

## THE GOD WHO RESTORES

### Judges 6

On Friday, April 3, 2004, the news of another soldier killed in action in the Middle East was reported. We never get used to these reports and every loss grieves us, but there was something unique about this particular soldier. His name was Pat Tillman, and what he did was extraordinary.

Tillman had everything a young man could want as a citizen of this country. Drafted into the NFL by the Arizona Cardinals in 1998, he won the strong safety position, where he broke the franchise record for tackles in 2000 with 224. He was at the top of his game, his 3.6 million dollar contract was never more secure. The Super Bowl champion St. Louis Rams were already after him with three times as much money. Pat Tillman was living the American dream.

But after the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks a higher cause gripped him. In May 2002, at 25 years of age, he walked away from the NFL, trading the multi-million dollar contract for \$18,000 a year from Uncle Sam as an Army Ranger. He didn't make a big deal about this. He kept the enlistment quiet, shunning interviews. He told his friends he wanted to give something back to his country. Two years later, Tillman was killed about 25 miles from a U.S. military base in Khost, Afghanistan.

Tillman's agent, Frank Bauer, said "They talk about the impact player [in football] - well, [Pat] was an impact person. He swam against the current. He marked those who knew him."

The Bible is filled with heroes who weren't the headliners. We hear a lot more about Abraham or David or Paul than these quieter heroes of the faith. They are common men and women who did uncommon things because they trusted the unchanging promises of God.

Gideon. He is not very impressive at first look, but he makes choices that flow from his faith in God. So significant is the mark this very ordinary man made in his time that he is listed in Hebrews 11 alongside the movers and shakers of the Old Testament. He is one of the most inspirational people in the Bible, and yet his story begins in some of the worst circumstances you can imagine. They were hungry, hurting, humiliated, and hiding in fear. The odds were stacked against Gideon. He like so many had struggled to make a life not just a living but they could never seem to get ahead. What Gideon would discover is that God is mighty and delights in showing up when things seem beyond all hope. God will use this farmer and turn him into a leader to protect Israel.

God had given them everything they needed to be a great nation. They took God's blessings for granted. When times were good, they turned their back on God. Israel swung between submission to the Lord and rebellion against Him. There were seven periods of rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration, and rest.

America did not just happen. America was a gift from God. However, the virtues and values upon which this nation was built have been walked over. What legacy are we going to leave for the generations to come?

On July the 4th, 1776, 56 men gathered in Pennsylvania State House to draw up a Declaration of Independence from we, the people of the United States, to King George and England. It was a fortunate hour in our nation's history. It was one of those rare occasions when we had greatness to spare. There were no White House scandals. There was no sick and corrupt media poisoning the minds of Americans. No one was betraying our military.

Those 56 men, who birthed America, were our founding fathers. They were righteous, God-fearing, Bible-believing, Christ-adoring Christians. These 56 men paid a price for liberty and freedom. They were not poor, hungry, wild-eyed believers. They were men of means. They enjoyed luxury and ease in their personal lives.

They had much to lose, but they gave it up gladly for your freedom and for my freedom. Freedom was born, and the United States of America became a reality.

This nation, under God, was destined for world leadership. Educators in America's colleges and universities today present them as greedy, malicious, self-serving people.

This same document that declared our independence from Great Britain, also declared our great dependence upon Almighty God.

John Hancock said, "We recognize no sovereign but God and no king but Jesus." Benjamin Rush, signer of the declaration of Independence, said, "My only hope of salvation is in the infinite love of God manifested to the world by the death of His Son Jesus Christ on the cross. Nothing but His blood will wash away my sins. I rely exclusively upon that. Come Lord Jesus, even so come quickly. Amen."

John Hancock signed his name very large. He said, "So that king George can read my name without his glasses." Patrick Henry said, "It cannot be emphasized too clearly and too often that this nation was founded, not by religionists," (that means people who believe anything) "Not by religionists but by Christians, not on religion, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Patrick Henry

John Jay, the first Supreme Court Chief Justice, said "Providence has given to our people the choice of their ruler. And it is the duty as well as the privilege of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers."

Charles Carroll, the signer of the declaration of independence, "Without morals, a republic cannot subsist at any length. Those who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so pure, are undermining the solid foundations of morals. The best security for the duration of our nation is morality."

Herbert Hoover, who was the thirty-first president of the United States said, "Our forefathers built for the United States a government, new and different from all the governments of the old world by three strokes of genius. First, they enacted a written constitution. They made, secondly, a division of powers within the federal and state governments by separating the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches. And third, they reinforced all of this by declaring to establish a government of laws where every citizen was equal before the law."

During the battle of Valley Forge, there were people who were calling for the resignation of George Washington. The army of the American revolution were farmers with pitch forks. They were fighting the best army in the world, the British army. They were starving. Most of them didn't have a contract with the government to stay more than six weeks. George Washington gave each of them a coin that said, "Victory or death."

George Washington at Valley Forge is an American patriot. His head is stained with blood. He has no shoes. His feet are wrapped in rags. He's hungry from starvation because they haven't had food in days. He's standing in the snow leaning on his musket. He stood in the snows of Valley Forge without shoes to give us the right to vote. He left his family destitute so that you could have freedom of speech.

What made America such a great nation is that America was born in a revival. From 1740-1770, there was a great revival that swept across America called The Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were among the preachers of this time. Out of this revival, schools were built. In those schools, principles were taught, and character became very strong.

Out of this, a Declaration of Independence from Great Britain and a dependence upon Almighty God were put into our hearts by our founding fathers. James Madison, the fourth president of the United States and the

architect of the federal Constitution, said that our whole future is based upon people who have character, and the basis of that character is the Ten Commandments of God. The Ten Commandments have been taken from the classrooms of America's schools and called unconstitutional.

We, like Israel, have taken the blessing of God for granted. America needs a new birth of freedom, and God is our only hope for that.

The great American dream has begun to dissolve because of sin. We came through the Civil War. We came through World War 1 with God's help. We were poor winners. We did not know how to give God thanks for what He had done. The Roaring Twenties came. America was out of control and self-indulgent. Then in 1929, the Great Depression came, and the stock market crashed. What has happened in America has not just happened recently. What has happened in America happened a long time ago. We wanted self-government without self-control.

Out of the Great Depression, rather than going back and saying what was wrong and fixing it rightly, we tried to fix it the wrong way. We began to give more and more power to the government. We began to relinquish more responsibility to the government. As character disintegrates, there is a loss of liberty; and the government becomes more and more powerful. When there is the erosion of character, sexual permissiveness and perversion, the disposal of unwanted and unborn children, the breakup of the family, the obsession with material things, and a craving for pleasure, sex and drugs, the government will get bigger and bigger.

We have less freedom and less liberty because the weak character of the people has permitted it. Liberty will last only as long as character and responsibility last. We still have a lot of blessings in America, but the blessings we enjoy are the residual blessings that our fathers and forefathers have left us. What will happen if we don't awaken? What is the reproach that will come to us? The loss of liberty. The disappearance of the middle class. There will only be two classes: The very rich. The very poor. Those who are very rich, for the most part, will be in the government or associated with the government. The very poor are those who are not in the government and who have to work to keep the government going.

*"Then the children of Israel did evil."* Judges 6:1

The *forty years of rest* (Judges 5:31) following the defeat of Sisera eventually came to an end. In their prosperity and complacency.

*"So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian."* Judges 6:1

God brought Israel into bondage through the oppression of the Midianites. This was an example of God's *grace* and *mercy* to Israel because the oppression would make them turn back to God. It would have been worse if God had just left them alone.

God wants us to be free, to be winning battles and experiencing victory on a daily basis. Their problem was an economic problem. The oppression came through Midian – coming because of the sin of Israel – brought Israel into *humiliation*. Before they turned back to God they had to be *humbled*, living as cave-dwellers instead of properly civilized people.

Israel's sin made all their hard work profitless. All their produce and livestock were stolen after they worked hard to bring it to fruition. Sin does this; it robs us of what we work hard to gain. There are many accomplished men who lose everything in life because they won't stop their sin. All is lost in order to gain what, in retrospect, seems like nothing.

*"Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the*

country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys." Judges 6:3

"As far as Gaza" is the whole *breadth* of the land, from Jordan to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus the whole land was ravaged and the inhabitants deprived of the necessities of life.

"They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help." Judges 6:5-6

After the long season of humiliation, fruitless labor, poverty, and domination by an oppressive power, Israel *finally* "cried out to the LORD." Prayer was their *last resort* instead of their *first resource*.

"When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, He sent them a prophet, who said, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. I said to you, I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me." Judges 6:7-10

Before Israel could receive and respond to the work of the judge, they first had to be prepared by this un-named prophet. The delivering judge named Gideon will appear later.

The Lord said, "*I brought you up from Egypt*" God spoke through the prophet, reminding Israel of all He did for them in the past. To face their current crisis, Israel needed a reminder of what God did before.

This reminded them of the *love* of God. The God who loved them enough to deliver them from Egypt still loved them enough to now deliver them from the Midianites.

This reminded them of the *power* of God. The God powerful enough to deliver them from Egypt was still powerful enough to now deliver them from the Midianites.

"*But you have not listened to me.*" God sent this messenger to tell them 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 *Israel*. It is human nature to blame *others* for problems that we cause. The message of the prophet also shows that when Israel cried out to the LORD, they didn't understand that *they* were the problem. Their cry to God for help did not mean that they recognized or repented of their sin.

What America needs is not an economic boom, but a spiritual revival. God can take ordinary people, fill them with His Holy Spirit, and use them to be a blessing to the world around us.

### **1. The Presence and Promises of God Comes In The Worst Of Circumstances.**

When we first meet Gideon, He is a defeated and a desperate man. Gideon is filled with fear and intimidated by the Midianites around him. "*Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress.*" This was both difficult and humiliating. Wheat was threshed in open spaces, typically on a hilltop so the breeze could blow away the chaff. Wheat was not normally threshed in a sunken place like a winepress.

Gideon is coming face to face with his DESTINY. Destiny is the answer to the question, 'What has God called me to do?' He also is going to answer the question of his IDENTITY. Identity us is the answer to the question, 'Who has God called me to be?'

God sends an angelic messenger to Gideon to proclaim his God-given destiny and identity.

*“The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, ‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.’” Judges 6:11-12*

Fear dominates so many peoples lives. The result is we hide in fear. We may not be hiding in a winepress but we fear a call from the doctor. We worry we cant pay the mortgage. We fear the supervisor. We feel all alone but we aren’t.

Gideon needed a face to face encounter with God. Every generation must experience God for itself.

You may feel alone but you are not. *“The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior.”* This was a strange greeting to Gideon. It didn’t seem like the LORD was with him, and it didn’t seem that he was a mighty man of valor. Gideon might have turned to see if there was another person to whom the angel spoke.

God saw Gideon for what he could be. He saw his potential. The Lord takes us where we are and moves us where we ought to be. It is not your weakness that matters, it is God's strength that matters.

*“Pardon me, my Lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.” Judges 6:13-14*

Gideon *“heard”* about the great works of God in the past, yet he wondered why he did not see the same great works in his day. 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. In truth, Israel had forsaken God – God did not forsake Israel. Yet to his credit, it bothered Gideon that Israel was in this condition. He was far from apathetic. He is revealed as a man continuing his work with the bitterness of the whole situation burning like a fire in his bones.

Gideon had concluded, *“The Lord has forsaken us.”* The presence of problems does not mean that God is not with us.

*“I will never leave you or forsake you.” Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5*

The Lord is going to be with you in the battles of life.

*“The LORD Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” Deuteronomy 31:8*

*“The Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?’” Judges 6:14*

It is hard to see that Gideon had *any* might to go in. Yet the Angel of the LORD didn’t mock Gideon when he told him, “Go in this might of yours.” Gideon indeed had might, but not as we might normally think.

- Gideon had the might of the *humble*, threshing wheat on the winepress floor.
- Gideon had the might of the *caring* because he cared about the low place of Israel.
- Gideon had the might of *knowledge*, because he knew God did great things in the past.
- Gideon had the might of the *spiritually hungry* because he wanted to see God do great works again.
- Gideon had the might of the *teachable* because he listened to what the Angel of the LORD said.
- Gideon had the might of the *weak*, and God’s strength is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The Lord makes promise after promise after promise to Gideon and to us.

*“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”* Judges 6:15

Gideon had might to go forward in, but he could not 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.

At the same time, Gideon was correct: *He* could not save Israel, but a great God could use a small and weak Gideon to rescue Israel.

God’s assurance to Gideon was not to build up his self-confidence, but to assure him that God was with him. Gideon did not need more *self*-confidence, he needed more *God*-confidence.

It is important to know that God has sent us, but it is even greater to know that He is with us. This was the same assurance God gave to Moses (Exodus 3:12) and that Jesus gave all believers (Matthew 28:20).

*The LORD answered, “I will be with you...”* Judges 6:16

Gideon was only concerned with who was with him physically. God says, “What really matters is that I am with you!” You would be amazed what God could do if you would just surrender your life to Him.

*Gideon replied, “If now I have found grace in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.”*

*Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.*

*“The angel of God said to him, ‘Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.’ And Gideon did so. Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the Lord disappeared. When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, ‘Alas, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!’”* Judges 6:17-22

Gideon saw the fire of God fall on that sacrifice.

## **2. The Peace Of God Will Fill Us In Our Biggest Battles.**

*“But the LORD said to him, ‘Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.’ So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it JEHOVAH Shalom - The LORD Is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.”* Judges 6:23-24

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. Gideon built an altar there to the LORD: Gideon did this as an act of worship and consecration unto the LORD, whom he had just encountered face-to-face. He was no longer terrified of God, as demonstrated by the title given to the altar: The LORD Is Peace.

There is peace for the battles of life. Our peace is not found in what we have on this earth, it is found in who we are in Jesus Christ! You have to meet God at a place of sacrifice. Gideon, for the first time in his life, found something he had always wanted and never had—peace in his heart.

*“And through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making*

*peace through His blood, shed on the cross.” Colossians 1:20*

You don't have to have turmoil in your life, you can have peace. God was saying to Gideon, “I am your strength. I am your peace. I am your victory. Trust in Me.” Everything changes when Gideon has his eyes upon the Lord.

- **Gideon Commits To Live A Life Fully Dedicated To The Lord.**

*That same night the Lord said to him, “Take the second bull from your father’s herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father’s altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.” Judges 6:25*

God says to Gideon, “Deal with those false gods in your life.” When Gideon made himself responsive to God, God guided him. Perhaps it happened as soon as Gideon built the altar. With the altar built, now God commanded him to sacrifice something on it. “*Tear down the altar of Baal that your father has.*” In Gideon’s community, Baal was worshipped right alongside of Yahweh. God called Gideon to get his own house in order first. Two bulls were to be offered; one as a sin offering, and the other as a consecration offering. It appears that the second bullock was offered, because it was just *seven* years old, Judges 6:25, being calved about the time that the Midianite oppression began; and it was now to be slain to indicate that their slavery should end with its life.

Gideon did this at night and under the cover of secrecy because he feared that his father’s household and the men of the city would *prevent* him from doing what needed to be done.

*“So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.” Judges 6:27*

You can't set up the Lord's altars until you get rid of the pagan altars. You can't have an altar to Jesus Christ until you get rid of all those false gods in your life. If you try to live for Jesus with some of the world in your heart, it will make you miserable, If you try to live for the world with some of Jesus in your heart it will make you miserable as well.

*“The people of the town demanded of Joash, ‘Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal’s altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.’” Judges 6:30*

Sometimes the courage of one believer will encourage another believer. Ancient Israel worshipped Baal because he was thought to be the god of weather, and they relied on the weather for agricultural prosperity. In the difficult economic times because of the Midianite oppression, people worshipped Baal all the more, not understanding that they only made things worse by not turning to God.

*“But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, ‘Are you going to plead Baal’s cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.’ So because Gideon broke down Baal’s altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal that day, saying, ‘Let Baal contend with him.’” Judges 6:31-32*

Gideon’s father made a very logical argument for preserving his son’s life. Since Baal was the offended party, he could defend himself. This is similar to what happened during a great move of God in the South Seas in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. One tribal chief was converted to Christianity, and he gathered up all the idols of his people. He told the idols he was going to destroy them, and then he gave them the chance to run away. He destroyed all the

ones that sat there like statues. This incident gave Gideon the nickname Jerubbaal. The name means, “*A man against whom Baal is to strive and contend.*” It was a title of honor.

In the midst of all these conflicts and struggles, Gideon had doubts so he asked God for a sign and God graciously proved his presence to Gideon again.

*“Gideon said to God, ‘If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.’ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.”* Judges 6:36-38

### **3. God's Power Delivers Victory To Us.**

Success is determined by God’s power, not ours.

*“But the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him.”* Judges 6:34

*“Gideon and the three hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled. When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.”* Judges 7:19-22

The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon: This follows the familiar pattern of the Spirit’s work upon men under the Old Covenant. The Holy Spirit comes upon specific people for specific reasons, usually for divinely empowered leadership. Under the New Covenant, a broad and generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit is promised upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:17-18).

Then he blew the trumpet: Because of this divine empowering, Gideon was able to gather an impressive number of troops on short notice. Judges 7:3 tells us that 32,000 men came to follow him into battle.

We are called to be light and salt. Salt penetrates and purifies. Salt heals and preserves. We are to be the salt, not the sugar.

*“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* 2 Corinthians 4:6

We have the light of Christ inside our lives but we must be broken, like clay pots, in order to shine as brightly as we can.

*“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”* 2 Corinthians 4:7