

Lesson 43
The Weakness of Faith
Hebrews 11:32

One of the marks of a declining and decaying Christianity is when professing believers begin to boast arrogantly of their own ability to do things for God. Man is exalted and God is debased. Humanity is enthroned and deity is dethroned. When men begin to glorify themselves, they also begin to speak of success and bigness at the expense of compromising the truth of God. Success, bigness and numbers become more important than God's truth and God's glory.

It is not wrong to think in terms of doing great things for God if these exploits are done by faith and to glorify God. The real issue is the motivation of one's heart, for only God and the person knows whether the things done are to glorify self or God.

William Carey said, "Ask great things of God; expect great things from God; undertake great things for God."

Gideon is one of four judges mentioned in Hebrews 11:32. *"And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jeohtha, of David and Samuel and the prophets ..."* Gideon made the Old Testament Hall of Fame; for his faith. Gideon is a perfect example to show the weakness of faith; that is, an individual must recognize his own weakness in himself and be weak before God, wholly trusting in God to work mighty works through him.

BACKGROUND

Gideon was a judge in Israel, and came to power in a day of great spiritual declension. Following the deaths of Moses and Joshua, Israel grievously departed from the Lord and *"every man did that which was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 21:25). The people as a whole had apostatized from the one, true God, cast away God's law and worshiped the idols of the heathen. God had told them to drive all the Canaanites from the land, but they failed in this task so God delivered them into the hand of the enemy. Yet, God did not leave Himself without a witness, and even in the days of dark apostasy God had a Gideon or some other judge to lead His covenant people. It was during these seasons of great spiritual decadence and gloom that faith wrought many of its mightiest works and achieved some of its most notable victories. We learn from the period of the judges that God works even in the midst of great apostasy.

We live in a day when Christianity is in sad shape. There is today a widespread departure from God and His Word. Religion flourishes, but this religion is nothing but apostate Christianity. Practical holiness and vital Christianity is at a low ebb. In most cases, a church experience has been substituted for a Christ experience. This is a sad day for true Christianity, but God has not left Himself without a witness, and those who wait upon the Lord will do great exploits for God. To show how far our country has apostatized from the truth of Christianity, a Buddhist was a recent chaplain of the legislature in California. A Buddhist is not even within the pale of Christendom.

Gideon, like the other judges, was a man far from perfect and who had great faults. His life was at times very unstable and his experience showed a mixture of unbelief and belief. Like ours so often is, his faith was mingled with fear, unbelief and carnal reasoning.

Gideon, like all the judges, was a man of like passion with us, and from his example we may take comfort, not by excusing our unbelief, but by refusing to despair when our faith is at a low ebb.

THE CALL OF GIDEON - Judges 6:11-16

“Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites.” -- The foe of God and God’s people at the time of Gideon was the Midianites. Israel was under the rule of the Midianites and they were ravishing the land of the children of Israel. A far worse situation than starvation faced the Israelites, for they were starving spiritually. The worship of Baal was a common practice among the covenant people of God, and it was considered a criminal act, deserving of death if Baal was not worshiped in Israel. But God had His man to deliver again the children of Israel from their external enemy, the Midianites, and their internal enemy, spiritual apostasy.

“And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, ‘The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.’” -- Gideon was an unknown nobody who was slaving away in a wine press, but Gideon was a man who knew the one, true God, and God chose to use Him to deliver His people. God had undoubtedly been preparing Gideon for years to be the leader of His people. Then one day the Lord appeared to Gideon and called him a “valiant warrior.” He obviously at this point of his life was not a valiant warrior, but God saw Gideon as he would be when God got through with him and not so much what he was at that moment. It was the God who was with him that would make him a valiant warrior.

Whenever God calls us to do a task for Him, we never feel adequate for the task, but God sees us at the end after He has given us the power and the patience to accomplish the task.

Some time ago someone sent me a plaque in the mail. It tells us that God looks at the finished product and not just the process. “Please be patient. God isn’t finished with me yet.”

“Then Gideon said to him, ‘Oh 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.’” -- Gideon did something that few of us might do, he challenged the angel of the Lord who was undoubtedly the preincarnate Christ. He said, “If God is with us, why has all this misery come upon Israel and where is the supernatural working God of our fathers?” He challenged God to work supernaturally.

When was the last time you challenged God in your prayer life? “If you are all-powerful, prove your power by saving souls. God, your people are wayward, your reputation is at stake among the unbelievers. Will you not work to preserve your own name among the heathen? Have you

abandoned your people?”

“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?’” -- God assured Gideon that his strength for the task before him was from God. God had sent him and God would accomplish the task through him. These words were designed by God to teach Gideon his own weakness and his absolute need for trust in God to do God’s work. His strength was in a realization of his own weakness. **“... for when I am weak, then I am strong”** (2 Cor. 12:10). Gideon had to learn of his own utter inability to deliver the Israelites. God had to do it through him.

“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.’ But the LORD said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.’” -- Gideon caught the message and said, “How can I deliver Israel?” He began to realize his own inability to do anything for God apart from God’s working in him. Gideon had to be emptied of all self-sufficiency and lean wholly on God Who would be with him to defeat Midian.

When God calls the Christian to do a task, He first empties that believer of any self-sufficiency and then teaches him the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to accomplish the task.

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

THE INFIRMITY OF GIDEON’S FAITH - Judges 6:33-40

“Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel.” -- Gideon, in faith, began his overthrow of the Midianites in a small way. He and ten other Israelites tore down the statue of Baal, the Canaanite god, and cut down Asherah, a Canaanite goddess, which stood in the middle of Gideon’s father’s yard. He did this act by night because he was afraid to do it by day. He was a man who was afraid, and God had to teach him to overcome fear. Before Gideon could conquer the Midianites, he had to conquer his own fear. This act of cutting down the god and goddess so stirred the Canaanites that they were ready to put Gideon to death. **“Then the men of the city said to Joash, ‘Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it”** (Judges 6:30). This caused the Midianites to go to war against Israel.

The Canaanites were Satan’s people, and Satan gets furious when his kingdom of darkness is invaded by the kingdom of light. Gideon did his God-given duty, and it caused the Canaanites to get blistering mad. When a Christian does his duty before God, it often stirs people and makes them furious. By doing right, a Christian often makes matters worse, and this, in turn, might discourage the Christian and give him reason to compromise the truth. Just as Gideon was called a radical for God, so we too should be known as radicals for Christ. Whenever Christianity becomes respectable to the world, the truth of God is being compromised.

“So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezerites were called together to follow him. And he sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him.” -- The key to understanding Gideon’s success is in the words, ***“The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon.”*** God moved on Gideon to do the task of destroying the Midianites.

As Christians we cannot overcome Satan, nor turn from temptations, nor increase our faith by a mere resolution of mind or an act of our own will. It is only as we are strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in the inner man that we can defeat the world, the flesh and the devil. The Christian is to constantly seek for the Holy Spirit’s power in his Christian battle with the world, the flesh and the devil. ***“For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father ... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man”*** (Eph. 3:14, 16).

“Then Gideon said to God, ‘If Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken.’ And it was so. When he arose, early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, ‘Do not let Thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground.’ And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.” -- The major infirmity in Gideon’s faith was that he kept asking for signs from the Lord to confirm His promises to Gideon. Gideon was not wrong in asking for a sign, but he kept on asking, showing that he was walking by sight and not by faith. Yet, in spite of his slowness to believe God and act, Gideon had a heart for God.

Christians do not all at once learn to walk by faith. Often in the baby stages of Christianity, there is a great mixture of walking by faith and by sight, and this is one of the reasons that baby believers are not too effective for God. ***“... for we walk by faith, not by sight ...”*** (2 Cor. 5:7). The more we learn to trust God apart from signs and feelings, the more we shall see Him work for us.

THE SUCCESS OF GIDEON’S FAITH - Judges 7:1-7; 16-22

“Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel become boastful, saying, “My own power has delivered me.” Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, “Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.”” So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained.” -- Gideon was still a man who walked too much by sight, and God had to teach him to walk by faith. When God told him, “Have I not sent you?” that should have been enough reason for any man, but not this man Gideon. The Midianites had an army of multiple thousands, and Gideon felt his army of 22,000 could defeat the enemy. God

told Gideon to get rid of the cowards in his ranks, and the army was cut to 10,000 men. Probably Gideon still thought he could defeat the Midianite hordes with 10,000 men. He still thought of success in terms of numbers.

“Then the LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.’ So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink.’ Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth was 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water. And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home.’” -- God wanted to teach Gideon that numbers were not important to defeat the enemy if there is a small band of valiant, disciplined and wise soldiers who trust in God. Only those soldiers who lapped water like a dog were retained, and that was only 300 men. The 300 brought the water to their mouths without ever taking their eyes off the enemy. Some have thought that 9,700 of the soldiers stopped marching to drink, getting down on their hands and knees, but the 300 did not stop marching because they wanted to go to battle. As they went along the water, they scooped it up in their hands as a dog laps water.

The lesson God wants us to learn as Christians is that it is better to have a few, well-trained and well-disciplined believers in a local church than to have massive numbers who know nothing of God and who are cowards to face the enemy, the world, the flesh and the devil. Furthermore, we do not have to have a big church to have a big ministry, but we must have well-taught and well-disciplined believers in Christ, and then the ministry will be effective for God.

“And he divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, ‘Look at me, and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.’” -- Gideon, after getting an interpretation of a dream that assured him of the downfall of the Midianites, said, ***“Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.”*** At this point Gideon by faith had conquered fear and was ready to do battle the Lord’s way. Gideon did a very strange thing. He divided his men into three companies of 100 men. He gave each one a trumpet, a pitcher, and a torch, and they were to follow his specific directions and do exactly what he did. He undoubtedly had received his directions from the Lord, although we are not told this.

“When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp, and say, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’” -- The men were to blow the trumpets and shout “For the LORD and Gideon.” Notice they did not shout, “For Gideon and the Lord.” Gideon had learned to put the Lord first and himself second. It was God’s glory and God’s honor that Gideon promoted, and men were to know that it was God who gave the victory.

“So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the

trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, 'A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!' And each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled." -- At the sound of the trumpets on a clear night and the crashing of pitchers and the sight of waving torches and the shouting, the enemy panicked and began to run.

"And when they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath." – Panic stricken and running in the dark, the Midianites began to kill one another, and their army was in total confusion. With the enemy in fear and retreat, the Israelites only had to pursue the Midianites to mop them up.

Gideon was successful because God was with him and he was totally dependent upon God to give him the victory, we can only have victory in our Christian lives as we believe God and obey his orders.

CONCLUSION

Gideon experienced God's power because he believed God. Have you yet believed in the one, true God who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for sinful men? The way to know God is through Jesus Christ. *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me'"* (John 14:6). The only way to experience God is through believing in Jesus Christ. You cannot experience God's power until you believe in Jesus Christ.

To believe in a god will not save you, for the Midianites believed in their gods of Baal and Asherah and were sincere, but they were lost and destroyed. To be saved you must believe in the one, true God who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for sinners. Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).