

## **Gideon's Anointing: The Unique Temptation of Leaders and the People Who Follow Them**

### **Judges 6,7,8**

#### **Sermon Manuscript and Small Group Questions**

Three months ago, we stood on an ancient threshing floor outside of Bethlehem. Our teacher demonstrated how the ancients would thrash the wheat against the rock floor in order to release the grain from the stocks. They would then take a hand full of the grain and throw it into the air. The wind would blow away the lighter chaff while the heavier grain would fall to the ground. This was just one of the many painstaking processes in making bread. Our story today begins with a young Israelite man doing just this, but in a wine press, not a threshing floor. This was because, there were no grapes to crush in the wine press because the Midianites had destroyed all the vineyards. They had also destroyed or stolen most Israelite crops, leaving the Israelites impoverished. Gideon's threshing of wheat in a wine press was his effort to keep the event from the eyes of the Midianites. His thinking was this, if an Israelite was lucky enough to get his hands on a few stocks of grain, no one would expect to see him threshing it in a winepress. It was a clandestine effort to stay alive. With each thrust of the wheat to the floor, "you damned Midianites!", and "God save us!"

The obvious question is: what were the circumstances that placed Israel under such Midianite tyranny? The answer: in our text. **Read 6:1-10.** Recap: So when spiritual renewal is required, God sends discipline, God's people begin to pray, and God answers the prayer by sending a prophet who reminds them of their covenant relationship with God and calls them to repentance. **But** spiritual renewal also requires leaders, all sorts of leaders; people willing to say yes to the call of God to take action, whatever action is required. **Read vs. 11-16.** Comments...Ending with... "There's nothing in me that qualifies me to do what you're asking me to do." God responds, "I will be with you...you will have my presence and power... and you will strike down all the Midianites together. I'm not asking you to be a prophet. I'm asking you to be a military commander."

**Fast forward...** Gideon then asks for a sign and God delivers a sign with an impressive display of fire from heaven. Gideon freaks out realizing that he's been talking to a theophany of God himself and fears for his life. God speaks into his fear, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die." Gideon marks the moment by building an altar to the Lord and sacrificing a bull on it.

Okay, here's where story gets interesting. Gideon is probably half way there in his consecration of God. That night God tells Gideon to build a second altar, sacrificing a second bull. This sacrifice is different than the first one. This is a sacrifice that will make atonement for the sins of Gideon's family. You see, Gideon was being held back by the sins of his father. There was a spiritual stranglehold on Gideon (and all Israel for that matter) that required breaking. Before Gideon is ready to be used, he needs God to set him free from the sins of his father through the shedding of blood. Yes,

this is where we're intended to see redemptive signals...a foreshadowing of Christ. **Read vs. 25-32.** So let's get this straight: a sacrifice is made, blood is shed, atonement is granted, and the spiritual stronghold of Satan is broken. What's left? Only one thing... Gideon is ready to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Pentecost follows Passover. The coming of the Spirit follows the Lamb's sacrifice on the cross. **Read vs. 33-35.** "Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon..." He blows a trumpet, which represents a call to corporate action, and there's a huge response. Thousands show up to fight. Gideon is still doubting God's involvement in all this and asks him for two more signs: the famous fleeces. God graciously grants the miraculous signs, and Gideon is now good to go.

Gideon is now anointed by the Holy Spirit. There's a unique charism upon his life. He possesses a unique gift that distinguishes him from others. People are attracted to it. They can see that it's God, not just Gideon. Or can they? Are the people able to distinguish between God and Gideon? Is Gideon able to distinguish the difference?

Chapter 7: Gideon gathers his army to fight, but God is concerned about something. He tells Gideon that he has way too many people. Through a series of simple tests, God reduces Gideon's army from 32,000 down to 10,000, and then finally down to 300! Only 300 men are left to fight an army with troops too many to count. What's God thinking? Here's his concern: **Read vs. 7:2,3.** Can you see God's concern? He's concerned about Israel confusing their power with his. He can foresee the possibility of Gideon and his army taking some of the glory for themselves. And so, he sets them up against impossible odds. Has God ever placed you in a similar situation? Where unless God acts, it isn't happening?

This is always the unique challenge and temptation that accompanies what we might call "the anointing". Can the character of the woman or man who possesses it match the charism? Or will the leader destroy with his character what he built with his gift?

Okay, now that there's only 300 men left to fight, God confirms his presence with them through another sign where Gideon overhears a Midianite telling his friend that he had a dream where a little barley loaf of bread rolls down the hill into the camp of the Midianites and destroys them. And his friend interprets the dream by saying, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon, son of Joash, the Israelite." (vs. 14) God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands." Hearing this, Gideon worships God, and rallies the troops to fight using a bazaar battle strategy involving trumpets, and lit torches concealed in clay pots. Let's read it. **Vs. 15-22.** (Painting)

**Chapter 8.** To save time. Let me paraphrase what happens next. One of the tribes, the Ephraimites, sharply criticize Gideon for neglecting to invite them to assist in the fight. We don't know if this was deliberate or a tactical oversight., but in any event, their feelings were hurt. Gideon butters them up in vs. 2 and their anger subsides. So even after a great victory where God's power is unleashed, there's potential for hurt feelings and a party spirit to develop. And it has to do with ego.

Gideon and his men have one task yet to perform, capture the two kings of Midian, Zeba and Zalmunna. Gideon's army is totally exhausted, and onroute to capture these guys they come across two towns, Succoth and Peniel, where they expect to be given some food for sustenance. Well, neither the town of Succoth or Peniel give Gideon anything. Gideon responds by promising that when he returns after capturing the two Midianite kings, that he will torture the leading men of Succoth ("I will tear your flesh with thorns and briers")...And destroy Peniel's tower and kill all your men. Hmmm? Does this reaction sound like the Holy Spirit or the spirit of revenge. This is Gideon, the anointed leader, who's character, while under stress, is showing signs of sinfulness and self-preservation. After capturing the kings of Midian, Gideon runs into a young man from Succoth, and gets the names of all 77 officials from Succoth (vs. 14). Gideon is now carrying a little black book with all the names of people who have disappointed him. He then carries out his violent threats against these two towns, and all that's left is for him to execute Zeba and Zalmunna. But he carries out the execution in the weirdest cavalier kind of way. He turns to his son, and says, "Kill them!" (vs. 20) but his son, shrinks back in fear because he was only a boy. Zebah and Zalmunnah then taunt Gideon as if to say, "Come on Gideon, show us your stuff. Do it yourself." And Gideon kills them and takes the ornaments off their camel's necks.

If this were the end of the story, we'd probably conclude that Gideon's pride has now taken over, and that those with some godly wisdom will call him out on it, sort of like Nathan speaking into David's life. But the opposite happens. The Israelites, vs. 22, beg Gideon to rule over them. They've come to love his bravado. They actually want his style of leadership. Surprisingly, Gideon declines the invitation using highly spiritual words, "The Lord will rule over you." "However, I do have one little request...let's read it, vs. 24-27. This is how the story ends. Gideon creates a golden ephod, which is a symbol of priestly leadership. It's what only priests wore, but Gideon was attaching his own leadership to it. In effect, he was saying, "Israel can connect with God through me." The story ends with the people worshipping Gideon's leadership, and Gideon and his family becoming ensnared, trapped in a new culture of leader worship.

After Gideon was dead, the people exchanged Gideon worship with Baal worship. They also ended up hating Gideon and his family, forgetting the good things he had done for them. If we worship anyone other than God, we will end up hating them, because they can never live up to our expectations.

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How can we know if we're being seduced by the "Gideon Anointing"? Can we begin to detect the spirit of Gideon in ourselves? Yes...

1. When we find ourselves powering up. When we use our spiritual authority or giftedness to get our own way.
2. When we are overly defensive when challenged or angry when criticized.
3. When we manipulate our desired outcomes by spiritualizing, using spiritual language to bolster our position.

4. When we view dissenters as the enemy to be removed or punished.

The Gideon spirit is alive and well in our modern world. You may even see it from time to time when you look in the mirror. I know I do. What is the antidote?

Submitting to the Spirit of Jesus, who washed feet, forgave sins, and entrusted his life into the hands of his Father.

#### Sermon Based Group Questions:

1. What does the Gideon story tell us about the nature and character of God?
2. What does the Gideon story tell us about the nature of humanity? Particularly as it relates towards our propensity towards idolatry.
3. What were the steps that God took leading towards the spiritual renewal of Israel? (6:1-12)
4. Why did God ask Gideon to tear down his father's altar to Baal? It wasn't Gideon's problem, or was it? How are we effected by the sins of our fathers? Ancestral sins?
5. Gideon is virtually a **nobody** (6:15), who receives the call of God along with a special anointing and becomes a **somebody**, and eventually infects **everybody** with a toxic spirit of leader worship. How did this happen? How does it still happen?
6. The story ends tragically, with Gideon and his family being "ensnared" (8:27). What exactly does this mean?
7. Vs. 8:28-35 gives the good news and the bad news of Gideon's anointed leadership. How does this whole story sit with you? What are some of the take aways for you personally?