

Introduction:

- A. There's a song Christians used to sing when parting—when a service was over, say, or when someone was going far away:

*God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.*

It's comforting, reassuring. Whether we sing it or say it, it is one of the privileges of our faith to say to someone departing, "*The Lord be with you.*"

- B. When the angel of the LORD surprised Gideon as Gideon was trying to hide from the dreaded Midianites, that's what he said. "*The Lord is with you.*" And he added, "*Mighty warrior.*" **The ground under that assurance just shifted!** That part doesn't come up in our farewell song or in our brief benedictions. "*The LORD be with you... mighty warrior.*" Perhaps if we said that every time we'd be more prepared for the life that comes to those who find themselves in the company of the LORD.
- C. Turn to **Judges 6**. If you weren't with us last week let me recap. We step into a time about 1170 years before Christ, several generations before King David. The Israelites, a kind of loose confederation of tribes living in the land God had promised them, had abandoned the LORD and were worshiping the gods of their neighbors, like Baal and Asherah. Consequently, God gave Israel into the hands of a fierce enemy, the Midianites, who raided and plundered Israel at will. This went on for seven years till finally Israel cried out to the LORD. They didn't repent, mind you, or turn from their other gods. They just cried out to the LORD also.
- Then, out of the blue, the angel of the LORD appeared to one ordinary Israelite, Gideon, while he was trying to hide his wheat threshing from the sight of the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared he said to Gideon in **Jdg 6:12**, "*The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.*" **The first phrase is great. The second means trouble.**

- D. In the next part of the Gideon story God shows us what it means for God's people to live with the LORD. **Having the LORD with us thrusts us into the warrior's world.**

As we saw last week, Gideon eventually asks to prepare a sacrifice for the Lord, and when he brought it back **vv.20-24** tell what happened....

I. WHEN THE LORD IS WITH US WE ARE PROTECTED BY HIS PEACE (6:20-24)

- A. There is a deep paradox in this picture: the fear of the LORD opens our lives to his peace. You may not see fire fall from heaven when the LORD is with you, but no one can live with the LORD who is not humbled by his holiness. That's why we repent of our sins—because we see ourselves in the light of his holiness and righteousness. That's why we come to worship with other believers—because we see that he is worthy of our worship. We do not use his name in useless and profane ways. We are not cavalier about holy things like Scripture or Communion. But out of that reverence which comes when the Lord is with us, we are given this extraordinary gift of peace.
- B. The altar of our worship is this: *The LORD is peace.* I visit hospital rooms where all around us is the fragility of life and I read **Ps. 91....**

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."*

*Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.*

*He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

One of our dearest songs celebrates how, despite trouble or guilt or death itself, "*it is well with my soul.*"

Jesus said in **Jn 14:27**, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*"

So... When the LORD is with us we are protected by his peace, no matter what happens. But make no mistake, *trouble will happen!*

Gideon when from the fire to the frying pan. Here's what happened next: **6:25-30...** We saw the musical, *The Music Man*, recently. Remember the song, "*You've got trouble, right here in River City.*" Well...

II. WHEN THE LORD IS WITH US WE'VE GOT TROUBLE (6:25-30)

On the last night of his life Jesus said, "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. **In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.***" ***In this world you will have trouble.*** Just ask Gideon. He was immediately triple-teamed. **He was between the devil and the deep blue sea and a hard place.**

Gideon was immediately under fire from three directions. The vast Midianite army, of course. But also the demonic gods of Baal and Asherah. And then from his own family and neighbors. Like the Light Brigade...

*Cannon to right of them, Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them Volley'd & thunder'd;*

A. First, there was the Midianite army. Midian was an old enemy of Israel. Basically, they were trying to take away the land, the prosperity, and the peace that God had given to his people as their birthright. When the LORD is with us, we will face those in the world who would steal away our God-given birthright—all that God has promised us in Christ. Jesus said, "*The world will hate you on my account.*" The world would steal away your hope. They would tear at our fellowship and reputation for good. They would pervert love and worship, and corrupt us with lies about the good life.

The world around us is *not* passive toward God's devout people. They love to talk about tolerance. **But the Bible says there is a deep, dark antipathy to those who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, so when the LORD is with us, we've got trouble from the world.** Just ask the martyrs.

B. Then, much more sinister, Gideon faced the spiritual malevolence of the demonic gods Baal and Asherah. Gods like these are not the figment of primitive imaginations. These two were like the power couple of the darkness. Baal was the god of storm and thunder. Asherah, a powerful goddess of fertility. The Canaanites all around Israel worshiped them maniacally in the life-or-death quest for good crops conveniently coupled with sexual perversion. The religion was lewd and debased, driving those cultures down into sexual and relational depravity. Remember the description in **Gen 19** of Sodom and Gomorrah? It is so vile, I'd be very reluctant to read it aloud in church. God didn't destroy these peoples because he is bloodthirsty and brutal. He demanded they be destroyed by Israel because they were utterly ruined and irredeemable!

These demonic gods had real power. There are real beings behind them. And even though we hear nothing of those names today, Paul warned us in **Eph 6**, "*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God.*"

So when the LORD is with us, we've got trouble.

C. And if that all wasn't bad enough, Gideon was threatened with death from his own family and neighbors. These were Israelites! Yet they'd sooner kill one of their own than risk of Baal's anger. The last time the Apostle Paul saw the elders of the church in Ephesus he warned them, not of the wicked world around them, but of the certainty of wolves in sheep's clothing coming into their church. Peter sounded a very solemn warning in **2 Pet 2:1-2**, "*But there were also false prophets among the people [of the OT], just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.*" Neither the wicked world around us nor even the demonic powers pose

such a threat to God's people as the wolves who would try to shred God's truth and devour God's flock.

And all this because the LORD is with us! Yet remember God's constant assurances of his protection. "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*" "*In this world you will have trouble,*" Jesus said, "*but take heart: I have overcome the world!*"

God's first command to Gideon was to "tear down that altar!" I read that an altar to Baal excavated not far from this site was about 26' square and 4' high, made of stones cemented together by mud mortar. No wonder it took Gideon and 10 servants to tear it down. The Asherah pole was a tall wooden pole, lewd and suggestive, often topped with the head of the goddess, Asherah. It was no small task to turn that into firewood. But the *work* wasn't the problem. It was the *risk*. The *risk* lay in the reaction of Gideon's family and townspeople. To tear these down was to invite the wrath of the gods. Remember, Israel was already impoverished by the raiding parties of Midian so they were not about to offend the already distant gods of rain and fertility.

But Israel, whom God had redeemed from slavery and death, and whom God had brought into the land and life of his promises, had forsaken him. They had violated the first and greatest rule of life: "*You shall have no other gods before me.*"

III. WHEN THE LORD IS WITH US WE MUST EXALT HIM AND DEFY ALL OTHER GODS

A. We get the clear sense in this story that God won't share worship. He doesn't tell Gideon to build a finer altar on a nearby hill. God wants the worship of other gods among his people *obliterated*. Among God's people there is no room for any other god but the LORD who is revealed in Scripture. No command of Scripture is greater than this: "*You shall have no other gods before me.*"

God is on the rampage against Baal and Asherah. He claims Baal's place and uses Asherah's wood to fuel the sacrifice to the LORD. I'm not sure why the *second* bull is taken. It is interesting that the 7-year old bull was born when Israel's 7 year of Midianite oppression began. And it

is even more interesting that the symbol of Baal was the bull. God is furiously and thoroughly *dissing... defying... desecrating* the gods who had defiled Israel.

- B. But, of course, Gideon was God's foreman on this desecration project. He took the heat! Before Gideon could be the "mighty warrior" against Midian he was the "mighty warrior" against the gods who had stolen the LORD's place of honor. So it may be for you and me, for the church.
- C. One of the themes of Scripture is how God angrily crushes all who would steal his glory or his people. The ultimate example is when Jesus died on the cross, the apparent *victim* of Satan. But **Col 2** explains: "*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, [i.e., when Satan had you dead to rights] God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*"
- D. God told Gideon in **v.26** to "*build a proper kind of altar.*" It is unclear just exactly what that meant but one thing is obvious—the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, deserves and will have an altar befitting his glory, and there will be no other. God will absolutely not share his glory with any other god, any other king, any other religion. And there is no way to worship God apart from Jesus Christ. He said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"
- E. So **Rom 12** tells us, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" Be vigilant, always on guard for yourself and for the rest of us, against any incursion of other gods, any whiff of their altar fires, any taint of their toxic presence.

So Gideon’s neighbors demand his death. But then Gideon gets a surprising defender—his own father, whose altar to Baal he just destroyed. Joash was apparently sort of the town father. **6:31-32....** Joash’s blunt logic was, *If Baal is the god of storm and thunder, let him fight his own battles.*

IV. WHEN THE LORD IS WITH US NO OTHER GODS CAN CONTENT WITH US (6:31-32)

- A. Notice that Joash turned the tables on the Baal worshipers: *You kill Gideon and you sign your own death warrant.* God has had countless martyrs, of course, but the book of Revelation makes very clear that they live on in glory and that their deaths will be avenged by the holy God.
- B. The point here, as we read forward, is that neither the bull Baal nor the wicked queen Asherah *could* contend with him. But nothing happened! No evil spell. No sudden sickness. Not so much as a rumble of thunder. **Their hands were tied because the LORD was with Gideon.** The townspeople did *not* kill Gideon, but eventually followed him into battle **because the Lord was with him.** The Midianites, despite their vast power and numbers were routed and annihilated **because the Lord was with Gideon.** Gideon wasn’t a mighty warrior by birth or personality or military training. He was a mighty warrior **because the Lord was with him.**
- C. Jesus Christ is called Immanuel—*God with us.* When we rest our faith in him, he is our Peace and we are *in him.* Let the world contend with him! Let the powers of this dark world contend with him! Let the wolves that threaten his church contend with him! *“Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”*

“Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.”

Illus: **John G. Paton** was a pioneer missionary to the South Sea islands about 150 years ago. Those who went before him were killed and eaten by cannibals. I read some of his story in John Piper’s little book, *Filling Up the*

Afflictions of Christ. He relates these two accounts written by Paton:

One morning at daybreak I found my house surrounded by armed men, and a chief intimated that they had assembled to take my life. Seeing that I was entirely in their hands, I knelt down and gave myself away body and soul to the Lord Jesus, for what seemed the last time on earth. Rising, I went out to them, and began calmly talking about their unkind treatment of me and contrasting it with all my conduct towards them. . . . At last some of the Chiefs, who had attended the Worship, rose and said, "Our conduct has been bad; but now we will fight for you, and kill all those who hate you."

[Once] when natives in large numbers were assembled at my house, a man furiously rushed on me with his axe but a Kaserumini Chief snatched a spade with which I had been working, and dexterously defended me from instant death. Life in such circumstances led me to cling very near to the Lord Jesus; I knew not, for one brief hour, when or how attack might be made; and yet, with my trembling hand clasped in the hand once nailed on Calvary, and now swaying the scepter of the universe, calmness and peace and resignation abode in my soul.

[John Piper, *Filling Up the Afflictions of Christ*, pp. 63-64]