

Judges 6

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your bibles to Judges 6.

The forty years of rest that occurred after the death of the wicked commander Sisera in chapter 5 last week eventually came to an end. In their prosperity and complacency, Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.

The book of Judges has fast forwarded through Israel's history in chapters 1-5, in fact if you do the math since the beginning of Judges to the end of chapter 5, nearly 300 years has passed. But now the book of judges slows the pace down drastically and zooms in as chapters 6-8 reveal the amazing account of Gideon.

But it all begins with another cycle of sin and slavery, disobedience and deliverance. This time Israel becomes the slave of the Midianites.

Tonight, we're only going to study chapter 6, and the title of tonight's message is An Unlikely Hero

Let's pray

1 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, 2 and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains.

The Midianites were nomadic, desert pirates. And when they went on their marauding binges, the Israelis fled to the mountains and caves for refuge.

Where did the Midianites come from? After Sarah died, Abraham married a woman named Keturah, with whom he had six sons—one of which was a boy named Midian. **Genesis 25:1 Abraham**

again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. 2 And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.

Now to keep Isaac, the son of promise, from being hassled by the sons of Keturah, Abraham sent Keturah's sons away. **Genesis 25:6 But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.**

You think that might cause some hard feelings over time? So over the years, the Midianites became enemies of Israel. Throughout Scripture, we see the sons of Midian constantly attacking the people of Israel.

3 So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. (sons of Abraham and Katura!) 4 Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. Think about how devastating this would be.

Everytime their crops were ready to be harvested, they would be utterly plundered and no food was left for the families or their livestock. And why did all of this heartache occur?

Sin.

Israel's sin made all their hard work worthless. Sin always has this affect-it robs us of what we work hard to gain.

How many accomplished people, both in the ministry and outside of ministry have we all witnessed lose everything in life because they won't turn from their sin. All that is meaningful is lost in order to gain what they believe will satisfy them. It's heartbreaking.

Now there's a detail we can't miss: V4 as far as Gaza means it was the whole land, from Jordan to the coast of the

Mediterranean Sea that was ravaged. Picture the scene-the whole land was ravaged and the inhabitants deprived of the necessities of life. Verses 5-6 give us more details...

5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it.

What made the Midianites such a fierce opponent? Midian employs a new battle weapon- the camel. Camels have been called “the ships of the desert”. They barely perspire and require little water. A camel can travel for a week, cover 300 miles, carry a load of 600 pounds, and rarely stop for food or water. Even rain won’t slow it down. And a camel’s feet are tough. They’re ideal for walking across sharp rocks and hot sand.

Compared to Jabin’s iron chariots, a herd of camels were a perfect choice for a desert warfare... long range, high mobility, quick deployment.

6 So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD. It took seven long years of being decimated by the Midianites before Israel finally cried out to the Lord.

It’s always tragic when people refuse to bow their knee...

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD because of the Midianites, 8 that the LORD sent a prophet (an unnamed prophet) to the children of Israel, who said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; 9 and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. God spoke through this unnamed prophet, reminding

Israel of all He did for them in the past. To face their current crisis, Israel needed a reminder of God's faithfulness.

10 Also I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.' "God sent this messenger to remind the Israelites where the real problem was. It wasn't that the Midianites were so strong; it was that Israel was so disobedient.

Israel thought the problem was the Midianites but the real problem was themselves.

11 Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. 12 And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!" The threshing of wheat was usually done at a higher elevation in order to allow the wind to blow the chaff away. Gideon, however, realized that every time he threshed wheat, the Midianites would swoop in and rip him off. So he threshed wheat not on a mountaintop but in a winepress, a lower spot, in a hidden area.

And look how the angel of the Lord, this being a theophany, an old testament appearance of Jesus, look at how Jesus sees Gideon-you mighty man of valor!

I wonder how many struggles we deal with daily because we don't see ourselves the way Jesus sees us?

13 Gideon said to Him, "O my lord,[fn] if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." Gideon heard about

the great works of God in the past, but he's wondering why he doesn't see the same incredible miracles?.

Notice the issue with perspective here-Gideon thought the problem was with God (now the Lord has forsaken us) – not with him and with the nation of Israel as a whole.

It was Israel that forsook God – God did not forsake Israel.

We fall into the same line of thinking sometimes don't we, where we can start accusing God of falling asleep on the job?

We'd be wise to recall the words of **Psalm 139 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;**

Try me, and know my anxieties;

24 And see if there is any wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

15 So he said to Him, "O my Lord,[fn] how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." ? Gideon didn't see himself as someone who could do great things for God. He thought of himself as insignificant, from the smallest clan in his tribe, and that he was the least in his own family.

Yet, Gideon was correct: he couldn't save Israel. But God could use a small and weak Gideon to rescue Israel.

Ever notice how God uses some of the most surprising people to accomplish His will? **2 Corinthians 2:19 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in**

weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

AND

1 Corinthians 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

16 And the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.” So Gideon asks in verse 15 ‘who am I to rescue Israel?’

But the Lord says that’s the wrong question in verse 16. “The question is: Who am I, for I will be with you.”

And that’s all we need isn’t it?

The key to serving the Lord is the same approach “it’s not who we are. It’s who You are, Lord.” It’s not about us, it’s about God.

This is the only way we can make disciples. We have nothing ourselves. Matthew 28 18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore^[fn] and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.^[fn] Jesus has the authority, He has commanded us, and He’s with us!

Gideon responds...

17-19

17 Then he said to Him, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me.

18 Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You.”

And He said, “I will wait until you come back.”

19 So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought them out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented them. In these days of famine—when bread was worth more than silver, and meat was more valuable than gold—Gideon prepares an offering!

It's a great reminder for us that worship is never a waste, no matter what it may cost us.

20-23

20 The Angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so.

21 Then the Angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

22 Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the LORD. So Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face.” Gideon panics!

23 Then the LORD said to him, “Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die.” Once Gideon realized the identity of the Angel of the Lord, he was terrified. The Angel of the Lord brought this comforting word to the terrified Gideon.

24 So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it The-LORD-Is-Peace.[fn] To this day it is still in Ophrah of the

Abiezrites. What an incredible series of events for Gideon. Don't you wonder what was running through his mind? The Lord wants me to deliver Israel from the Midianites??

25 Now it came to pass the same night that the LORD said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image[fn] that is beside it; God told Gideon before he began dealing with the men of Midian, Gideon had to deal with his own family.

If you recall, the same thing happened to Moses. On Moses' way to lead the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt to the Land of Promise, the Lord chastised Moses because he hadn't circumcised his own son.

The principle is clear, ministry begins at home.

No man can properly lead a nation, or his business, or a church, or a ministry if they don't first lead their families.

So Gideo is instructed to not only cast down the alter to Baal that his dad had...

26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down."

27 So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the LORD had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night. There are 2 schools of thought regarding these verses

- 1) Gideon wanted to be hidden by night so the judgment of his family wouldn't fall upon him, or

2) he feared that his father's household and the men of the city would prevent him from doing what needed to be done.

28-30

28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar which had been built. 29 So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."

30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it."

Ancient Israel worshipped Baal because he was thought to be the god of weather, and they relied on the weather for agricultural prosperity.

Shockingly, the hard economic times because of the Midianite oppression caused the people to worship Baal all the more, not understanding that they only made things worse by not turning to God.

31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!" 32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal,[fn] saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar." Gideon's father made a very logical argument for preserving his son's life. Since Baal was the one offended, let Baal try and defend himself.

And out of the ordeal Gideon gets a new name. He's called, "Jerubbabel" which means "Let Baal plead"

33 Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. After this big step of faith in tearing down his fathers altar, what happens next? Is it siesta time? No, it's take another step of faith time.

Imagine how scared an already frightened Gideon is now? He desperately needs some supernatural help from God. And right on cue... verse 34...

34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. Throughout the entire Old Testament and into the pages of the New Testament, we read of the Spirit of God coming upon people to empower them for service.

That's what the baptism or fullness of the Spirit is all about. It's the power of the Spirit to enable us for service for God's glory.

And notice God not only called Gideon to serve, but empowered Gideon to serve.

And we have the same promise-what God has called us to do, He has empowered us to do!

35-37

35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them. 36 So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said— 37 look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said." Gideon has seen some incredible things so far. A face-to-face encounter with the pre-incarnate Christ, the pulling

down of the alter of Baal, even Gideon's dad seems to come around. Yet Gideon still has doubts and questions. So he asks God for a supernatural sign

We can all relate to Gideon, can't we?

38 And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. 39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew." 40 And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground. Gideon wasn't entirely satisfied with the 1st miraculous sign, so he asks for a second in the laying out of the fleece.

Gideon's weak faith was still greater than no faith. Gideon is rightly included in what's commonly called the hall of faith.

Hebrews 11:32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

Now Gideon had worshiped God intensely, and boldly stood up to his entire family and neighbors. Now, as he is about to lead his countrymen in a battle in which the odds are heavily against them, he pauses to make sure he is hearing God right.

All too often when we read Judges 6, we focus only upon Gideon setting a fleece, and we forget the worship and the tearing down of the altars that came before this moment.

Having said that, however, we come to an interesting illustration that raises some practical questions about finding God's will. Is it right to put a "fleece" before God?

In Genesis 24, Abraham sent his servant, Eliezer to find a bride for his son, Isaac. To complete this assignment, Eliezer told the Lord that if a woman came to the well and offered to draw water for him and for his camels, he would know she was the chosen one.

In 1 Samuel 14, in order to determine whether it was God's will that he and his armor-bearer take on the entire Philistine army, Jonathan said, "We'll shout. If the Philistines threaten to come to us, we'll know God's not with us and we'll split. But if they challenge us to come to them, we'll know God is with us." So Jonathan and his armor-bearer made their way to the Philistine camp, let out a yell, and were immediately ordered into the camp to do battle.

Jonathan said "God is with us. Let's go get 'em!"

And the entire Philistine army was defeated.

In Isaiah 7, God Himself instructed Ahaz to ask for a sign from Him.

Remember Zacharias in **Luke 1:18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."**

19 And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. 20 But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

But all those examples are BEFORE God gave the indwelling of the HS at Pentecost.