

# What is Jesus Doing?

## FINDING YOUR FAITH

Last week we spoke about the prayer of faith and how being a willing vessel of the Holy Spirit's desire to move freely through you is a crucial part of God's ability to use you for His Glory and to enable you to live the abundant life to the fullest.

We talked about how the Holy Spirit will speak directly to you but you will only hear from Him if you are open and in fact invitational to what the Lord wants to do with you and through you.

We read the scripture story of how Elijah brought the entire nation of Israel out to Mount Carmel to watch him in a throwdown with the 450 prophets of Baal and how when he chose to be faithful, the Lord gave him supernatural courage and strength to prepare the altar and call down the fire of God as a witness to bring the people back to faith in Him.

Today we are going to go back even further to the Old Testament Book of Judges and see how another hero of the Bible overcame his fears and chose to find his faith, believing what God told him he could do although he was afraid. Like Elijah, he was a man with a nature like ours...

Hopefully this message will give us some insight into how we can do what God tells us we can do even when we're afraid.

The Book of Judges delineates the cycle of idolatry, repentance and deliverance that the children of Israel went through over a period of 400 years. We're going to look today at the story and example of Gideon who was one of the judges of Israel.

If you recall a couple of months back, we talked about what a judge of Israel really was. The Hebrew word as translated "judge" in the Bible is shofet and it means deliverer. Now we know that Jesus is our ultimate deliverer from the power of sin and the fear of death but in order for us to walk in the power of that deliverance we need to have faith.

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That's why the story of Gideon is so interesting.

As the story of Gideon begins, the Israelites were in the middle of one of their cycles and had just experienced 40 years of relative peace. The bills are paid, the kids are behaving, and business is good; everything's coming up roses. And as it tends to happen to us all in such times, Israel forgot God. They became self-sufficient. They didn't need God. They began to worship idols again.

So, the Lord shook things up by rousing an enemy against them to show them how hard life can be without Him. If we're honest, that is a cycle that many of us have experienced in our lives. How many times have hard circumstances come to us, and we never stop to ask what God is planning for us in those circumstances?

Instead, we hold out, thinking that we can handle it on our own. Learn this from Gideon: every experience in life is a test. Every trial in the lives of God's people is tailored to draw us closer to God.

The purpose of this message is the importance of breaking the cycle and finding our faith and keeping our faith because God is faithful. Amen? So... for Israel the cycle started as it usually does for us... with idolatry.

Here's the story of Gideon which begins like this...

*Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey.*

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*For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.*

- Judges 6:1-6

The children of Israel cried out to the Lord. If we are ever to get our faith back in the midst of a trial, it is when we realize that whatever we're doing to get us out of the trouble we're in is not working and we need to turn back to God. That is what the people of Israel did then they cried out to God and that is what we need to do when we come to the end of ourselves.

Here's the point: When tough times come, instead of looking at them as if God is punishing you, try to see them as God's gift of grace.

*Do not despise the LORD's instruction, my son, and do not loathe His discipline; for the LORD disciplines the one He loves, just as a father, the son he delights in.*

- Proverbs 3:11-12

God loves you too much to let you keep living the way you are when you have fallen away. He longs to be at the center of your life.

C.S. Lewis said it like this, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It's His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Now because the people of Israel cried out to God He heard their cry, and so the story continues...

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*And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. Also I said to you, "I am the Lord your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice."*

- Judges 6:7-10

Now I don't know about you but when I cry out to God because I realize that I need him desperately in my circumstances, the first thing He does is convict me through His Spirit and show me how I got myself into the mess I'm in. That's what the Lord did through His unnamed prophet. And now God is going to move on Israel's behalf through our unlikely hero...

*Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!"*

- Judges 6:11-12

Now I just want to stop for a moment and point out that here is this young man whose father is a local bigwig (and who is, by the way, a big-time idol worshipper as we will soon see), and he is hiding in a wine press dug underground threshing wheat so that the Midianites would not catch him and steal the wheat that he was threshing.

How scared do you have to be to thresh wheat in a wine press?

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Now some of you know this, but city boys like me don't. Normally, you would want to thresh wheat out in the open so that the wind could blow away the chaff. But Gideon has apparently been stung before, so he goes into hiding in an underground winepress, hoping to avert the attention of the Midianites. It's a pitiful sight, full of frustration, discouragement, and fear.

So here is the Angel of the Lord, calling this frightened kid a mighty man of valor. Pretty ironic. I'm sure Gideon is looking around to the right and the left to try to figure out who it is that the Angel of the Lord is speaking to...

Do you ever feel like you're being called to do something that you feel completely inadequate to do? Do you ever question God's Word when it tells you who you are in Christ Jesus? That is kind of like how Gideon felt.

Let's continue the story...

*Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."*

- Judges 6:13

Apparently, Gideon is not sure yet who he is talking to... What he did know, however, was that previous generations of Israelites had apparently experienced the Exodus through the Red Sea and God's mighty works but he himself only knew that God had forsaken them.

Do you sometimes feel like God has forsaken you?

Be encouraged beloved. This is what happens next.

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*Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"*

- Judges 6:14

Go in this might of yours: It is hard to see that Gideon had any might to go in. Yet the Angel of the LORD wasn't mocking 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 how low Israel had fallen.
- Gideon had the might of the knowledge of God, because he knew that the Lord had done 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 faith, because he listened and believed what the Angel of the LORD said.
- Gideon had the might of the weak, because God's strength is perfected in weakness.
- Gideon had might to go forth 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.

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So here's a question... do you feel like you are losing ground in your life? That you have no ability to make a difference in the place God put you? That the world is eating away at your ability to gain sustenance from your relationship with Jesus Christ?

Would you like to go in the faith and the MIGHT that God tells you that you have in Christ and make something amazing out of the life you were given?

The Lord's word to Gideon was "Have I not sent you?" These are the same words Jesus spoke to His disciples for all time...

*So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."*

- John 20:21

Here is what God told Gideon...

*And the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."*

- Judges 6:16

God did use Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites but first he had to convince his own people to follow God again.

Gideon had to tear down the altar to Baal that belonged to his father and almost get killed by his own idolatrous countrymen before he was able to convince them that God really did want to deliver them and was going to use him to do it. Then he was able to rally 3000 men to go up against the Midianites who were more than 100,000 soldiers.

However, before they could go into battle, the Lord told Gideon that he needed far fewer than that, so that when they defeated the Midianite army that they would not believe that it was their own doing, but that they would KNOW that it was the deliverance of the Lord.

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Therefore, the Lord winnowed down Gideon's army to a mere 300 men and Gideon, by keeping the faith that he now had in what the Lord was telling him he could do, was able to defeat the vast army of the Midianites and gain back the land.

Before Gideon could do any of that, he had to choose to believe what God told him he could do and find the faith to walk it out. Before we can do any of the mighty things God tells us we can do in Christ Jesus, we too have to find the faith to walk it out.

I hope you will take the time to read the book of judges and especially the full story of Gideon on your own time, but here is another scripture...

Gideon begins the battle with the Midianites in an interesting way...

*Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!'"*

- Judges 16-18

Suffice it to say that when they do this, it creates havoc in the Midianite camp and the Lord, in the confusion sets each of the enemy soldiers against each other.

I like to see the comparison of this small group of Gideon's men with their trumpets and torches in clay jars like effective evangelists. We trumpet the Word of God for all to hear, and we allow the broken jars of clay that we are to pour God's glorious light out into the world!



## What is Jesus Doing?

You may have heard of the Gideons, which is an organization that makes bibles available to people free of charge in hotels, hospitals, jails, military bases, etcetera. They also make presentations in schools and military bases to speak about Jesus. Their logo is a Jar with a light coming out of the top.

This is how the organization describes its connection to the story of Gideon in the book of judges...

*“Gideon was a man who was willing to do exactly what God wanted him to do, regardless of his own judgment as to the plans or results. Humility, faith and obedience were his great elements of character. This is the standard that the Gideons International is trying to establish in all of its members, each man to be ready to do God’s will at any time at any place and in any way that the Holy Spirit leads.”*

Personally, I like the way they sum that up. That’s kind of how I see Abundant Life Church... I would like to see us be ready to do God’s will at any time at any place and in any way that the Holy Spirit leads. In order for us to do that, I think we must exhibit, like Gideon, humility, faith and obedience.

As I have said before, here at Abundant Life, we want to provide significant opportunities for each of you to explore and enhance your gifts through Service to the Body of Christ and our Community.

A great opportunity to do this is to become a Gideon. Here in Simi Valley we have a thriving Gideon Chapter. Becoming a Gideon is a great way to become more deeply rooted in the local body of Christ.

As I mentioned earlier, with the Gideons, there are opportunities for local evangelical outreach to schools, hospitals and Community Events which is organized by the local Chapter.

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For someone who wants to follow Jesus' command to be an evangelist but who is perhaps not ready to talk scripture to everybody they meet, this is a great way to bring the love of God and your love of God's word to the lost with others who have a similar desire.

There are both men's and women's Chapters and they meet on a regular basis. You can be as involved as you like but there is no obligation.

However, it is a great opportunity for fellowship and a way to get to know more of the local body of Christ that may attend other church fellowships and build friendships across denominational lines which I think is something that is close to the heart of Christ.

In fact, one of our brothers of the Abundant Life Church Men's Bible study is one of the local Gideon officers. Although he attends another church on Sundays we consider him part of the Abundant Life family.

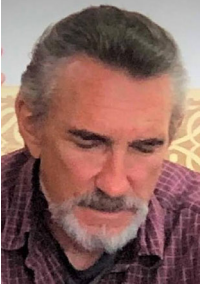
If you might be interested in learning more about the Simi Valley Gideons and how you may be able to get involved please let me know and I will get you information.

Going forward, we will continue to provide opportunities for fellowship and service in our community for your benefit and the glory of God. Although we are in our flesh, broken vessels made of clay, we have within us the Light of the world in Christ Jesus. When we allow His Light to shine through the cracks in us, the darkness has to flee, and the enemy with it.

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*One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.*

- Joshua 23:10



*Let's Pray,*

*- John Henry Raskin, Roadhouse Rabbi*