

Jesus and Gideon – Judges 6

How many of you played dodgeball as kids in school? I don't think they play that in most schools anymore. Too many kids getting bashed in the face but I loved to play that game.

I remember playing dodgeball in the gym in middle school and no matter what, I wanted to be on John's team. I don't remember John's last name but I remember he had flunked a couple of times and he was bigger and stronger and faster than anybody else. I know he had a mustache and I think he was already driving and had a job but I'm not sure. Anyway, if you were on John's team, you knew you were going to win because he could throw even those half-deflated dodgeballs (you remember those round, red, plastic face-smashers?) to make Nolan Ryan proud. You didn't want to be on the opposite side of the red line when John was chunking those dodgeballs.

I remember one day we were playing and everybody had gotten out on both teams except John on one side and David Reitan on the other. Now David was small and skinny, maybe 100 pounds, a bit of a nerd, wore thick glasses. You know the kid. Somehow, he had managed to stay in the game probably by not ever throwing a ball but just using one to block others. And when he realized it was just him and John left, David's eyes got big and you could see he was scared. And he had reason to be scared. And John saw it too.

It was like David versus Goliath but David versus John and we were all rooting for David just because he was the underdog. John rears back and chunks a couple of scorching death balls at David but David managed to dodge them somehow and the place went crazy. But then, as David is trying (wisely) to protect his head with a ball, John hits him in the feet and the coach calls him out. But David protests, saying that it hit the ground first. So, we all started screaming, "It hit the ground. It hit the ground!" But the coach said no and he was out. But we were proud of David for doing as well as he did against crazy odds.

I thought of that story this week as I read the story of Gideon in Judges chapter 6. God used Gideon even though he, like little David Reitan, was **scared, wrong and weak**, not just playing a kid's game but in his life overall and yet we will see that God used this common man to do uncommon things.

Before we read **Judges 6:11-16** I want to read another passage that sounds like it was written just for Gideon – and for me – and maybe you, too can relate to **1 Corinthians 1:26-27**. It says, "*Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of*

noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”

We are continuing our sermon series today about the great saints and heroes of the Old Testament and we have seen quite a few but last week we saw Jesus show up to wrestle with Jacob. Today I want us to see how Jesus showed up to encourage Gideon when he was scared, wrong and weak and hopefully it will encourage you when you feel that way as well.

So, let’s look at **Judges 6:11-16**.

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah -**Stop right there for a second**. When it says the angel of the Lord, that does not always mean it is Jesus but sometimes it might be a regular angel or somebody else. And for some passages, we don’t know for sure but there are some ways that differentiate when it’s Jesus and when it’s a “regular” angel. First, how does the angel speak? Does he say, “I” and “me?” Or does he say the Lord will do such and such.

Secondly, does the angel accept worship? In **Revelation 22**, John sees an angel and he says, “*And I am John, who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. 9*But he said to me, “Do not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers.” But with a Christophany, Jesus accepts the worship.

Third, an angel doesn’t make promises of his own or forgive sin or proclaim on his own that something is holy or right. That’s God’s job and angels won’t do that.

Lastly, how does the person react and what do they say afterward? Do they say, “*I saw the Lord?*” Then they probably did. It wasn’t an angel. Still, with those things in mind it can be a bit confusing sometime but be watching for some of that as we read the rest of this fascinating passage.

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. ¹² When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”¹³ “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.”¹⁴ 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?”¹⁵ “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.”¹⁶ The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”

Peladophobia: fear of baldness and bald people. Porphyrophobia: fear of the color purple. Chaetophobia: fear of hairy people. Levophobia: fear of objects on the left side of the body. Dextrophobia: fear of objects on the right side of the body. Calyprophobia: fear of obscure meanings. Thalassophobia: fear of being seated. Stabisbasiphobia: fear of standing and walking. Odontophobia: fear of teeth. Graphophobia: fear of writing in public. Phobophobia: fear of being afraid. (Fraser Kent, *Nothing to Fear*, , Doubleday & Company, 1977.) There is a fear for everybody. So, I hope that in itself makes you feel better. At least you don't have some of those phobias.

Gideon had Midiaphobia – fear of the Midianites and he had good reason to. It tells us in previous verses that the Midianites would wait until the Israelites' crops were ripe for harvest and they would come in like locusts and just camp out there and eat all their food and run the Israelites off into the hills where they had to live in the cliffs and rocks or be killed. Evidently this had been going on for some time and now we find young Gideon trying to thresh wheat in a winepress.

Normally a person would get on the top of a hill where the breeze would carry off the chaff from the edible wheat when they threshed it but if Gideon had done that, the Midianites might have seen him and so he hid down in a winepress where they wouldn't see but the work would have been more difficult. This is where he is found by what the book refers to as “the angel of the Lord”.

Then the very first thing the angel says to Gideon is in **verse 12** where He says, *“The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”* Can't you just see Gideon as he looked up and saw some guy he didn't recognize looking at him and calling him “mighty warrior”? I bet Gideon looked around over both shoulders like, “Who walked in?” But he answers the angel of the Lord with typical Gideon fear.

“...if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?” Now, with this one sentence we can see the real Gideon. We can see that he is scared, wrong and weak but we also see that even though Gideon was scared, wrong and weak, God still used him. In fact, I'll tell you how Gideon's story turns out. The last thing here that the angel says to him is, *“I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”*

Do you know what happened? Later on we see that Gideon, with God's help, struck down all the Midianites, leaving none alive and what I want us to see is that God used him to

strike down the Midianites even though he was still scared, wrong and weak. God didn't make him brave, right and strong and then Gideon turned into "Super – Israelite" and killed all the enemy. All through the story you see God using Gideon **in spite of** his fear and **in spite of** his being wrong about God and **in spite of** his weakness.

Now, this is not to encourage us to be content with our fear, or to be content in our ignorance or weakness. It is to encourage us that God can and will use us in spite of ourselves; in spite of who we really are; who we really are when nobody is looking or when nobody can see that we don't really have it all together like we might look like. Gideon was afraid and he had good reason to be afraid. If the Midianites had seen him they probably would have killed him. Today you might be afraid and you might have good reason to be.

We love to quote **Philippians 4:13** around here. Remember what it says? **Philippians 4:13** says, *"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me."* That is so true, but the converse is also true. I can do nothing without Christ Who strengthens me. Without Christ, we ought to be scared. Without Christ there are no guarantees, no hope, no peace, no joy, no strength outside of our own. I don't know about you but that would scare me and it should!

But whatever scares you – death, spiders, bald people – whatever – don't let it keep you from being who God wants you to be or doing what He wants you to do. *"But Pastor Todd, witnessing scares me to death. I don't know what to say and I'm afraid I'm going to say something wrong."* I understand that. I feel the same way sometimes.

But go back to **Philippians 4:13**. I can do all things through Christ. In fact, all I have to say is Christ. All I have to say is Jesus and then shut up until He tells me to say something else. Just telling people that Jesus loves them is powerful! Just say that. Tell them you don't have all the answers but one thing you do know is that Jesus lives and that He loves you! There is power just in the name of Jesus so say it and say it often and let God use you in spite of your fear.

Now, we also see that God used Gideon in spite of Gideon being wrong about God. Gideon asked the angel, *"if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?"* Then he said, *"But now the Lord has abandoned us!"* If you look at the beginning of the chapter, the first phrase explains all that. *"Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord..."*

God had not abandoned them. It was not God's fault that they were in this position. Sin has consequences. In fact, sin always has consequences. The worst thing that can happen to us as Christians is sin. It's not death or divorce or disease. Sin is the worst

thing that can happen to us because it puts a barrier between us and God and there is always a consequence to that and that is what Gideon and the other Israelites were experiencing.

Bleach Did you know that common household bleach will kill you if you drink it? Well, I don't want that in my house. So, I decided to change the label and make it "fruit juice." That way I don't have to think about it killing me. Killing me is so rude. I don't like that. Isn't this better? Does that make any sense at all? Well let me ask you something.

1 Peter 5:8 says the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking to see whom he may...cause discomfort, right? Does it say Satan is prowling looking to see who he can aggravate? No. Satan wants to devour you and he will devour you with sin. Sin has consequences and if you want something to be scared of then be scared of sin in your life. Sin needs to be called sin. It's not a mistake or a disease or a lifestyle choice or an oopsie. It is sin and sin will kill you even if you call it something else.

John Wesley said, *"Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon Earth."*

Gideon was blaming God for their circumstances. He failed to realize the consequences of a nation's sin. Does that sound familiar? People today wonder why this country has fallen to continuous new lows. Well, we have taken God and prayer out of school. We kill literally millions of babies every year through abortion. We call homosexuality an alternative lifestyle and we think getting rid of Aunt Jemima and the Indian on the butter container is going to solve any problem? Gideon was not the only one who has been wrong about God.

But that is what made Gideon such a good candidate for being used by God. When God worked through Gideon, it was obviously God doing it and not Gideon. Again, that is what God wants. He wants people to know that it is Him Who is doing it, not man. It's the same today. Our country is wrong about God and how better for God to get glory than for people to stand up, in spite of their fear, and say, *"I may not understand everything but I give God glory for what goes on in my life"*? *I don't have all the answers but I'm going to call sin "sin."*

Now, look in **verse 15** again. Gideon says, *"but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."* Well, at least Gideon was right about something. Notice the angel doesn't disagree with him. In fact, I think that's why God picked Gideon. It's the same reason He led Gideon in the next chapter to fight hundreds of thousands of the enemy with only 300 men.

I want to say something that I haven't said in a while but that shows itself to be true in the story of Gideon. **God's will is going to be done.** It was done in the life of Gideon and in the life of Israel. It was done in the New Testament and it is done in your life and in this country. He may have to use people who are scared, wrong and weak but His will is going to be done. He may have to use a talking donkey, the rocks themselves may have to cry out or He may use a young virgin girl to have a baby, but God's will is going to be done.

You can get on board and you can do your part in spite of how you feel and what you wish and what you think, clinging to the truth of scripture and the revelation of the Spirit and you can be blessed. Or you can fight it and complain and hide in fear and ignorance and miss out on the blessings and suffer the consequences. It's your choice.

You may think you are just a common and ordinary person with no special skills and no real influence...and you are probably right. But C.S. Lewis once said, *"He who has God and many other things has no more than he who has God alone."* Do you know how every single one of all the great revivals started; revivals that changed lives, communities and even countries? Every single one started by some ordinary, common layperson on his or her knees crying out to God in fear, ignorance and weakness for God to work through them. I'm not kidding.

The history of all the revivals that changed continents started, not with Spurgeon or Wesley or Billy Graham even though they may have included some of those, but they started with common people being used by God in spite of themselves; in spite of who they really were. Going back to the passage we read at first, **1 Corinthians 1:27** says, *"God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."*

Your friends and family, your church and your community and your country don't need you to be braver, stronger or smarter. Well, for some of us it wouldn't hurt to be a little smarter. But what this world needs is for us as Christians to submit ourselves to God and let Him be all that we need and more. You have heard it said not to work harder but to work smarter? Gideon would say let God work through you and let Him be the One who provides the wisdom and knowledge and the strength. Do that today by asking Him to be your personal Savior and Lord and let Him swap you all your fear and ignorance and weakness for His power and grace and forgiveness.