

The Grace and Faithfulness We Don't Deserve
Judges 6:11-24
Sunday, May 15th, 2022
By Ryan Perry

Scripture

Judges 6:11–24

[11] Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. [12] And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." [13] And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." [14] And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" [15] And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." [16] And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." [17] And he said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. [18] Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return."

[19] So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. [20] And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so. [21] Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. [22] Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." [23] But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." [24] Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

Let's Pray

Now, before I get into this text this morning, I want to set the stage for you of what has been happening in the life of Israel during this time. Because for many of us know the Gideon story really well, while at the same time not understanding what has necessitated God's call on Gideon's life.

If we back up to the beginning of Judges we see that Joshua has died and the people of God have begun to conquer the land of the Canaanites that God had promised them. Judah and Simeon went first, and they were initially successful until they met resistance from the inhabitants of the plains who had chariots of iron (1:19).

Now this could have been a moment where Judah and Simeon inquired of the LORD and said, “You told us to go and do this, but we can’t seem to defeat these guys, what are we supposed to do?” But they didn’t. **Instead of wiping the people out like God commanded, they decided to leave them alone.**

And this began a series of compromises throughout the tribes of Israel where they would go in and drive out certain inhabitants, but would leave others. **This was a blatant disobeying of God’s commands that brought with it immense consequences as the people of Israel began to follow after and worship the God’s of the Canaanites.**

As a result, it says in Judges 2:14-15:

[14] So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. [15] Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.

And yet, despite Israel’s sin and God’s judgement, we see his grace and faithfulness to them in 2:16 when it says:

[16] Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

This is the same pattern that we see in the Gideon story. The people disobeyed or did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and God gave them into the hands of the Midianites (Judges 6:1). As a result, the people of Israel were forced to make dens and caves in the mountains because the Midianites along with the Amalekites would come up against them.

They would come with their camels and livestock and would devour all the crops and cattle so that there was nothing left in the land for the Israelites to eat.

In their distress the Israelites cried out to God. But instead of sending a deliverer right away he sends a prophet who reminded them of God’s deliverance from Egypt and other oppressors, and how he drove out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan on their behalf.

And in return he gave them one very simple command “**do no fear (worship) the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.**” **But they did not obey God, but instead worshipped and served other God’s besides Yahweh.**

Yet, despite their sin, and despite their wayward hearts, God decides to be gracious and faithful to them by visiting, commissioning, and empowering a man by the name of Gideon to be their deliverer.

Now, when we think of Gideon, we often think of him as the might warrior who, along with his 300 man army, destroyed the army of Midian. **We think of him as a dude, a man's man.** But the truth is that despite all of the ways that God tried to reassure Gideon of his calling to be Israel's deliverer, he was a weak man who, like the rest of Israel, lived in fear and struggled with his faith.

So, this morning we are going to look at the call of Gideon. And in so doing, we will not only come face to face with Gideon's weaknesses, sins, and fears. But we will also see the grace, goodness, and faithfulness of God applied to Gideon and by extension, to us.

I have four points to get through this morning and you will notice that I have written them as truths that we can apply to ourselves so that you can come back to them for hope and encouragement in the coming weeks.

Here is point 1 this morning:

1. God is working even when we can't see it (V. 11-14)

[11] Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. [12] And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." [13] And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." [14] And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

So here is the scene. Gideon is freaking out. He is so scared of the Midianite invaders that instead of beating the wheat out in the open on the threshing floor, he is trying his best to beat it in the winepress so that the invaders wouldn't find it and take it from him and his family.

And this is understandable. The Midianites took and ate everything, and food resources in the land of Israel would have been scarce so trying to hide this wheat would make logical sense.

But then something amazing happened. It says that the angel of the LORD (who by the way is not only God himself, but many scholars agree is a pre-incarnate version of Jesus, the Word) appears to him and says, **"the LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."**

Now, I don't know how you would react, but this didn't sit well with Gideon. Not only was he not acting like a mighty man of valor as he is frantically tries to hide the wheat, but he is looking at his circumstances and those of his people and he is asking **“where is God in this mess?”**

Now, Gideon isn't simply asking a polite question; rather, the language of the text suggests that Gideon is frustrated, angry, and terse as he responds. It's almost as if he is saying, **“If God did all these things in the past, and he is so great, why isn't he doing anything now?”**

Can you relate to that? Have you ever responded like Gideon? Just think about the past two years. How often did we as God's people ask, *“What are you doing God, why is this all happening, are you even working? It feels like you aren't with us as people are dying, our economy is shut down, jobs are being lost, depression is at an all-time high, marriages are crumbling, and more than ever people are divided and fighting amongst themselves.”*

God, where are you!?

And it would have been good and well within God's right to turn to Gideon and say, “Don't you remember the curses that I gave for disobedience? As it says in Deuteronomy 28:25:

[25] “The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

But he doesn't do that. Instead, he meets him in his weakness and says in verse 14: **“Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?”**

Don't worry Gideon, I know this is hard, I know you're scared, and I know it looks like I'm not doing anything, but I have a plan to save my people. **And my plan is to send you.**

This is God's sheer goodness and faithfulness to his people and to Gideon even when he didn't have to be. Gideon was angry, and didn't believe that God was working, and yet God opened his eyes to show him how he was going to save Israel.

Now, we may not always get a Gideon moment in our lives where we see how God is working in the midst of our hardships. And very often it isn't until we are past the hardship that we can even understand a little bit of God's plan for it.

But we do have the words of the living God which remind us that hardships and trials will come, and that God will use them in our lives to accomplish his purposes. As it says in 1 Peter 4:12:

[12] Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Then in James 1:2-4:

[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

So take heart this morning. Even when you can't see it, even when you can't understand how, God is working.

2. God is powerful even in our deepest weakness (V. 15-16)

[15] And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." [16] And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

The angel of the Lord has just answered Gideon's question of "where is God and what is he doing?" by telling him that he was going to send him to save his people. Now, in a perfect world it would have been great for Gideon to hear this and respond to it with a strong faith in what God would do through him. **But of course, he doesn't.**

Instead of responding in faith he begins to give all the reasons why he can't do it. He says, "I can't do it, don't you know that I come from a small and weak clan? Don't you realize that I'm the youngest and weakest in my own house? You don't want me; you definitely want someone else."

Gideon is feeling the weight of his earthly weakness, and doesn't see how he will be able to do what God is asking of him. This is very similar to what we see in Exodus as God calls Moses in the burning bush. Look at Exodus 3:10-11:

[10] Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." [11] But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

Moses looked at himself, assessing his strengths and weaknesses, and he came to the same conclusion as Gideon, **"how can I deliver your people?"**

Now, on the one hand we can applaud this. They had one half of the equation right. In and of themselves they don't have what it takes to accomplish the things that God was calling them to do.

This is much better than the man who thinks himself capable on his own to accomplish any task. As it says in Proverbs 16:18: *[18] Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

The point is that God generally humbles us when we think we've got it all together.

However, despite Gideon and Moses having the first part right, they still missed the most important part of the equation. They were missing the fact that God would be with them. As it says in Judges 6:16: ***“But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.”***

Likewise in Exodus 3:12 God says to Moses:

[12] “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

God wanted them to understand that, yes, you can't do it on your own. You are weak, and you are unable to do the things that I have called you to do. But you don't have to, and I am not asking you to. **Instead, I am going to go with you, which means that it will be my Spirit and power working through you to accomplish these great tasks.**

In the same way, we are often faced with our own fears and frailties. Maybe you have some heavy challenges in front of you that you are unsure that you have the strength to walk through.

Maybe you have been thinking about stepping out of your comfort zone to minister to your neighbors, but you are afraid because you don't know how to begin or if they will accept you. Maybe there is something that God has put on your heart for a long time, but instead of walking in faith, your fear has kept you from being obedient to his call.

Whatever your situation, we must remember that despite our fear and weaknesses we have a God who has promised us his presence and power to accomplish his purposes through us. As it says in Ephesians 1:19:

“[19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might...”

And of course, in 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul writes the words that God spoke to him and yet apply to us:

[9] But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

God is powerful, he empowers us, and he is with us, even in our deepest weakness.

3. God is gracious even when we sin (V. 17-19, 21)

[17] And he said to him, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. [18] Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you.” And he said, “I will stay till you return.”

[19] So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. ...[21] Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

God has now given Gideon the assurance that his presence would be with him, and this should be the end of the story. Gideon should now be able to go ahead and complete his task of delivering Israel because he knows that God will be with him.

But Gideon is still a fearful man. He is still struggling to have the faith that God is really going to deliver on his promises, and he is struggling to believe that it is God who is speaking to him.

So instead of walking in faith, he asks for a sign.

Now this may not seem like a big deal to you and me, but we need to understand how God sees this. As it says in Deuteronomy 6:16:

[16] “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.

And Jesus said to the Sadducees and Pharisees in Matthew 16:4:

[4] An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed them.

Asking for a sign in that day, and I believe this is true today, was equal to testing God. Gideon didn't trust that it was God speaking to him, so he tested him by asking for a sign and in so doing he sinned against God.

At this point it would have been well within God's right to rebuke or even destroy Gideon because of it. He could have said, since your heart is hard, and you won't believe me, I am going to go find someone else who will obey my voice.

But instead of being harsh with Gideon and exposing the error of his ways he shows him grace and is willing to do what Gideon asks. So Gideon goes, prepares a meal, and comes back and the angel has him put it on a rock and pour broth over it.

And in the moment the angel touches it with his staff, it burns up and vanishes so that Gideon would know that it was the one true God who was speaking to him, and it is this God who will be with him and for him.

Some of us here this morning might need this point in the story more than any other. You find yourself daily feeling the immense weight of guilt and shame over past and present sins because you don't realize that you serve a gracious God and Savior who loves you more than you can imagine.

You need to hear that God isn't sitting around waiting to knock you upside the head when you fail. He isn't going to cast you away when you make mistakes. Instead, because of the finished work of his Son Jesus Christ on the cross He is daily pouring out his mercy and grace upon you because he understands who you are. As the Psalmist writes in Psalm 103:13:

*[14] For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.*

God knows who we are. He knows we are weak. He knows we are needy, and he knows we have and will mess up. But instead of giving us judgement and the sword, he has given us grace upon grace through his Son Jesus Christ. So now instead of Judgement we can draw near to God and receive the help and mercy that we so desperately need. As it says in Hebrews 4:16:

[16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

4. God is with us even when we forget his promises (V. 22-24)

[22] Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." [23] But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." [24] Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

Gideon finally realizes that it was God himself who was speaking to him. It was God calling him to go and deliver the Israelites from the hand of Midian, it was God telling Gideon that he would be with him, and it was God who patiently waited for the meal so that he could burn it up and in so doing confirm his divinity.

So now Gideon of course is pumped up and ready to defeat the Midianites with God's help. But he's not. **Instead, all at once Gideon is undone, is full of great fear, and believes that he is going to die.**

Now it was the belief in that day that you would die if you saw God face to face so in one sense this was an expected reaction.

But on the other hand, would God have given him the promise of being with him if he was just going to kill him? No, of course not. Yet, Gideon forgot the very promise of God made to him just a few verses earlier.

But once again, God is gracious and faithful to Gideon, and he gently and lovingly reminds him of his promises. He says “Peace be to you (I am with you). Do not fear; you shall not die.”

As those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ we have a better more complete picture of the promises of God than Gideon did. We know that if we have put our trust in Christ that we are now washed clean of the penalty of sin. We are sealed and secured by the Holy Spirit and we have a forever and eternal hope that one day we will be with him forever.

Yet we forget don't we. We so easily forget who we are, who we belong to, and that he deals with us not according to our sins, but according to his perfect grace and love.

He took people like us who are unlovable and deserving of the pit of hell and he has washed us, cleansed, us, called us his precious treasure and children. And he has given us the forever promise that he will be with us, even when we forget.

So if you are here this morning and wondering if God is working. If you are weak and feel like you can't go on. If you are struggling with the constant shame and guilt of sin. And if you are, like me, prone to forget the promises of God.

Be reminded this morning that you serve a God who knows your frame and yet loves you anyways. And take heart, that no matter how much you forget, no matter how much you screw up, no matter how much you feel like you can't go on, that he is with you, he is working for you, and he will never leave you. As it says in Deuteronomy 31:8:

[8] It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

Let's pray.