

*Introduction:*

- A. When they were young, some 40 years before, they had been saved. Really *saved*... from ruthless enemies and there had been a revival—a great turning to God. When they were young, they had sung with great joy and passion,  
*“May all who love you be like the sun  
 when it rises in its strength.”*  
*Then the land had peace forty years.* [Jdg 5:31]
- B. So it is a sobering shock when the very next verse in the Bible says, “*The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD.*” Turn to **JUDGES 6**. The date is about 1170 BC, well after Joshua’s conquest of the Promised Land but about 150 years before King David. It only took one generation—40 years—for the Israelites to slide from singing about the Lord’s shining love into oppressive darkness. In only 40 years they had become worshippers of Baal—the fertility god of the neighboring peoples, with all its demonic and sexual perversity. Only 40 years and the light went out.
- C. So here’s what happened: **vv.1...** Midian and their allies invaded from the southeast. They were old enemies of Israel but at this time they were overwhelmingly powerful. Israel had no defense and there was no end in sight.
- D. **Vv.2-6...** Do you sense a little sarcasm: It got *so* bad that their last resort was to pray to God. Be that as it may, *“they cried out to the LORD for help.”* That’s good, isn’t it? Well, yes and no. They cried out, but what they *didn’t* do was repent for abandoning God. What they *didn’t* do was destroy their Baal altars and idols. What they *didn’t* do was bring sacrifices to the LORD or sing again the songs of salvation. They didn’t even stop calling out to other gods. They wanted God’s help but it never occurred to them that God had anything against them.
- E. Some things never change. We may not know anything about Midian or Baal or famine, for that matter, but this remains true:

## I. PEOPLE NEVER RECKON ON THE RISK OF WALKING AWAY FROM GOD'S LOVE (6:1-10)

- A. During the 40 previous years when Israel was safe and secure it was because they were safe in God's good hands. But then when they shook off God's hands they fell under the fists of Midian. Midian, of course, for all their might and bluster, were bit players in this story. They're like a horde of extras brought in to show the might of God. Later they are the measure of God's power. Here, Midian was God's megaphone. C. S. Lewis famously said, "*God shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*" It took seven years of godless misery before the people of Israel finally cried out to God, but God had been shouting to them all that time.
- B. So they cried out to the LORD and he came to the rescue, right? Vv.7-10... They cried out to the Lord and he sent them a prophet who told them how their God had saved them out of slavery. He told them how God had driven out all their enemies so they could have this Promised Land. And he told them again about God's #1 Commandment: "*You shall have no other gods before me.*" Not they help they had hoped for. Who wants a sermon when you're in deep trouble! I assume this prophet plodded from one town to another with his unwelcome message but despite their cries to God it is evident that no one paid much attention when he replied.

There's something going on here that we might miss. This prophet isn't so much a preacher as he is a process-server. He's delivers God's legal complaint against Israel, **God's grounds for divorce**. Israel had entered into a covenant with God after he saved them from all their enemies. It was a marriage. [*Do you take this God to be your wedded husband? We do.*] But they had become a national prostitute selling themselves to other gods who cared nothing for them. They spurned God's love. All they wanted from a god was prosperity and pleasure and they sold their souls to get it. **But God still loved them.**

C. Do you see the irony? Israel “cried out to the LORD for help” when all the time God himself was shouting for their attention—first through the megaphone of pain, and then through a prophet serving papers by saying, “*This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says.*” But no hearts changed.

“*I prayed to God,*” people say when they’re in deep trouble, “*but he didn’t listen to me. He didn’t answer my prayers. I don’t believe in God anymore,*” they say. But God may well be saying, “*But **you** have not listened to **me!** And one way or another you are going to hear me!*” **People don’t realize the risk of walking away from God’s love.**

If you didn’t know any more about this story, what might you expect to happen next? Papers have been served. The wife has no interest in returning to her Husband. This relationship is headed for divorce court. We don’t expect anything on the next page but tear stains.

But this is the Bible and this is what happened: v.11, “The angel of the LORD came.” WHAT!?! I thought God was done with them. I thought he had just served papers on them.

**This is where the story about Gideon begins.** But here’s the thing: Gideon isn’t the main character. He isn’t the hero. He’s really just a guy. The angel of the Lord doesn’t show up at his oak tree because Gideon was a promising prospect. He’s not braver than others, nor better. We’re not really told anything that commends him to us. **He’s just a fearful, faithless guy who meets God. Which is pretty much where everyone starts, and it tells you a lot about the God who loves us.** We’re not studying this story to be more like Gideon. We’re studying Gideon’s story to know God.

- **V.11...** A winepress is a stone tank in the ground meant to hold the juice of crushed grapes. By contrast, wheat was threshed on hills where the wind could blow the chaff away, leaving the grain. But if you don’t want marauders to see the dust of your threshing, you do it in a winepress under an oak tree. Only problem is, you’ll end up with more chaff than flour, and bread that tastes like sawdust. But what can you do?

- **V.12...** So Gideon is hiding and suddenly this stranger is watching him. Must've given him quite a start! The whole point was *not* to be seen. Then the man spoke and Gideon's life changed: **"The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."** I picture him looking over his shoulder to see if someone else is in the winepress. *Who? Me?!! Mighty warrior??* Gideon didn't realize that in that moment the LORD was literally with him. But the point was that this was the answer to Israel's frantic prayers in disguise. For seven years, the LORD had *not* been with Israel. He'd **shouted** at them through Midian. He'd **preached** to them through the prophet. And now, he **shows up himself**, out of the blue, under Joash's oak tree, sitting by a winepress, of all places!

- **Vv.12-16....** What's your impression of Gideon from that? I see **three things**: (1) **he's hiding and fearful**. And with good reason. We learn later that his brothers have been killed by the Midianites. (2) **He is angry with God**; he thinks God has abandoned his people; that God could have stopped all this suffering and he didn't. And (3) **he is insignificant**. I might add that we'll see a few verses later than his whole family are worshipers of Baal. They have a big old altar right on their property. **So one thing we can say about Gideon: he was no giant of the faith!** Yet when the writer of Hebrews in the NT looks back on him he writes of "*Gideon... who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised.*"<sup>[Heb 11:32-33]</sup> So what changed!?! **Remember, in this story Gideon isn't the hero; the LORD is the hero!**

## **II. THE LORD WILL DO ANYTHING TO HELP WEAK PEOPLE TRUST HIM (6:11-16)**

A. In the stories and sermons about Gideon the point seems to be either we should be like him in his courage or *not* be like him in his need for faith-bolstering signs. Neither are really the point. We all *are* like Gideon. He is what we call in literature and *everyman*. When we look at Gideon we don't look at a monument. We look in a mirror.

What stands out most in vv.11-16 are the assurances the LORD makes to Gideon. When the angel says to Gideon, "*Go in the strength you have,*" what strength is that? All

we see is weakness: fear, skepticism, insignificance. What strength does he have? **He has the presence and promises of God!**

*“The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”*

*“Am I not sending you?”*

*“I will be with you and strike down all the Midianites.”*

Those promises stood true even when Gideon had trouble believing them. God kept those promises even when Gideon’s faith was no bigger than one of those precious grains of wheat laying at his feet.

**This isn’t so much the story of Gideon’s faith as it is the story of our God’s faithfulness.** God is with you, too, mighty warrior. God sends you, too. God will work his victories through you, just as he did through Gideon. Because God is faithful and God never changes.

- B. God always enlists weak people in his mighty work of grace in the world. God would use Gideon to “*save Israel*” and a paradoxical show of human weakness and divine strength. **God enlists everyone he loves**, and the only strength we bring that matters is the faith he is growing in us. **The more we trust him the mightier we become.**

These promises begin to stir in Gideon. He begins to believe this holy visitor. He begins to realize that this man is in a different category than the prophet who’d spoken to Israel. Gideon didn’t have much faith, and what he had was shot through with the poison of Baal, but look what he does next: **vv.17-19...**

Do you see how extravagant that offering was? These people were in a famine. Gideon had been trying to salvage some flour for bread in that winepress. The Midianites had rustled all the livestock they could find. Yet Gideon sacrifices a goat and about 35 lbs. of flour!

That whole point was in **v.17**, “*If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign.*” *If you’re from the LORD show me whether he’ll have me—whether he’ll accept me.* That’s an important question. Israel in their sin assumed God owed them deliverance. Now Gideon is realizing he is the debtor.

Vv.20-22... Now Gideon knows without a doubt who he is dealing with: *Yahweh the Sovereign One and his angelic messenger*. Gideon knew enough of the Scriptures to know that no one can see God and live. First, he was shocked to the core of his being by this blazing devouring of his large sacrifice. *Gone! Ash in a flash* (as my uncle would say). Nothing left but a sooty smudge. *Then* the visitor vanished, as if he himself were the very flame of the LORD. And that's when Gideon put the pieces together and realized his very life was on the line. **He most definitely did not feel like a mighty warrior!**

But that sacrifice stood in Gideon's place. That's the point of sacrifices. The sacrifice is accepted in the giver's place. The fire signaled that the sacrifice was accepted by God. That's grace, of course, because that sacrifice wasn't sufficient to pay for Gideon's sins nor to reconcile him to God. But God in his grace accepted it as sufficient. Gideon had his sign and it terrified him.

### **III. FAITH IS FIRED IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD, LIKE CLAY IN A KILN (6:17-24)**

A. **V.23...** It is hard to imagine anything more terrifying. The angel of the LORD is gone but his voice still speaks, *"Peace! Do not be afraid."* Could God possibly say anything more out of synch with the scene?! A blazing blast of the holiness of God Almighty, enough to incinerate the man along with his sacrifice. And then the words from the LORD: *Peace. Shalom. All is well. Rest. Be still and know that I am God.*

What other god is like our God—a consuming fire who speaks peace to the very people who have ignored his love and questioned his goodness?

(And it goes without saying, Gideon, that if you're not going to die now, what do you have to fear from the Midianites? *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*)

B. **V.24...** The story begins with God's ungrateful, unfaithful people facing extinction from an enemy they can't hope to overcome, a fate they richly deserve. They don't even realize that their greatest threat is the very God they accuse of abandoning them, the holy LORD who could consume

them as surely and completely as he had Gideon's sacrifice. **But then we come to this astonishing word from the God whose love they had rejected: *Peace! Do not be afraid.***"

Gideon built an altar so he could come again and again to the LORD to find help and mercy. We have in Jesus Christ the ultimate altar. We come to him again and again to find God's peace.

## Conclusion

We are all easily disoriented. We easily lose our songs of salvation. We all know what it is like to sing, "*May all who love you be like the sun,*" and then, in no time, we're reduced to cowards by the enemies of our souls. So remember what is always true of God:

1. **Never risk walking away from God's love.** There is only trouble and tragedy when we push away his hand.
2. **The Lord will do anything to help weak people trust him.** Our strength rests in his promises: "*The LORD is with you. He is sending you.*" "*Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.*"
3. **Faith is built on the fear of the Lord.** Strangely, the fear of the LORD is the way to peace. Jesus said, "*Come to me, and I will give you rest. Peace.*"