faithfully**. This means letting go of old realities to let God work persistence and patience in us. We must live with joyful obedience and submission to God's will. But the temptation will be to default to some of the dysfunctional but familiar patterns we developed in the pandemic or earlier.

We need to wait upon God with joy, hope and expectation. William Carey said:

*EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD. ATTEMPT GREAT THINGS FOR GOD.*

This past week our Day of Prayer focused on Psalm 130. Reflect on this psalm by listening to [I Will Wait For You](#) sung by Keith and Kristyn Getty.

Mark Twain wrote, “*Facts are stubborn but statistics are more pliable*.” Do not simply become a statistic of God's victorious work...be a fact! Be “rooted and walking” in Christ...living out the reality of what He has accomplished in you!