

The Book of Judges

Lesson 5: Gideon Called to Deliver -- Judges 6:1-40

Picture a man crouched at the bottom of a winepress, beating out a little wheat with a stick. A winepress is no place to thresh grain. Threshing needs an open, breezy hilltop where you can toss the grain into the air and let the wind carry off the chaff. But there is no wind down in that stone pit, and that is exactly the point. Gideon has gone down into a hole in the ground to hide his food, because the Midianites have been swooping in like locusts for seven years, stripping the land bare, leaving Israel nothing to eat. So here he is, sweating in a cramped pit, glancing over his shoulder, doing slow hard work in the wrong place because the right place is too dangerous. That is what fear does. It drives us into winepresses.

And then a stranger sits down under the oak tree nearby and says the most unlikely thing Gideon has ever heard: "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor." You can almost feel Gideon flinch. Mighty man of valor? Him? The man hiding in a hole? You and I might have laughed out loud. Gideon does not laugh. He argues. "If the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all His wonderful deeds?" It is an honest question, the kind we have all whispered in the dark. Where is God when the enemy keeps winning? Notice that God does not scold him for asking. God meets the doubt. But God also does something we might not expect: before He answers Gideon, He has already sent a prophet to tell Israel the painful truth about why the Midianites came in the first place.

Here is the part we would rather skip. When Israel cried out under Midian, God's first gift was not a deliverer. It was a prophet, and the prophet's message stung. "I brought you up from Egypt. I delivered you. I said, I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites. But you have not obeyed My voice." Before God lifts the burden, He names the cause. We want the rescue without the diagnosis. We want the symptom relieved without the sin exposed. But God loves us too much to fix the surface and leave the heart rotting underneath. And so before Gideon ever raises a sword against Midian, God sends him out at night to tear down his own father's altar to Baal. Reform, it turns out, starts at home, in the dark, where it costs us something.

Watch how patient God is with this trembling man. Gideon asks for a sign, and gets one: fire from a rock. Gideon obeys, but he does it at night because he is afraid of his family and the townsmen. And then, twice, Gideon lays out a wool fleece and asks God to prove Himself with dew. Wet fleece, dry ground. Then dry fleece, wet ground. "Let not Your anger burn against me," Gideon pleads, "and let me speak just once more." And God, gently, without a word of rebuke, does it again. This is the God we are dealing with: a God who can take a fearful man in a winepress and turn him into a deliverer, not because the man is strong, but because God says, "I will be with you." That single sentence is the whole secret of this chapter, and it may be the very word you need to hear today.

Group Discussion: When Israel cried out under Midian, God first sent a prophet to expose their unfaithfulness before He sent a deliverer (6:7–10). Why does God so often name the cause of our trouble before He lifts the burden, and what does that tell us about the kind of rescue He is really after?

Personal Reflection: Gideon was called a “mighty man of valor” while he was actually hiding in a winepress, paralyzed by fear (6:11–12). Where in your life right now are you living in a winepress, doing the right thing in the wrong, fearful, hidden way, because you do not yet believe that God is with you?

Read Judges 6:1–40

Study Questions

1. According to Judges 6:1–6, why did Midian’s oppression come upon Israel, and what does it reveal about the relationship between Israel’s sin and their suffering?
2. Israel “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” again (6:1), repeating the cycle. What pattern of returning to the same sin do you see in your own life, and what would genuine repentance, not just regret over consequences, look like?
3. Before sending a deliverer, God sent a prophet to confront Israel’s disobedience (6:7–10). What does this teach us about how God deals with His people’s cries for help?
4. The prophet reminded Israel of all God had done and then said simply, “you have not obeyed My voice” (6:10). When God reviews His faithfulness to you against your obedience to Him, what does that honest accounting reveal?

5. The angel of the LORD greeted Gideon as a “mighty man of valor” and promised, “I will be with you” (6:12, 6:16). On what basis does God qualify those He calls, and how does His presence, rather than our strength, become the real qualification?
6. Gideon objected, “my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (6:15). What objection do you keep raising to God about why He could not possibly use you, and is it really humility or is it unbelief?
7. God commanded Gideon to first tear down his father’s altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah before he could deliver Israel (6:25–32). Why must the idolatry in our own household be confronted before we are fit to serve God publicly?
8. Gideon tore down the altar by night because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town (6:27). Where is God asking you to obey now, even imperfectly and fearfully, rather than waiting until you are no longer afraid?
9. Through Gideon’s weakness, his fearfulness, and the tearing down of Baal’s altar, God shows that His power is made perfect in our weakness and that idolatry must be torn down, beginning at home. How does this passage point us to Christ, who is “God with us” always, who confronts every rival to His throne in our hearts, and whose strength is perfected in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9; Matthew 28:20)?

10. Gideon had an “altar” to Baal in his own father’s house, and a fear that kept him in the winepress. Name one specific altar that Jesus is calling you to tear down, or one fear He is meeting with His promise “I am with you,” and what is the first obedient step you will take this week?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Exodus 3:11–12, Moses objects that he is unfit and God answers with the same promise, “I will be with you”; 1 Corinthians 1:26–29, God chooses the weak and foolish things to shame the strong; 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, God’s power is made perfect in weakness; Hebrews 11:32–34, Gideon listed among those who “out of weakness were made strong”; Matthew 28:18–20, Christ’s abiding promise, “I am with you always”

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