

The Lord is with YOU • Judges 6:1-16

INTRO • Read 1 Cor. 1:26-31

1. Pop psychology was on a kick for a while with something called positive self-talk.
 - a. You were supposed to look in the mirror and compliment yourself.
 - b. Say strong, encouraging things TO yourself. [stuff to say]
 - c. It aimed at countering the negativity and criticism all too prevalent in our world.
2. As believers, we have something infinitely better. We find it right here in what Paul writes to the Cor.
 - a. Look around. From the world's perspective, we ain't much.
 - b. Not especially wise, strong, nor privileged.
 - c. The world considers us weak fools, un-sophisticated nobodies.
 - d. **But**, God chose us! Precisely because we're **NOT** all that and a box of **Cracker Jacks**.
 - e. God delights in taking those the world esteems small & useless & making something awesome with them.
 - f. So that He alone gets the glory!
3. In ourselves we're **not** strong, brilliant, sophisticated.
4. But in Christ—we're much **more** than that & a bag of **Flamin' Hot Cheetos**!
5. There's an amazing tale from the Book of Judges that illustrates all this.

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 7 yrs, 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.

1. The Book of Judges is like a broken record.
 - a. The names change, but it's the same story over and over again.
 - b. Israel is faithful and obedient so God blesses them. They prosper.
 - c. They take their prosperity for granted and become apathetic.
 - d. Apathy opens the door to immorality. They begin to worship idols.
 - e. The corruption grows, they neglect God and rebel.
 - f. He disciplines them by allowing one of their neighbors to oppress them.
 - g. They cry out to God for help. He sends a deliverer; a Judge, who defeats the oppressors & leads them back to God.
 - h. So He blesses them, and the cycle starts all over again.
2. Here, they've entered the judgment phase of the cycle for the 5th time.
3. This time, it's the Midianites who oppress them.
 - a. Midianites were nomadic shepherds living E of Israel in what is now Saudi Arabia.
 - a. While usually small autonomous groups wandering around looking for pasture,
 - b. Every once in a while, a powerful chief united them.
 - c. Then they were a terror to their neighbors.
4. Things have gotten so bad, a good part of the population has fled the towns to live in caves in the hills.

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.

1. **More** Eastern nomads pile on Israel's misery.

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. 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. ⁶ So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

1. Israel sowed their fields, but at harvest time, here come the raiders from the East yet again.
2. They took everything; crops, livestock. And this went on for 7 yrs.
3. All the reserves are gone, so at the point of starvation, FINALLY, they cry out to God.

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 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.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.’”

1. God heard their plea for help. The problem is, they aren't repentant.
2. They regretted the **consequences** of their sin, **not the sin itself**.
3. Now that they've at least turned to God, He sends a message thru an unnamed prophet.
4. He tells them WHY they suffer. They've chosen it by their rebellion.
 - a. They're lying in the bed they've made in worshipping idols.
 - b. Now that they understand the **real cause** of their distress, they know the solution.
 - c. **Repent** and turn back to God.
 - d. We know they do because of what happens next.

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.

1. Gideon belonged to the tribe of Manasseh, living in the village of Ophrah.
2. He's working away one day when an angel pops by.

¹² And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, “The Lord *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!”

1. That's an encouraging greeting!
 - a. I don't know about you but if an angel said to me, “**The Lord *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!**” I'd be pretty stoked!
 - b. Who doesn't want to be Mighty & Valorous?
 - 1) I don't even know what “valor” means, but it sounds good!
 - 2) Sounds like courage & strength. I picture a knight in shining armor.
2. But hold on a second: Where's Gideon when the angel greets him.
 - a. In a winepress, threshing wheat.
 - b. To thresh wheat, you need wind to blow the chaff away.
 - c. A winepress is in a sheltered area so wind doesn't blow debris into the vat.
 - d. A threshing floor is on top of a ridge to catch the wind. A winepress is in a valley.
 - e. You don't thresh wheat where you pressed wine.
3. But if Gideon threshed his wheat in one of the usual places, it would have been like sounding a trumpet to the Midianites to come rip him off.
 - a. They'd see him up on that ridge.
 - b. So he's toiling away in secret just to get enough grain to make a loaf of bread.
4. It takes way longer than it should have.
 - a. So he's frustrated, fed up.
 - b. Then an angel shows up, “God's with you, Stud!”
5. We can just see Gideon . . . “You talking to me?”
6. Now: Bible students. What's the usual reaction when of people when an angel shows up? Terror.
7. Not Gideon . . .

¹³ Gideon said to Him, “O my lord, 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.”

1. Whereas others are on their face when an angel appears, Gideon's all UP IN this angel's face.
2. Gideon's got what Jews call **chutzpah** = Clever daring.
 - a. Jews say chutzpah is being on trial for killing your parents,
 - b. Then throwing yourself on the mercy of the Court for being an orphan.
3. Gideon says, “God's with me, huh? Then why am I threshing wheat **in a winepress?**”
 - a. “If God's with us why isn't He doing all the stuff He did for our ancestors?”
 - b. “He worked miracles for them, but not us.”
 - c. “He's handed us over to these raiders from the East who've taken over.”

4. Do you ever wonder something similar?
 - a. You know what the Bible says: God loves you and won't forsake you.
 - b. But you're beset with trouble & say, "If God loves & is with me, why am I going through all this?"
 - c. "If He's done all the stuff the Bible says, why don't I see a shred of His power in my life?"
 - d. "I don't need the Ocean parted or to walk on Lake Casitas.

I just need some help with my marriage, my kids, my finances, my job."

5. That's a question all of us deal with at some time or another.

6. Let's see how God answered Gideon . . .

¹⁴ Then the Lord turned to him and said,

1. Turns out the Angel is none other than God Himself.

"Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

1. God's reply wasn't an **answer** to Gideon's question. It was better; it's a **solution** to the problem at hand.

2. To Gideon's challenge, "If the Lord is with us, why is bad stuff happening?"

God says, "I'll use you to end it."

1. One of the most troubling questions people ask is, "If God is all loving and all powerful, why is there evil in the world?"

a. While some use that as **convenient excuse** for **rejecting God**,

b. Those who **sincerely** want to **understand** are challenged by the Spirit to instead of sitting around arguing about it, to get up and go **do something** about evil & injustice.

1) They feed the homeless. They build shelters for low-income families.

2) They contribute to relief works & orphanages.

3) They volunteer at the local Pregnancy Center.

c. They don't sit around and debate philosophy, they become part of the solution.

d. It's the height of hypocrisy to point at the existence of evil as the reason for rejecting God, then doing nothing about that evil!

e. People charge God with the very thing they're guilty of Doing nothing about evil.

f. God's solution to the problem of evil is the Cross, & to give to this fallen world men and women whose lives have been transformed by the power of that Cross, who go forth to redress the wrongs.

1. God's response to Gideon's challenge was to **make him** the solution to the problem.

¹⁵ So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father's house."

2. Like Moses, Gideon tried to beg off his assignment.

a. He didn't see himself as qualified.

b. He wasn't lazy. Threshing wheat in a winepress proves his problem wasn't fear of hard work.

c. He simply didn't see himself as a leader or warrior.

d. In regarded himself as a nobody. And as the world reckons it; he was.

3. But that's not the way **God** saw Gideon. God saw him for who he **really was** A mighty man of valor.

a. He **was** the one to deliver Israel.

b. He was **both** a leader & warrior, though neither identity was known by him yet.

4. And so it is with us my dear brothers & sisters.

Rom 8:37 • We are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us.

1 Cor 1:30 • Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

a. It's crucial we understand that God **sees** what the work of His grace **will** accomplish in us.

b. And He **deals** with us on the basis of that.

c. We are **not** what we think we are; these dirt-suits we wear are **not** the real us.

d. The daily routine so familiar to us is **not** our real life.

e. We are sons & daughters of God. We are a bride preparing for her wedding.

g. If we could see what God sees when He looks at us IN Christ, we'd be speechless with wonder at the beauty & power.

5. When God first appeared to Gideon, He called him a mighty man of valor because He knew him better than he knew himself.

a. Gideon didn't **feel** like a mighty man. But he was.

- b. Discovering that, entering INTO that identity required a challenge big enough to call it forth.
- 6. What was true for Gideon is true for us.
 - a. God wants you to discover who you really are.
 - b. That doesn't happen by sitting on the couch, bag of Cool Ranch Doritos in 1 hand, remote in the other flipping between *North Woods Law* and *Chesapeake Shores*.
 - c. God has a challenge tailor-made just for you so you will come to know who you really are.
- 7. Gideon saw himself as less than a nobody.
- 8. God said, "NO! **YOU Gideon**, are My pick for greatness!"
 - a. This was Gideon's moment; His time and place for greatness.
 - b. You & I live at a crucial moment in history, when the world is rushing headlong toward the last days.
 - c. Never before has the challenge of standing for God been more urgent.
 - d. The day is far spent, and evening comes when the light will fail and earth will be plunged into the darkness of the Tribulation.
 - e. Now is the time for the people of God, normal, everyday believers, to rise up as mighty men & women of valor, and shine the light of Christ so the last few who need to come to faith will find their way home.

¹⁶ And the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

- 1. To Gideon's claim he was a nobody, God said, "It's not about you. What matters, what guarantees your success is **My presence**."
- 2. V5 says the people of the E covered the land like a plague of locusts. They were **everywhere**. Routing them seemed impossible.
- 3. When God told Gideon he was Israel's deliverer, he began thinking about how to do it.
 - a. The Midianite horde could only be moved by an even **bigger** army.
 - b. But as a nobody, Gideon had no leverage to raise such a force.
- 4. God's answer was, "**I** don't need an army, **just you!**"
 - a. Well, as the story unfolds, Gideon embraces the task and sends out a call that rallies 32K.
 - b. Though they're outnumbered 4:1, God tells Gideon he has too many men.
 - c. When they win the battle, they'll think it was due to their superior skill rather than God's help.
 - d. So He whittles Gideon's force down to just 300!
 - e. Then they go into battle armed with torches & horns.
 - f. How it all goes down, you can read for yourself.
- 5. The point is: The Battle was God's from start to finish.
 - a. He accomplishes His work, His way.
 - b. He's just looking for us to step OUT of the lies that shaped what we were, into the Truth about who and what we are IN CHRIST.
- 6. Gideon is Everyman / Everywoman.

God Wants to Use You!

- 1. There are needs all around us.
- 2. Modern Midianites cover the land, gutting the culture of its Biblical heritage.
- 3. We can run and hide in the hills and ancient Israel did.
- 4. Or we can take God at His word and follow where He leads.

That's what I'm doing.