

Judges 6 – Gideon Meets the Lord

Intro:

This evening we move on to Gideon, probably one of the best-known of the Judges – a man of great faith, and greatly used of the Lord. Like all the other judges, he has his detractors, particularly in the matter of the fleeces that he put out. God willing, we will look at that next Sunday morning.

But today I want to look at the call of Gideon, and his meeting with the Lord – a theophany. As we noticed in the first message – the Angel of the Lord is always a pre-incarnate appearance of the Christ – strictly we should not say ‘Jesus Christ’ as he only took the name Jesus on his incarnation.

The general background:

After the victory of Barak there was an extended period of peace, followed by an equally serious decline. The seriousness of the apostasy can be gauged by the fact that, when Gideon takes action against Baal it is the Baal-worshippers who demand the death penalty for him, when, under the law, idolatry itself is punishable by death. It is always a mark of extreme apostasy when those who are faithful to the Word of God are condemned by the apostates. Do we not see this today? Within broad Christianity every view is acceptable – except that which takes the Word of God seriously and to be authoritative.

The judgment that God placed upon them was very severe:

Judges 6:1-6 Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. And the power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the Lord.

It was so bad that Gideon was reduced to threshing wheat in the winepress. The idea of threshing is to do it in a place where the wind has free access to blow away the chaff, and a winepress is hardly designed to allow the wind to pass through.

Eventually the people cried out to the Lord for help, and the Lord sends a prophet, but it is clear from the prophet’s message that the people are only crying out for help from the Lord, and not turning to him:

Judges 6:7-10 Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord on account of Midian, that the Lord sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘It was I who brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out from the house of slavery. ‘And I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their

land, and I said to you, "I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.""

The prophet simply brings a message of condemnation – it would seem. There is no hope offered, no offer of hope that the oppression would be relieved. And there is a very important lesson here. It is not enough simply to cry out to the Lord for help – without repentance, and self-humbling for our sin. It is obvious that all they wanted was relief. Yes they were looking in the right place, but not in the right way!

Whenever we come to the Lord, whether it be in distress, or in our normal devotional times, there should always be in our hearts a sense of repentance:

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

But this issue goes further – we live in a day and age of the ‘repentance-free’ gospel. Too often a gospel is preached that is not a gospel. It is a message that focuses on sin only being something that spoils our relationship with God, rather than the rebellion against a holy and righteous God that it is. And so we are presented almost as victims rather than spiritual criminals, and God is presented (almost) as a kind of spiritual social worker, trying to help us get on the right track. This is the message that is presented in such things as the Alpha Course and The Purpose Driven Life.

And so, when people respond to such a gospel, they think that they are Christians, when the real problem in their life is left unchanged. Talk about taking Tylenol to cure cancer! No wonder there are so many weak and unspiritual ‘Christians’ around today.

So many people whom we meet in the Open Air blame God for their trials, and even say that they have asked God to help them, but he hasn’t. But they have never repented from their sin, and look upon God’s help almost as a civil right!

Contrast this with the New Testament:

Mark 1:14-15 Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

And consider what Paul says, when he sums up his ministry to the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:19-21 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:26-27 "Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God."

When we witness and preach the gospel, repentance has to be the number one issue we raise. Christ on the cross teaches us no less.

Important Note: Not all trials for Christians are as a result of sin. They may be a result of faithfulness, in terms of persecution, or tough labour for the Lord. Or they may simply be to humble us. Following his remarkable experience of God, Paul writes this:

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

But a spirit of repentance never goes amiss in our approach to the Lord! Trials should produce self-examination, not self-condemnation!

The Angel of the Lord visits Gideon

Now there must have been a response among the people to the prophet’s message – for the next thing we read is that the Angel of the Lord comes to see Gideon and addresses him in a remarkable way:

Judges 6:12 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, “The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior [or mighty man of valour].”

Gideon did not feel very much like that, as we shall see, but the Lord saw in Gideon what he could make of him, and that is what counts. We may not think that we amount to all that much – but when the Lord calls us, and gives us the strength, we can do amazing things.

When Gideon makes his comments in verse 13, the Lord’s response is to repeat the challenge, but in a remarkably tender way:

Judges 6:13-14 Then 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 abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

And the Lord looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?”

He does not say ‘Go in your own strength’ but ‘go in **this your** strength’ – the strength that the Lord gives to those whom he sends – ‘Have I not sent you?’

What a blessing it is to know that those whom the Lord calls to service he equips for service! And that means us too!

The Lord looked at him – a look that must have carried great weight with Gideon for his whole attitude changes, from showing his sadness at the situation to enquiring about how the Lord planned to do this great work:

His use of the word 'Lord' changes. In verse 13 he uses it as a title of respect – 'sir'. And we know this because he refers to God as Lord in the same sentence, not realising who his visitor was. But in verse 15 he addresses him as God directly, and the look that the Lord gave him, coupled with the direct command was convincing him of just who it was that was addressing him.

Judges 6:15 And he said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."

The Lord's response is a promise of his presence to go with him:

Judges 6:16 But the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."

How similar to the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Character of Gideon

This whole encounter demonstrates just what Gideon was like, and how godly he was.

Gideon was a godly man who had stood up for the Lord in very difficult circumstances. We see this in a number of ways:

i. **His response to the Angel's greeting.** See how, when the Angel addresses him in the singular, his response shows how he identifies with the woes of his people. He is so taken up with their state that, given the opportunity of a sympathetic ear he pours out his heart – before the Lord, although he is not aware of that yet. Note the absence of the word 'They'!

He is like Daniel in his great prayer in Daniel 9 – worth a read.

Friends – when we look around at the state of the professing church today, do we grieve the way that Gideon did, and do we mourn the spiritual drought that follows the dishonouring of the name of the Lord by so many who profess his name? Or do we stand aloof and blame it on 'them'?

ii. **In his description of his own situation:**

Judges 6:15 And he said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest [lit 'least'] in my father's house."

Now while this may refer simply to his age, and the size of his family – it is much more likely that he is saying that he has little influence, precisely because of his stand for the Lord. He was well-known for his opposition to the Baal-worshipping ways of the people, and consequently was not listened to.

Do we often feel like this? Our stand for the Lord, far from being honoured, seems to have left us with no influence whatsoever. No-one comes to us for advice, and, if we offer it, it is rejected in favour of worldly options. God does not appear to be using us. Gideon was so used to being ignored that, when the Lord told him things were going to change, he couldn't believe it.

But he didn't compromise! He didn't adapt what he said in order to get more influence. Isn't that a temptation? We soften the gospel in order to make it more 'attractive' to the world. But all we do is empty it of its power.

iii. **In his action in knocking down the Altar of Baal.** Was his fear cowardice? Hardly. Was it not more that there were so few who trusted the Lord that he had only his own servants to stand with him, and to do it in broad daylight invited total disaster. And when the deed was discovered, he was the only likely culprit. They didn't have to look for long, did they? His opposition to Baal-worship was so well-known that he was the obvious one to accuse.

What a great man Gideon is – and an example and challenge to us all.

The sign

If you had been Gideon, how would you have reacted to a man coming up to you and saying to you the things that the Angel said to him? We have seen that his view of his visitor had begun to change, and this is confirmed by v17:

Judges 6:17 So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favour in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who speakest with me."

The language here is of one who is beginning to understand that he is speaking to the Lord. Which is why he asks for a sign. He is not sinning in this. What he has been told is so unexpected, and so tremendous in its challenge and assurance of success that he was wise to ask for a sign. But he also offers the traditional hospitality – with one difference: he does not invite him into his home, another sign of his unpopularity as a faithful worshipper of God.

On his return with the food (very generous considering the state of near famine) he gets his sign! And the sign brings him the final proof that he has met with God himself. And his reaction is the same as Samson's father – he feared to die because he had seen the Lord. His reaction was based upon his own sense of personal sin together with a deep appreciation of the holiness of God – both worthy truths.

But his fear of dying? This stemmed from a misunderstanding of the Lord's words to Moses, when he met with the Lord:

Exodus 33:18-23 Then Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!" And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" Then the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. "Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

How much comfort do we miss by not knowing the Scriptures accurately? Had he forgotten that Moses did not die, neither did Jacob when he wrestled with the Lord?

What do we forget that would be for our comfort? Do we forget that Christ has paid for all our sin – that we are accepted by God because of Christ? Do we go weakly on our way because we forget the privileges that are ours in him? Do we forget that he has promised never to leave us or forsake us? Do we fear for the future – forgetting the great promises that he will keep safe all whom the Father has given him, and will not lose any?

Seeing God

The thing that caused Gideon his concern was only one side of the truth: Only God in his essential deity may not be seen:

1 Timothy 6:15-16 He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honour and eternal dominion! Amen.

But this awesome and holy God can be known through a mediator – Christ – and it is Christ whom Gideon has seen, and who gives him the message of peace. It is only through Christ that we have peace, and that is why Gideon names the altar that he builds ‘The Lord is Peace’.

Under the Old Covenant the only way they could approach God was through the mediator – the whole sacrificial system taught that, and the occasional theophanies were only extensions of that. Interestingly in both this appearance and the appearance to Samson’s parents he accepted offerings – emphasising his position as mediator.

If we look at the times in the OT when Christ appeared in this way, it was always at a significant time in the life of his people, or in the life of individuals. He came to commission, strengthen them etc. It is no different now – he is always with (as he was always with his people then) but there are times when he makes himself known to us in a very special way. No longer is it a physical manifestation, but something much better – the inner peace and assurance that he brings to our hearts.

The theophanies were also foretaste of his incarnation – when he came as a real man, and not simply looking like one. And he came as a real man for only one purpose – to live a life of absolute perfection, and then die on the cross as a sinner, in our place, taking the wrath of God that we deserved, that we might have peace with God.

The peace that Gideon had was bought on the cross just as much as our peace is.

The question is: are you at peace with God?

Romans 5:1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.....

In other words, have you truly repented of your sin, and have you truly cast yourself on the mercy of the Lord, and, by faith in Christ, found your sin forgiven, God’s righteous anger turned away from

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you. This is the only way to peace with God – but it is a sure way. If you have never turned to Christ, seek him now, and do not stop until you have found him!