

Thoughts From Other Minds:

In verses 25-32 Yahweh lays down the demand that commits us. ... Why such a demand? Because two altars cannot coexist side by side. You cannot have an altar to Yahweh (v.24) and an altar to Baal (v. 25). They are mutually exclusive. The demand placed on Gideon was meant as a paradigm for Israel. Yahweh was preparing to deliver them. But Israel must be properly prepared for such deliverance. God cannot safely trust his good gifts to those not fully given to him. When our little boy comes, bawling, into the kitchen with knees skinned up from a headlong fall on the driveway, we don't simply slap a giant two-inch-wide Band-Aid over the mess. Rather, we cleanse the grit and gunk out of the wound before the Band-Aid goes on. And that is Jesus' way. He did not hand the rich man a decision card and tell him to check the box beside 'follow me.' Instead he exposed the moral man's transgression of the first commandment and called on him to smash his idol - then he could follow Christ (Mark 10:21). There can be none of this double-heartedness - not for Gideon, nor for Israel, nor for the rich young ruler, nor for us.

Such is Yahweh's demand on Gideon and Israel. If Yahweh is to be their Saviour Baal must go. Baal may be tolerant, but Yahweh is jealous. There can be no 'limping between two opinions' (2 Kings 18:21). ... Judges 6 and Matthew 6 agree: no one can be a slave of two masters (Matt. 6:24). For Gideon and for us those times come when our commitment to the living God can no longer remain hidden, when we must declare ourselves, when we must burn our bridges and, if need be, stand alone against the religious, social, cultural expectations of the community.

Gideon 'did as Yahweh had commanded him' (v. 27). Some may blame Gideon for demolishing Baal's altar by night fearing relatives and city fathers. I doubt that it matters. Did God tell him to do it by day? Did God tell him he couldn't be afraid? Or did God simply tell him to do it? Evidently, obedience was essential and heroism optional.

Nothing had so shaken Ophrah in all the village's history! What a furore as the town councilmen sipped their warm goat's milk in the town gate that morning! Lord Baal's altar wrecked, Lady Asherah's pole hacked to pieces and used for firewood - they'd never known such sacrilege. Wait'll they catch the rascal who did it. Somehow word leaked out and the village fathers pay Joash a call, demanding he turn over his son for execution. Crises sometimes cause people to talk sense - at least Joash found it so: [v. 31]

The writer of Judges must have smiled as he recorded the biting satire of Joash's words. (Only Elijah's 1 Kings 18:27, will be more pungent.) 'If Baal is God,' so ran Joash's new theology, 'he doesn't need any help from Ophrah's town council to maintain his honour; he should be perfectly able to zap my son himself.' So the issue presses Israel: either continue to prop up Baal (v. 31) or worship at the altar of Yahweh (vv.24,28).

Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges, Such a Great Salvation*, pp. 97-99.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

15 May 2016

Sermon: "Gideon—prepared to save by faith #1" (text: Judges 6:1-32)

Scripture: Judges 6:1-40

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Gideon leads the 'Honour Roll of Faith' of Hebrews 11:32-34, as a man who 'by faith' did mighty deeds. Last Lord's Day we saw Barak's faith as it were 'full-grown'; the Lord commands, and Barak obeys and saves; but for our edification the growth of Gideon's faith to a saviour of Israel is described for us in detail.

1. Calling for a saviour

Israel was oppressed by the Midianites (Jdgs 6:1); this suffering was not as long as at other times, but it was more intense, so that 'Israel was brought very low because of Midian (vs. 6). Then the people of Israel 'cried out for help to the Lord'. What made them wait so long?!

This time, instead of raising up a judge, the Lord sends them a prophet to preach his word to them (vs. 7-10), to remind them. 'I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice.'

They thought they were suffering because the Lord had abandoned them (v. 13 b). But the truth was that they were suffering not because the Lord had forsaken them, but because they had forsaken the Lord—and so the first step towards salvation from the Midianites would be repentance, a turning from idols to the Lord.

Often people appeal to suffering as evidence for atheism. They say that if God is as he is described in the Bible, as all powerful, wise and good, then he would do something about the suffering in the world—but he does not do so; suffering continues, and so probably there is no such God.

The Bible teaches that while not all suffering is a direct consequence of sin, sin brought suffering into God's perfect world (Gen 3). The Bible also teaches that some suffering is good; it is good that touching hot things burns, so we pull away; it is good when the Lord uses suffering to discipline us (Ps 119:67).

Without suffering, Israel would never have called on the Lord to save them. Many testify that if it were not for suffering they would not have come to faith in the Lord Jesus (cf also 1 Peter 1:7). Rather than complain about suffering, we should look for the Lord's purpose for us in it, for he uses suffering for our good.

2. Called to be a saviour

When his people to call on him to save them he called Gideon to be their saviour. The Angel of the Lord came to him while he was hiding from the Midianites,

beating out wheat in a winepress at Ophrah, calling him a 'mighty man of valour'. Many think this was sarcasm—but this is what he would be if he obeyed the Lord.

At first Gideon did not recognise his Visitor; but when he tells him “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” it began to dawn on him that his visitor might be divine – and so he calls him ‘Lord’ (v. 15). Then, when his Visitor says “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man”, Gideon asks for a sign to prove that he really is ‘the Lord’ (vs. 17-18).

Gideon prepared a present worthy of the Lord, a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour (= about 22 litres), and placed them on the rock as directed by the Angel of the Lord—and when he touched them with the tip of his staff and fire sprang out of the rock and consumed them and he vanished, Gideon knew, and he was afraid, because he had seen the Angel of the Lord.

This is the foundation of faith in God, Christian faith—knowing that God has spoken to us, for faith is taking God at his word. God can speak in many ways; he spoke to John Calvin through William Farrell, calling him to gospel ministry in Geneva. His ordinary way of speaking is by his written word, the Bible.

We know the Bible is God’s word from the teaching of Jesus (Jn 10:34-36); we know it speaks to us because much of it is for everyone (e.g., Jn 3:16, Acts 17:30). Our knowing is different from the knowing of others who, sure that God has spoken to them, engage in terrorism.

Our being sure is not like their being sure because the Bible is unique; God’s fingerprints are on it, and the Holy Spirit persuades us of its ‘infallible truth and divine authority’ (cf. WCF 1:5); and Jesus has risen from the dead, confirming that he is the Son of God—and on his authority we rest on the scriptures as God’s word.

The foundation of our faith is knowing that God has spoken to us (cf. 1 Thess 2:13. The Thessalonians received the good news that salvation is through faith in Jesus, the Son of God, who died on the cross, as the word of God. The gospel is God’s word; when we tell it to others, God speaks through us (2 Cor 5:18-19).

Trusting Jesus, we are reconciled to God, at peace with him (Rom 5:1); Gideon had this peace; he was not an idolater; the Angel said the Lord was with him. When he was afraid he would die because he had seen the Angel of the Lord, the Lord said to him, ‘Peace be to you; do not fear you shall not die (v. 23)

The Lord tested Gideon; would he depend on himself, or on the Lord? And then he told him to destroy his father’s altar to Baal and the Asherah pole beside it, for the Lord demands our exclusive loyalty, and to offer sacrifice, for there is no forgiveness apart from sacrifice, now the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Many condemn Gideon for his fear; but the scripture suggests he was wise to do it by night. God does not blame us for our fear, provided that we trust him, act wisely and obey him, leaving the consequences to him, as Gideon did. The Lord did not fail him, but protected him; we are to fear God only (Matt 10:28-30; 1 Pet 3:14-15).

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Both Barak and Gideon were ‘heroes’ of faith (Heb 11:32-33); compare and contrast what we learn about their faith in chapters 4-5 and 6 of Judges. What practical use can we make of this?
2. When, oppressed by the Midianites, the people asked the Lord for a saviour did he send them a prophet? (Judges 6:7-10) What question/s does / do the prophet’s message answer?
3. Suffering entered the world because of sin (Gen 3), and it is an evil; yet it is also a good. Give examples of how suffering can be a good thing in both the natural realm and in the spiritual realm (e.g. Ps 119:67; 1 Pet 1:7).
4. Read and reflect upon Gideon’s conversation with the Angel of the Lord (6:11-16); why does Gideon ask for a sign (v. 17)? Why does he prepare an offering (v. 20)? Why was he afraid he would die, and how does this bear on the identity of this ‘Angel’?
5. How does God speak to us, and how can we be sure?
6. What does this part of the story of Gideon have to say about our fears?