

Don't Judge Me, Lead Me: The Book of Judges

Judges 6:25-40

A Gideon Story (Part 2)

What if God personally asked you right now to tear down the most cherished idols in your life? You might respond, "What idols? I don't have statues of gods in my garden, and I certainly don't worship the sun or moon! That sort of thing happens in other cultures far away. Sure, lots of people in the Bible worshipped idols, but not me!"

If that's your initial reaction, then we need to revisit the first couple of commandments in Exodus 20:

Exodus 20:1-6 (KJV)

1 And God spake all these words, saying,

2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

No other gods. Hmm. Let's look at some definitions of the word "god" from Webster's dictionary:

1. Big G God (my addition), The Supreme Being; Jehovah; the eternal and infinite spirit, the creator, and the sovereign of the universe. "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4)

2. Little g god (my addition), A false god; a heathen deity; an idol. "Fear not the gods of the Amorites." (Judges 6)

3. Any person or thing exalted too much in estimation or deified and honored as the chief good. "Whose god is their belly." (Philippians 3).

Or—let me add—whose god is their job or position; whose god is their bank account; whose god is their hobbies; whose god is their addictions; whose god is their opinions. Yes, we're talking about anything that usurps the supremacy of God in our lives. Sound like the law? It is!

To truly understand why idol worship is such a big deal, we must first know Who God is. In Exodus 20:1-6, we learn several things about Him:

1. He is merciful. He rescued Israel from bondage in Egypt (Exodus 20:2).

2. He alone is worthy of worship. He commands Israel to worship only Him (Exodus 20:3) and despises their worship of created things (Exodus 20:4).
3. He is jealous. When Israel worships anything else, He punishes their rebellion (Exodus 20:5).
4. He is merciful again and again. God is always ready to bless and forgive those who love and obey Him (Exodus 20:6).

Then we need to not only know about God, but to know Him personally. In the New Testament, we see these same attributes of God, but through a more relational lens:

1. His love and mercy toward us. He rescued us from darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His Son (Colossians 1:13).
2. He loved us first (1 John 4:19), while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8) and now—on the other side of the cross—we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).
3. He won't share our love with the world. Everyday we must choose between Him and the world (1 John 2:15-17).
4. God forgives us when we worship other things and fall into sin (1 John 2:1; John 14:15).

We can only know God through His Word. He seeks worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). Once we understand Him in the context of a relationship—not just laws—we realize why He zealously guards His glory in our hearts.

***QUESTION FOR MEDITATION:** Do you recall a time when perhaps you only knew God through religion and its adherences, rather through a personal relationship with Him through Jesus? What is the difference now that you have the resurrection life of Jesus living in you and through you (and I pray that you do!). What changed?

***STUDY POINT:** Conduct a personal Bible study of Apostle Paul before and after his radical conversion on the road to Damascus. Write down in two columns all pertinent Scripture references—Paul before Christ, Paul after Christ. Underneath your two-column chart, write down all the ways that a conversion like this would be received in our day and time. What reactions would we see from believers and non-believers—similar or different than the Biblical account?

In today's Teaching Room, we continue with Gideon's story in Judges 6:25-40, where God asks Gideon to tear down the idols of his people to restore proper worship to the Lord, opening the floodgate to God's divine power. Oh, and lots of His grace!

(INTRODUCTION)

Let's catch up with Gideon in *Judges 6:25-27 (NIV)*:

"That same night the LORD said to him, 'Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.' So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because

he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime."

Gideon was commanded by God to destroy the altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it—symbols of idol worship in Canaanite culture. Baal, a storm and fertility god, was central to their religious practices. Gideon obeyed, but out of fear he and his ten servants carried out the task at night.

Despite his doubt and fear, God was beginning to grow Gideon's faith, enabling him to act swiftly on God's commands. Perhaps we see a bit of ourselves in this scenario. God invites us to see through time and trouble, that He is good (Psalm 34:8)—that we might place our total trust in Him!

"In the morning when the people of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar! They asked each other, 'Who did this?' When they carefully investigated, they were told, 'Gideon son of Joash did it.' The people of the town demanded of Joash, 'Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.'" (Judges 6:28-30 NIV)

Gideon's obedience to God enraged the townspeople, who demanded his death. Ironically, these were fellow Israelites, God's chosen people, who were now defending idols rather than God's honor. You can discern who or what a person worships by the fervency of their defence for those things.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: In what ways might you take a stand for Christ, and worship of Yahweh within your sphere of influence? What would that look like, and what would it mean in terms of your lifestyle?

In *Judges 6:31 (NIV)*, Joash, Gideon's father, responds:

"But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, 'Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.'"

Joash, once a keeper of Baal's altar, now stands with his son, challenging the crowd to let Baal defend himself. We may surmise here that Joash is not a little surprised, perhaps proud of his son's uncharacteristic courage and fortitude. The words of Joash—steeped in long-held convictions that the gods defend themselves and any vengeful human intervention will result in bloodshed—highlighted the absurdity of idol worship. If Baal were truly a god, he wouldn't need anyone to fight his battles! We may laugh at this notion, but look at how we sometimes lean into worldly means to save us! Perhaps this scene reminds you of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Be sure to read 1 Kings 18:20-40.

As a result, Gideon was given a new name by the locals, as seen in *Judges 6:32 (NIV)*:

"So because Gideon broke down Baal's altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal that day, saying, 'Let Baal contend with him.'"

I'm sure our friend Gideon much preferred being renamed then removed from the earth! He's thanking God that He softened the hearts of the townspeople!

***STUDY POINT:** Not all Biblical accounts of God's messengers taking down cherished idols ended as well as Gideon's. Search the Scriptures to find at least six passages where God's own suffered for carrying out His will. Write out the Scripture references for each of these instances. Now find six passages in which God's will was carried out and lives were spared, including the messenger. Think about outcomes. Why does God sometimes allow good outcomes but sometimes allow negative things to happen when we obey Him?

In *Judges 6:33 (NIV)*, we learn about the gathering of Gideon's enemies:

"Now all the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel."

The Valley of Jezreel, a fertile plain, had long been a battleground in Israel's history, including Deborah and Barak's victory and Saul's defeat. Here it would serve as a stage for yet another victory for Yahweh.

*"Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them."
(Judges 6:34-35 NIV)*

"Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon" is the idea of God's Spirit clothing and empowering Gideon to lead the people in battle. This is a pattern of the anointing of God's Spirit in the Old Testament, usually purposed for the gathering together of troops for God-ordained battles. God utilizes Gideon's leadership skills but enhances them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This final section in Judges 6 has become somewhat famous, and a lot misunderstood. Here is Gideon's request for confirmation from God:

*"Gideon said to God, 'If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.' And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.' That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew."
(Judges 6:36-40 NIV)*

In Judges 6:36-40, Gideon seeks confirmation from God through a yes-no oracle, similar to the Urim and Thummim used by Israelite priests (Exodus 28:30). Without access to these, Gideon uses a fleece on a threshing floor as his oracle. His question: will God use him to deliver Israel? Under normal conditions, the fleece would be damp and the ground dry. When this occurs, Gideon wonders if it's just nature at work, not a divine answer. He

reverses the conditions, asking for the fleece to remain dry and the ground wet, believing that such an unnatural outcome would confirm God's will. In ancient Near Eastern culture, oracles often used natural elements or sacrificial organs to seek divine answers.

So was Gideon simply seeking assurance from God, using a fleece as a sign—or was he betraying his lack of faith from an unbelieving heart? Well, we don't ultimately know his heart. But God graciously responded, even reversing the conditions on the second night to confirm His divine plan. And this is a great takeaway from the Gideon story: While Gideon's test reveals his insecurities, it also shows God's patience and faithfulness. Listen, beloved, Gideon's weaknesses didn't hinder God's plan, and neither do ours. God's grace is sufficient, even in our doubts and fears.

I leave you with this encouragement from Scripture today:

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9, KJV)

~ Reverend Darren McClelland