

October 30, 2016  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Judges  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Judges 8:22-35.

1. Was it wrong for the people to desire Gideon to be king or wrong for him to serve as king?
2. Chart the spiritual ups and downs of Gideon's life.
3. Have you ever experienced a cycle of greater or lesser dedication to God?
4. What drew you out of your wandering from God?
5. Is it possible for us to help others "get back to God," and if so how?

### **DISTRACTION LEADS TO DISASTER** **Judges 8:22-35**

God has a general, over-arching principle for His people that puts all His other commands in perspective. He told the Israelites, early on in their history, "*And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*" (Deuteronomy 10:12). Granted, at the same period in the nation's history, God gave them a whole body of law, multiple commands He expected them to keep. But, if they could figure out the "love for God" thing, the command-keeping would not be so burdensome.

Jesus brought up the same command when a lawyer asked Him what is the most important command of all. *And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"* (Matthew 22:37). Of course, Jesus gave that instruction to a Jew who lived under the Mosaic law. When Jesus died on the cross, He brought to completion all the requirements of the Mosaic law. Does that mean that the Lord's people don't have to love the Lord anymore?

People whom Jesus Christ has purchased out of sin through His sacrifice owe the same kind of focused love to Him that God's moral law requires. Paul wrote, *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died* (2 Corinthians 5:14). It is the love of Christ that constrains us, motivates us, drives us in our plans, desires, and actions in life. That might mean that Christ's love for us controls us. Or it might mean that our love for Christ controls us. Compared to the great command to love God with all our hearts, we can easily conclude that in a similar way our love for Christ keeps us living in fellowship with Him.

This over-arching principle is critically important because life offers so many distractions to us. It is so very easy for us to get focused on other things, even good things, to the point that we neglect our love for and fellowship with Christ. When we become so distracted, we are not too awfully concerned to obey Christ, and we naturally wander off into all kinds of hurtful sins. Unless our Lord graciously arrests us in our wayward walk, we will walk into terrible spiritual disaster, which might even result in physical disaster.

That is what happened to Gideon and his peers. God miraculously and lovingly rescued His people from their enemies. On the heels of God's rescue, Gideon led the people to do something that seemed innocent enough. But in time, the innocent thing became a distraction so that God's people went right back to the hog wallow from which God had rescued them. Let's learn from their mistakes how important it is to keep loving the Lord.

### **An Innocent Proposal (vv.22-27a)?**

The LORD is our ruler (vv.22-23). But He uses human rulers to lead us and successful warriors make good leaders, right? It appears that is what the men of Israel were thinking. *Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian"* (v.22). Something in human nature considers a successful warrior a good candidate to be king or ruler. Maybe it is evidence of courage, or ability to enlist others, or wisdom in planning for success. The people of the United States have often chosen a man to lead us who had been involved in some way in protecting our nation through military service. Nineteen of our past presidents were not only involved but had put their lives on the line as they were engaged in military action. Some of those presidents were significant commanders and saw significant action such as George Washington, Zachary Taylor, Ulysses Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy and George H.W. Bush.

Therefore, it is not surprising that people gathered around Gideon the mighty war hero and asked him to establish a dynasty to rule over them. Probably these were people, or the representatives of people, from the various tribes that had been delivered from the focus of Midianite incursion. On the surface their offer looked like a noble offer. According to the text, no one actually suggested that Gideon would rule as king. Everyone was supposed to know that God was their king. Furthermore, we know that God would not give Israel a king for nearly another 150 years.

Yet everything about the offer the men of Israel made to Gideon smacks of "kingship" or royalty. The people offered a generational rule requesting that Gideon, his sons, and even his grandsons rule over them. Obviously, the people's concept of kingship was determined by what their pagan peers had been doing for a long time. Israel had no king and they kept falling into sin as a culture. Maybe if they had a king like their neighbors things would be different. Maybe not. Their neighbors didn't appear to be saints.

While the people did not ask Gideon to be their king, they did offer to follow him as ruler. The offer was simply a reward for Gideon's mighty exploits. That in itself revealed a wrong spirit, a distracted heart in the people. The asked Gideon to rule over them *for you have saved us from the hand of Midian* (v.22b). It is true that

Gideon did call the soldiers to battle. And Gideon did show them the really odd plan for winning the battle. Gideon did lead to victory. Gideon punished the leaders in Succoth and killed the people in Penuel. Gideon had captured and killed two Midianite kings. Yes sir, Gideon did seem to be the focus here.

When they put the focus on the servant of the LORD, the people arrived at an erroneous conclusion. It wasn't Gideon who accomplished such great things. It was God and God alone who had won the battle against the massive Midianite army. In fact, God, knowing human tendency to exalt fellow humans, did much to prevent this conclusion. When God shrunk Gideon's army, *The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me'"* (Judges 7:2). Now that is exactly what happened. How did it happen?

Maybe Gideon contributed to the problem. Remember what Gideon told the 300 warriors when he showed them the battle plan. He said, *"When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon'"* (Judges 7:18). Was it really necessary to shout *"and for Gideon"* also?

When people begin to focus on the servant of the LORD, the LORD always is forgotten. Sometimes God blesses His servant's work and the servant sincerely attempts to keep the focus on God. Sometimes when God blesses, the people end up exalting the servant when all they really wanted to do was show respect and appreciation. Sometimes servants of God rob God of His glory by subtly attributing success to their own efforts. It is so easy for us to simply slide the focus away from God to God's servant. This will be a distraction that eventually has serious consequences. Forgetting God as we focus on human instruments will lead us into sin.

The people made quite an offer to Gideon, and at the outset it appears that Gideon responded well to the offer. *Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you"* (v.23). On the surface, this appears to be an emphatic threefold response from Gideon. He replied, "I will not rule." "My sons will not rule." "The LORD will rule."

At this point, it really looks like Gideon steadfastly refused to be the first ruling dynasty in Israel because he was convinced the LORD is king. Let's remember that this is the man who tried to beg off from being God's chosen deliverer. He had no aspirations to be king or ruler at that point. Along the way, he learned incredible lessons of faith through his experience of following God. Yes, Gideon was a sincere, humble servant of the LORD.

But we also know from this story that there were some other situations we should take into account. Did Gideon demonstrate personal vengeance against the people of Succoth and Penuel? There is little doubt that Gideon killed the two Midianite kings out of personal vengeance. Yes, he revealed his human nature in those situations. But according to his refusal, Gideon still recognized that the LORD was king over His people, right? Maybe.

Before the servant of the LORD descends into disaster, there are generally telltale signs of looming failure. When the people glorified Gideon for his military success, why didn't he correct them? Why didn't Gideon say, "Whoa, now hold on a minute. I didn't save you from the Midianites. The LORD did!" That might be an argument from silence, but why didn't Gideon correct them? It is just possible that Gideon was like other servants of the LORD who say the acceptable things even while their hearts are distracted by other things.

It is interesting to see in this one short story how there was a man who focuses so much on his inabilities, insignificance, and lack of ambition that he argued against doing God's work. God finally convinced the man, taught him many lessons of faith, showed Himself to be mighty, and brought victory through the reticent man. Then before we know it, the humble, insignificant guy is robbing God of His glory because he is focused on himself. Maybe concern for self was the problem in the beginning. He reminds us a lot of King Saul.

Gideon refused the offer to establish a dynasty and reminded the people that the LORD was their ruler. However, at the same time Gideon acted like the ruler (vv.24-27a). Having said he didn't want to be in charge, Gideon called for a "freewill" offering. *And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) (v.24).* Gideon knew that the 300

warriors, plus all the people who joined them to chase and defeat the enemy, had gathered a lot of spoil from the Midianites.

On the heels of refusing to become the ruler, Gideon requested an offering of some of the treasures the people had won. Why? What was his plan? One thing for certain is that a freewill offering given to him would be a sign of submission. Every king depends on the submission of his subjects. We know from the rest of the story what Gideon planned to do with this offering. But even making the ephod was an issue of self-focus.

The people participated in the offering willingly. *And they answered, "We will willingly give them." And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels (vv.25-26).* When the people agreed to give willingly they weren't kidding. They gave jewelry valued at 17 shekels of gold. As far as we can tell, that would be equivalent 43 pounds. At today's price for gold, that was a treasure valued at \$874,104. That sounds like a king's ransom! All of this was added to Gideon's personal collection of *the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels (v.26b).*

### **Divided Hearts Revealed (vv.28-35).**

God blessed the nation in spite of distraction. Because the people were distracted, their hearts were not fixed on God. Or maybe because their hearts were not set on God, they were distracted. The distraction was rooted in Gideon's action. *And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family (v.27).*

The ephod was well known among God's people. God had ordered Moses to have a special one made for the High Priest. It was woven of special material, beautiful colors and even included gold. The High Priest wore this apron over his garment while he ministered

before the LORD at the tabernacle. The names of each Israelite tribe were inscribed on it. The apron also had a pocket attached to the front that contained the Urim and the Thummim which the High Priest used in some special way to determine God's will. What was Gideon going to do with something like that? Was he planning to do priestly work as well as ruling?

The ephod was also used in religious practices among the pagans. High officials and sometimes kings wore ephods at times of national or spiritual significance. Leaders of the pagan religions would wear the aprons while worshiping or sacrificing to the false gods. But the worst practice was for them to locate the ephod in a particular place (cf. the tabernacle) where it was often draped over an idol, the representation of a false god.

It would be easy for us to conclude that this is what happened with Gideon's ephod. He put the thing in his town. Then the words *And all Israel whored after it there* are words that often describe God's people forsaking Him and running after idols and false gods. That it was *a snare to Gideon and to his family* makes us wonder if Gideon rebuilt the Baal idol he had torn down previously. All in all, it appears that Ophrah became a center for false worship in Israel.

This picture is so sad because we have seen it played out too many times. Someone comes to Jesus Christ by faith, confesses sin, and repents. But then in time, the person fails to keep focused on God, fails to walk in fellowship with their LORD, and sin gets the mastery of them. Peter described the problem in pretty ugly terms when he wrote, *What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire"* (2 Peter 2:22).

And yet within the context of all this human failure, God gave peace and rest. *So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon* (v.28). The words remind us that God is incredibly patient and longsuffering. However, even God has limits as to how long He will endure His people's rebellion. This is the last statement about God giving a period of rest in the book of Judges. The cycle of sin, oppression, conviction, confession/repentance, crying out to God, deliverance, rest, back to sin is a cycle leading ever downward into spiritual disintegration. The extremity of this cultural

disintegration will be painfully obvious when we study the story about the Levite who cut up his concubine and sent pieces of her throughout the land (Judges 19).

How far is the American culture from such anarchy because we have continued to reject God and worship the gods of our own inventions? Do you know anyone who is caught in this cycle of disintegration as sin ruins their lives a step at a time?

Yes, but God is patient, right? Human wisdom would conclude that God blessed Gideon in spite of his slack dedication. In reality, what might appear to be God's blessing was actually the result of human effort and ambition. Gideon demonstrated self-centeredness. There was nothing wrong with him living in his own house, was there? *Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house* (v.29). Why did the author state something so obvious as "Gideon lived in his own house"?

First, consider the name the author used here. He didn't call him Gideon. We remember from 6:32 that *Jerubbaal* means "let Baal contend against him." Was Satan, through the false god Baal, contending against Gideon and winning? Furthermore, this is the only place "Jerubbaal Ben Joash" (son of Joash) is used. That sounds like a king's name, the head of a dynasty. All the time in the story where God was doing special work through the man, he was called Gideon. From this point through the rest of chapter nine, the name Jerubbaal has overtones of kingship or dynasty.

Second, the phrase *lived in his own house* means more than we see on the surface. The Hebrew word for *lived* literally means sat or to sit down. Often the word means to inhabit. But this word is also used frequently to talk about the king sitting on his throne which means he has taken up reign over the people. We can fairly conclude that Gideon broke from his father's house and sat down as a king in his own house, in the place where he had set up the object of worship. This is not far from the picture of antichrist in Daniel and Revelation who puts his image in God's temple and sets down as ruler to replace God.

Surely we all agree that Gideon really didn't need many wives. *Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives* (v.30). Oh, but collecting wives is what kings did. We know from the Bible evidence that most Old Testament kings had multiple

wives in order to have large numbers of sons. Sure, but that practice flew in the face of God's original design and command for one man to have one wife.

Gideon was unquestionably self-centered to have a concubine. *And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech (v.31)*. Maybe he had more than this one who was never named. She had a son named Abimelech. Abimelech is named here because of all the havoc he will wreak on Israel. Also significant is that the name Abimelech means "my father is king." Abimelech interpreted that idea literally and argued some years later that he had a rightful claim to take over his father's reign (9:1-5). If Gideon didn't act like a king, there was no reign, and no claim to it would be valid.

Though he supposedly rejected the people's offer to be king, Gideon acted like a king and broke all God's rules in the process. God never chose Gideon to be the king, but God gave instruction to Moses about guidelines for the king when it was time according to God's will for Israel to have one. God gave His rules for kings in Deuteronomy chapter seventeen. "*When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. "And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).*

Gideon made plenty of mistakes along the way. Nevertheless, he died well. *And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites (v.32)*. Long life was considered a blessing from God. To be buried with your fathers was a blessing from God. But that does not mean that God approved of Gideon's and the people's failure.

Gideon and the people failed miserably. But God was not surprised by the people's failure. That the people rejected God was no surprise to God. *As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god (v.33)*. This should not be surprising to us either in that while Gideon was alive they were running after, that is worshiping, the ephod he made. This is not surprising in that the culture was caught in a decline into apostasy.

Any culture that is declining into apostasy will forget God's blessings. So Gideon's peers did not remember **that** God delivered them from their enemies. *And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side (v.34)*. That was obvious early on when they attributed victory to Gideon. It happens so easily when professing Christians forget that they have deliverance from sin and victory over sin, not through their own strength and wisdom but only through God.

Gideon's peers also did not remember **how** God delivered them. We read, *And they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel (v.35)*. God chose to use Gideon and the people should have showed his family gratitude. We need to set up stones of witness in our lives to recall when and how God delivered us from our sin.

What is sadder than a story about a successful servant of the Lord who does not end well. God's servants are humans and subject to all the weaknesses any fellow human experiences. The weaknesses that cause failure are only overcome by staying focused on God. When we set up idols, even if they are called "ministry," we will get distracted from God and remove our focus from Him. That is when we start down the path to finishing poorly.