

**Introduction:**

- A. *Illus.*: Three months ago I told you a story that I want to tell you again. At the beginning of this year we knew that the number one priority in our church was to become much more active and effective in evangelism. So we began to pray much more purposefully about that.

But that Sunday in May we were stymied as to how to proceed. I told you how a couple weeks before I had stopped by Dr. John Woodbridge's office at TEDS. He is a beloved church history professor. I told him how important the book he co-authored on the great revivals, *A God-Sized Vision*, was to me and how we'd started our *First, Prayer* services in part because I'd learned long ago that prayer always precedes revivals.

"That's great!" he said. Then he told me that he'd asked some people at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Assn. what they felt their most effective crusade had ever been. They told him that it was the 1959 crusade in Sydney, Australia. In preparation for that crusade, as was their custom, the crusade leadership sought to build a prayer base among the churches long before the Crusade began.

Living in Sydney was a very elderly man who had actually worked with the great Chicago evangelist, D. L. Moody, who had died some 60 years before. They asked that man to give leadership to the prayer leading up to the crusade even though he was very frail with age. (He actually died during the crusade). Rather than focusing on prayer for Billy Graham or for converts, as you would expect, **he insisted that the first thing they pray about was unbelief.** As Dr. Woodbridge wrote to me a day later, *"The gentleman was concerned about believers whose faith was quite constrained by 'unbelief.' Once, the Australians dealt with that issue in their prayer meetings, then they were ready to pray for the Sydney 1959 Crusade of Dr. Graham. Dr. Graham indicated that Sydney was the most prayed for city he had ever experienced or preached in."*

I kept thinking about that story. How could you say that churches who organized and invited Billy Graham to do an evangelistic crusade in their city needed to pray about their unbelief? That story wouldn't let go of me. **So we began to pray that Sunday and ever since about our unbelief.**

B. We've realized that our unbelief here at Village Church takes two forms: (1) **gospel passivity**. We have little excitement or urgency about sharing Christ. And (2), **we don't actually believe God would save people through us**.

Over this summer we've prayed. We've had two days of worship and fasting. God has challenged us and helped us. **And then a few weeks ago, of all people, Gideon strolled into our service**—a man whom God selected to “save Israel” yet whose unbelief ran deeper than ours.

C. When God called Gideon—“*The LORD is with you, mighty warrior!*”—Gideon's faith was almost nonexistent, and what he did believe about God was wrong because he blamed God for Israel's oppression. But in fact, Israel had been oppressed by Midian for seven years because they abandoned the LORD to worship the demonic gods of their neighbors. Before God would use Gideon to save Israel God took him into faith training. Turn to **Jdg 7**.

Last week we left Gideon with an army reduced by God to only 300 men, outnumbered more than 400 to 1, because God didn't want Israel to have any room to boast when he conquered the Midianites through them. **7:7-8...** [their “provisions” were in jars, so the only things they really had a lot of were jars and ram's horn trumpets.]

D. Here is what happened: **7:9-22a...**

- **10a** – “*afraid*” – Note that Gideon was ready to attack but he *was* afraid. God read his mind.
- **12** – “*locusts*” – A picture of a vast invading plague.
- **13** – A loaf of bread bombs the Midianite tent. It was symbolic, of course, but it was also a crazy image.
- **22a**. Do you see how Israel won? **They literally scared the Midianites to death!** Only 300 men, situated on three sides, in the pitch dark, just as the new sentries came on duty. Suddenly the shout, “*For the LORD and*

*Gideon,*” echoing through the valley, waking the already-spooked Midianites from their dead sleep. Then the reverberating cacophony of the trumpeting ram’s horns. Then jars crashing and torches appearing as if an army materialized out of nothing.

And then this: “*The LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords.*” **God simply psyched them out. He got into their heads.** Gideon and his men never actually took up their own swords. They never actually attacked. They “*held their positions*” blowing their horns, shouting, and waving their torches. **God had already given the Midianites the heebie-jeebies and then he added them into killing each other.** After that, the Israelites just chased down the fleeing Midianites who survived the melee till they were utterly destroyed.

- E. God was determined to save Israel, the people he loved, despite the way they had prostituted themselves to other gods. God didn’t *need* help to save them from their oppressors but **God chooses to enlist those who have learned to trust him when he saves desperate, hopeless people.**

That’s one reason this story is in our Bible, and the reason this passage is so important for Village Church this morning. Jesus Christ is the champion who saves people from sin and death, but he has enlisted us to be his agents, his army, his ambassadors to the people around us. But we must get rid of our unbelief—our gospel hesitancy and disinterest.

- F. Did you notice that in all the chaos of that battle (if we can even call it that), the turning point came *before* the battle even started? Gideon heard the second Midianite sentry interpret the dream and in that moment Gideon finally *knew* that God would save as had promised. And “*he bowed down and worshiped.*” That is the turning point. **When it comes to our part in God’s saving works, faith is the victory!**

## I. GOD RELENTLESSLY DEVELOPS THE FAITH OF THOSE HE ENLISTS.

- A. In Gideon's case God is like a trainer with only a few weeks to develop a boxer into a champion. He really takes Gideon to school! However long God takes in your life, he is determined to see you and me grow in faith—especially if we are to be instrumental in his saving people around us. We *must* shed those unwanted pounds of unbelief, that flabby muscle of passivity.
- B. It was a process for Gideon just as it is for everyone. We learn that God meets our sin with his gracious peace. God requires us to demolish all other gods in our lives. He gives us our first experiences of the Holy Spirit's power. He mercifully indulges our often-juvenile fleece-tests of his promises. He actually weakens us so that on the day of his victory we will have no room to boast and every reason to praise him. All those steps were part of Gideon's rigorous faith training... and they have been part of yours and mine.
- C. And now came the night of battle. Gideon was prepared to obey Go but he was still afraid. **And a frightened leader is apt to lead frightened soldiers.** If Gideon wasn't *sure* God would deliver them, his men would doubt too. So it was almost as if God put the coming victory on hold so as to fortify Gideon first.

When it comes to evangelism at Village Church, I don't think our problem is fear, *per se*. But we have not believed that God would bring people to salvation using us. But we *want* to believe God! We *want* to see God's salvation reaching hopeless people through us. We've gone hungry to pray. We've met to pray and we've prayed alone. We've asked God again and again to lead us forward. God has encouraged us with one another's stories. God has given us vivid encouragement from his Word.

- From Ezekiel: that the good news of salvation can flow out from us as God's people like a spreading sea.
- From Matthew: that Jesus has entrusted disciples like us with the bread of life for hungry people, and there's more than enough to go around.

- From Luke: that our Master wants us to bring guests from the highways and back alleys into his waiting feast. We have only to invite them!

**God has been building our faith because when it comes to our part in God's saving works, faith is the victory!**

*Illus.:* Last Monday Susan and I went to the Chicago Botanic Garden and we saw Spike, the rare corpse flower that's been drawing thousands to the garden. It has taken that huge plant 12 years to come to the point where it flowers. Then it opens into this beautiful (and stinking) flower for one day. We'd heard it would be Monday, but no. Then Wednesday. But no. In fact, I read in the paper that, "Conservation scientists and horticulturists have determine that Spike 'lacks the energy to open by itself.'" So today they're going to 'help' it. That's us: "*lacks the energy to open by ourselves.*" So God helps us.

When Gideon heard those sentries talking about the dream his reluctant faith finally flowered. **V.15** says, "*He bowed down and worshiped.*" There it is! The moment Gideon became the "*mighty warrior*" God had said he was. That's where the demonic Baal met his match. In that moment doubt died. Courage and confidence kindled. He went back to his small band of soldiers, huddled in the dark, full of infectious trust in God, and said, "*Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands.*" After that "it was all over but the shouting!"

## **II. FAITH COMES TO FULL FLOWER WHEN WE CAN WORSHIP GOD FOR THE VICTORY WE HAVE NOT YET SEEN.**

- A. When Gideon bowed down and worshiped he was doing what you'd expect after the victory, not before. Gideon had worshiped God the first time when he learned that the LORD was Peace to him. He worshiped God the second time when he destroyed his father's altar to Baal, and publicly made the LORD his God. **And now he worships again, this time because he knew God would save, using him, even before the battle began.** That is worship
- B. The text doesn't say specifically, but I think it was in that moment that Gideon knew *how* God would defeat the Midianites. And Gideon must have grinned in the dark at

the divine ingenuity of the plan. Just jars and torches, trumpets and a shout of triumph. When it comes to salvation, God always does the heavy lifting. God alone saves hopeless and desperate people. We bring what little we have and he uses it. Mostly what we bring is Jesus' grace and our availability.

*Illus.:* Friday night when we met for prayer Ric Olson read a story to us from the book, *Experiencing God*. Henry Blackaby explained how a church he served in a college town had tried for two years to start a campus Bible study with no success. Nothing. Then this: [pp.44-45]

That is essentially our lighthouse approach. Prayer, care, share. Watch where God is working. Go where grace is lacking. Believe that God will use you.

## Conclusion

*Illus.:* I sent the story John Woodbridge told me on to my friend, Dr. Peter O'Brien, who taught in Sydney. He replied that as young believers, he and his wife Mary had been counselors for that 1959 Billy Graham Crusade in Sydney. He wrote, "*The results were amazing. I remember visiting some of the 300 plus referrals sent on to our church (situated in the middle of the notorious Kings Cross). Large numbers of these were complete outsiders. Many people were converted, including our friend [who later became] Archbishop, his brother and many other [future] evangelical leaders.*" **Because the church dealt with their unbelief and then stepped into God's work of salvation.**

I'm hesitant to say this, knowing how fickle my faith can be, but **I believe I've crossed that line when it comes to evangelism at Village Church.** I do not have many years left with you, and I've waited for a time like this all my ministry life. Our church has never enjoyed a season of harvest. *Now* is our time. **I believe God has given Gospel success into our hands. Our faith is ready.** We still have decisions to make and opportunities to explore, but I believe that our turning point has come. **I believe God will use us now to be agents of salvation as we've never seen here before. So I say with Gideon, "Get up! The LORD has given salvation success into your hands!"**

miracles, wonders and signs *which God did through Him in your midst* (Acts 2:22, italics added). God the Father did His work through Jesus the Son.

Jesus realized that He could do nothing by Himself. Yet with the Father at work in Him, He could do anything. If Jesus was that dependent on the Father, then you and I should realize we are even more dependent on God the Father to be working in and through us.

This is not just a step-by-step approach for knowing and doing the will of God. It describes a love relationship through which God accomplishes His purposes. Once you have an intimate love relationship with God, He will show you what He is doing. Your job as a servant is to follow Jesus' example: Do what the Father is already doing—*watch to see where God is at work and join Him!*

#### WATCHING FOR GOD AT WORK ON THE CAMPUS

While I pastored Faith Baptist Church in Saskatoon, we began to sense God leading us to an outreach ministry to the college campus. I had never done student work. Our church had never done student work. Our denominational student ministries department recommended we begin with a Bible study in the dorms. For almost two years we tried to start a Bible study in the dorms and it did not work.

One Sunday I pulled our students together and said, "This week I want you to go to the campus and watch to see where God is working and join Him." They asked me to explain. God had impressed on my heart these two Scriptures: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God" (Rom. 3:10-11) and "No one can come to Me [Jesus] unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).

I went on to explain, "According to these passages, no one is going to seek God on his own initiative. No one will ask after spiritual matters unless God is at work in his life. When you see someone seeking God or asking about spiritual matters, you are seeing God at work."

For example, when Jesus passed through a crowd, He always looked for where the Father was at work. The crowd was not the harvest field. The harvest field was within the crowd. In Jericho Jesus saw Zacchaeus in a tree. Jesus may have said to Himself, "Nobody can seek after Me with that kind of earnestness unless My Father is at work in his heart." So Jesus pulled away from the crowd and said, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house" (Luke 19:5). What happened? Salvation came to that household that night. Jesus always looked for the activity of the Father and joined Him. Salvation came as a result of Jesus' joining His life to the activity of His Father.

I told our students, "If someone starts asking you spiritual questions, whatever else you have planned, don't do it. Cancel what you are doing. Go

with that individual and look to see what God is doing there." That week our students went out to see where God was at work on the campus and join Him.

On Wednesday one of the girls reported, "Oh, Pastor, a girl who has been in classes with me for two years came to me after class today. She said, 'I think you might be a Christian. I need to talk to you.' I remembered what you said. I had a class, but I missed it. We went to the cafeteria to talk. She said, 'Eleven of us girls in the dorm have been studying the Bible, and none of us are Christians. Do you know somebody who can lead us in a Bible study?'"

As a result of that contact, we started three Bible study groups in the women's dorms and two in the men's dorm. For almost two years we tried to do something for God and failed. For three days we looked to see where God was working and joined Him. What a difference that made! Over the following years many students trusted Christ as Savior and Lord. Many of those surrendered to full-time ministry and are now serving as pastors and missionaries all over the world.

### GOD IS ALWAYS ACTIVE

Right now God is working all around you and in your life. One of the greatest tragedies among God's people is that while they have a deep longing to experience Him, they are experiencing God day after day but do not know how to recognize Him. If this has been true of your own Christian experience, I pray that this book will help you learn ways to recognize clearly the activity of God in and around your life. I pray that God will open your spiritual eyes to see what He is doing. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God will instruct you and help you know when and where God is working. Once you know where He is working, you can adjust your life to join Him where He is working.

Once you join God in what He is doing you will experience Him accomplishing His activity through your life. When you enter this kind of intimate love relationship with God, you will know and do the will of God and experience Him in ways you have never known Him before. Only God can bring you into that kind of relationship, but He stands ready to do so.

### DON'T BYPASS THE LOVE RELATIONSHIP

Many people want God to call them to an assignment. However, they try to bypass the love relationship. As we will see later, the love relationship is why God created you. That is far more important to Him than what you do. So anticipate that God will start working with you and drawing you to an intimate love relationship that is real and personal. When the love relationship is right, God will be free to begin giving you assignments at His initiative. Whenever