

GIDEON

The Bible reading for this is the famous bit in Judges 7 when Gideon defeats the Midianites in battle with only 300 men. But it's about much more than that.. we'll look at Judges 6 and 8.. let's dive in and let the Holy Spirit give us fresh insights as about what was going on..

This talk focuses mainly on Judges 6.11 to Judges 7.25. Quite a lot to read so we won't reproduce it here. Besides, where is Judges in the Bible...? Try to find it without using the index!

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

We find that the Angel of the Lord (God appearing in human form) appeared to Gideon who was working to keep wheat from the Midianites in Judges 6.11. The Angel of the Lord called Gideon a 'mighty warrior' (Gideon's name means 'smiter' which could be translated as 'one who decisively and suddenly hits hard'). Often in the Bible, names have a special significance with some people living up to their names. Gideon was one of these people.

WE NEED AN ATTITUDE OF BELIEF

Gideon was commanded to go and save Israel from the Midianites. 'How can I? My family are the weakest tribe in all of Israel and I am the least of all of them.' His attitude wasn't one of "I can't" but "OK but how can I?" This is important in our lives as Christians. Mary gave a similar response in Luke 1.34. Contrast Mary's attitude of faith (see also Luke 1.38) with the attitude of unbelief of Zechariah (Luke 1.18). Our attitude must be one of faith and belief, even if we ask how God will do something!

HUMILITY

Gideon's attitude also shows a humility. This means a Godly, rightful, head-bowed kind of attitude about ourselves before an almighty, all-powerful God. We also see Gideon's humility in Judges 8.23 when Gideon was asked to be King but said, 'The Lord is your ruler. I will not be your ruler.' In fact, Gideon reflects the character of Jesus to some extent in his humility. Incredibly we read in Judges 6.11 that the Angel of the Lord actually came and sat down next to a tree near Gideon. Very humbling and very powerful. (See Philipians 2.5-11)

THEOCRACY NOT DEMOCRACY

From this we learn that God's Kingdom is not a democracy. God doesn't say to us, 'well, let's take a vote than guys. If the majority of you want to sleep around, that's OK with me.'

God's Kingdom is a theocracy. Big word – what does that mean? It means that God is at the head, he is supreme, the King, the man, the boss, the Lord. What he says goes. We worship only God. The curtain between us and God has been torn by the sacrifice of Jesus (and when he rose from the dead and went back to heaven). We have access to God through the blood of Jesus. We don't need a priest or anything. We worship God alone. No-one and nothing else. Anything else is idolatry. We should obey God and serve him in love, as his humble heirs.

ASSURANCE IS OK

Gideon needed assurance from God. In both chapters 6 and 7 we find that Gideon asked for a sign to confirm what God was saying. This is very different kind of testing to the text we find Jesus quoting in Matthew 4.7 (from Deuteronomy 6.16). We see in Judges 6.20-21 that the Angel of the Lord touched the meat and bread Gideon had brought with a stick and flame jumped up and burned the food. Then in Judges 7.36-40, we find Gideon testing God's words with lambs wool.

Incidentally – Deuteronomy 6.16 says 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did in Massah'. In Exodus 17.7 we find Massah (which means 'testing' linked with a place called 'Meribah' – which means 'quarrel' or 'complaint.') I can only think that it is not the testing of God that is wrong but an evil attitude and intent in the testing. If Jesus used this line against Satan directly (Mt 4.7), we can be sure it is more than the simple 'testing of God's will' that Gideon did in Judges – and many Christians have done through time!

In Judges 7.10-15 we see Gideon even sneaked down to the enemy camp when God revealed a fearful conversation between 2 Midianites who'd had a dream and felt that they would be defeated that night by Gideon and the Lord God – encouraging news or what! Sometimes God will bring encouragement to you too! Or maybe you can bring encouragement to others (so says Hebrews 10.25 among others – also meaning that there will be some very discouraging things happening in the last days – so be encouraging always!)

Whatever, God is happy to bring assurance and reassurance to Gideon. Maybe you are that kind of person. We all are at times. We need to hear from God more than once perhaps. Maybe God speaks through his word and through other Christians. We are encouraged to test prophecy (1 Thess 5.20-21). So, I believe, we can also test God's will – with the right attitude!

God wants us to find his will for our lives. He doesn't want it to be a mystery. In fact, seeking God's will and testing God's will is a good sign as it means we want to do God's will. That is something God loves!

KNOWING OUR TRUE PLACE – THE POWER OF THE LORD

In Judges 6.21-24 we find that as the flames leapt up out of the rock where the Angel of the Lord had touched the meat and bread, Gideon suddenly understood he'd been talking to the Lord. He freaked, crying out, thinking he was going to die. But the Angel of the Lord calmed him down. In response Gideon built an altar, as an act of worship to the Lord.

This passage reminds me of 2 other Bible incidents. One is in Isaiah 6 where Isaiah sees the Lord and thinks he is going to die, realising how impure and unholy he was in the presence of the Lord God. In Isaiah, one of the creatures around God touched his lips with a burning coal and he was reassured by God he would not die.

For Isaiah, as a prophet, his lips were touched (where he would speak from as a prophet). For Gideon, the Angel of the Lord spoke and called him 'mighty warrior' (though Gideon didn't feel like one) as a prophecy of what God would do through Gideon.

The second passage of significance is in Luke 24.13-35 on the road to Emmaus when Jesus appeared to 2 disciples. At first they did not recognise him but then suddenly, after Jesus broke bread in verse 31, the Bible says 'they were allowed to recognise him (Jesus)'. So God reveals himself suddenly at times. Are we ready for God to reveal himself to us? What's more, in verse 32 when Jesus had gone and the 2 disciples were talking to each other, they said, 'It felt like a fire burning in us when Jesus talked to us and explained the Scriptures.'

So, when Jesus appears to us, reveals himself fully to us, when Jesus acts, when we truly hear from Jesus through his Word or an inferring of the Holy Spirit, the result is a fire that burns – in us and around us. Amazing stuff, do you want that fire of Jesus? I sure do.

TEARING DOWN THE IDOLS, ACTS OF FAITH

When Gideon tore down his father's idol to Baal and the Asherah pole and replaced it with an altar to the Lord God (as God had commanded) he took a great risk, and he knew it! Why else do you think he did it at night? What would you have done?

The crowd wanted to kill Gideon but his father Joash, stayed their hand. He said let Baal fight for himself if he can. This action by Gideon helped his father get things in perspective. When God calls you to do some things they may not be easy, you may be threatened with death (and even killed) but God requires obedience. The blessings are always more than the action. Fear God, not man.

This also gave a representation that God was more powerful than any idols and that God was the only God. All other idols in our lives, in our world must be literally, spiritually and metaphorically pulled down. The First Commandment still stands, as Jesus reiterated in Matthew 22.37. When Gideon did not die after pulling down the idols, it sent out a clear signal to the men about the power, authority and place of God.

AND SO TO BATTLE – FAITH IN ACTION

God called Gideon in chapter 7 of Judges to go attack the enemy. However, bit by bit God reduced the size of the army. Note that Gideon was listening to God. When God spoke to Gideon, he heard and obeyed. We should do the same!

Why did God do this? How come Gideon stepped out in faith and won the battle against the Midianites with only 300 men and some burning torches? Because God wanted to demonstrate that God is more powerful than man. God showed that where men put their faith in God and obey him, anything is possible. God wants us to trust in him and not in the things of this world, even if, like a large army, they appear to have great power.

Gideon is mentioned in Hebrews 11.32 along with great Bible 'names' like David and Samuel because he chose to trust in God not an army. He took the step of faith and obeyed God despite his fears and need for assurance from God.

Where is – how is – your faith today? Are you going to be a Gideon?