

“Finishing Well”
Judges 8:22-35
(Preached at Trinity, April 5, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The life of Gideon was a life bearing testimony to the power of God. When we met him at the beginning of **Chapter 6** we found a timid man hiding from the Midianites while trying to thresh enough wheat to survive. God raised him up as the deliverer of Israel defeating an innumerable army with an army of only 300.
2. Gideon obeyed God and acted with bravery, courage and faith. He is recognized for his faith in Hebrews 11
Hebrews 11:32-33 NAU - " And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions"
3. But it is never enough to begin well or even demonstrate faithfulness for many years. It is important that we finish well.
The Bible is full of warnings. There seems to be endless examples of men who did not finish well.
 - A. The Bible speaks of many of Israel's kings who were righteous men; the Bible records that they "did right in the sight of the LORD." But sadly, many of them did not finish well.
 - B. King Asa reigned righteously but in the end he turned his trust away from God. When confronted by one of God's prophets he became enraged and cast the prophet into prison. The last we read of his otherwise excellent life was, "In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, "yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians" (2 Chron. 16:12).
 - C. Of King Uzziah we read, "But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense" (2 Chron. 26:16).
God punished him with leprosy and he remained a leper to the end of his life.
 - D. Even the righteous reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah were marred by the wretched curse of pride. As soon as we think we are immune to this sin we are in our greatest danger. Peter stood boldly and announced, "*Even* though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away" (Mat. 26:33).
That very night Peter betrayed Jesus.
4. In the New Testament we read Paul's report of his fellow missionary, Demas:
2 Timothy 4:10 NAU - "for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica"

5. Our continued prayer must be, "Oh God, help me to finish well. Help me to know my weakness and my great need of your strength." Paul knew his own weakness. God had taught him,
"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).
6. As we come to the end of **Chapter 8** we find the sad conclusion to Gideon's life. His otherwise excellent life ended in apostasy.
7. Paul writes in **2 Timothy 4:7-8**, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." Paul's immortal words were that he had finished well. He had endured until the end. May these words make an indelible mark upon our hearts. There are endless ways to lose our way.
 - A. 1500 pastors leave the ministry each month. Only 1 in 10 finish
 - B. Countless professors of Christianity abandon the faith
8. Tonight I want to examine Gideon's failure and consider how we can avoid such calamity.
 - I. First of all, it is important that our practice line up with our doctrine
 - A. Gideon is asked to become the ruler of Israel and he responds by making a right theological statement
Judges 8:23 NAU - "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you."
 1. The very request demonstrates the evil heart of the Israelites. Rather than giving God the glory for the amazing victory over the Midianites they gave Gideon the credit. We see the continuing downward spiral in the morality of Israel.
 2. He rightly refuses and declares to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you."
 3. Although his words were theologically correct, his actions soon proved it to be only empty words. In his heart he *was* Israel's ruler. He behaved like Israel's king. He named his son Abimelech which is translated "My father is king." And in Judges 9:1-5 Abimelech surely implies that that he believed rule rightfully belonged to Gideon's family.
 4. Gideon's life was marked by a progression of decisions reflecting a departure from God's commands.
 1. Led by the passion of greed, he requests from each of them an earring of gold. The sum totaled 1700 shekels.
 - a. Paul warned of the corrupting power of money:
1 Timothy 6:10 NAU - "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
 - b. Jesus said that it is impossible for a lover of money to enter into heaven
 - c. Its corrupting power will lead us away from Christ and bring us great sorrow.
"some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

2. He married many wives
 - a. This was contrary to the law of God for Israel's leaders
Deuteronomy 17:17 NAU - "He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself."
 - b. This was also the downfall of Solomon
1 Kings 11:3-4 NAU - "He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. ⁴ For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*."
 3. Finally, he falls into idolatry.
 - a. He makes an ephod. The ephod was a ceremonial garment worn by high priest. It contained the Urim and Thummim which were used to enquire of God.
Exodus 28:2-3 NAU - "You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. ³ "You shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me."
 - b. It was to the high priest that enquiring after God was given. Gideon began seeking it for himself.
 - c. Ultimately it became a snare for Gideon and for the rest of Israel and they fell into idolatry.
- B. Right doctrine must always result in right practice.
1. Does our high view of God result in a high trust in God—even if doing the right thing costs us?
 2. Is our high view of God reflected in our worship?
 3. Does our high knowledge of Christ result in greater and greater love for Him and contentment in Him?
 4. I'm amazed at the many who call themselves reformed and reject the Sabbath
 5. And how often do we neglect the Lord's Supper as God's means of grace. Dale Ralph Davis writes: "We plan, organize, and concoct 'revivals,' seminars, retreats, or encounters, or we pressure congregations to come forward and rededicate their lives to Christ. All the while we neglect what God has provided: the Lord's Supper."
This was the sin of Gideon with making an ephod for himself and neglecting God's chosen means of knowing His will.

II. We must be cautious of the small compromises.

A. Gideon fell by degrees

1. Was the praise of men a strong desire of Gideon? Was he flattered by their request that he rule over them?
2. How long had his heart lusted after material things. He turned his heart towards the gold ornaments on the camels of the kings of Midian.
Judges 8:21 NAU - "So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks."
He then turned his heart upon the gold earrings of the Israelites.
3. How long had he lusted after women?
Judges 8:30 NAU - "Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives."
4. Was it not pride that drove him to establish his own form of worship?

B. So often Christians fail in baby steps.

It's the continual small compromises that turn the hearts of people from God

1. They make hundreds of concessions and compromises along the way
2. I have seen this far too often in my 27 years of pastoring.
 - a. I have seen church members who are steadfast and unmovable. They are faithful in service, faithful in attendance, steadily progressing in the faith.
 - b. I have seen others consistently compromising, constantly making concessions – and they most often rationalize their choices. Satan's bag is filled with tricks to lead you to compromise. They usually seem so reasonable.
3. This is not to say that Christians never fail. Like with children, failures are bound to happen. Failures also serve to strengthen us. Peter's failure and forgiveness forever changed him.
But we must have a heart of love for Christ – love that drives us to follow Him absolutely – a life of Christian integrity.
4. Nor are we saying that a true believer will ever fall away.
LBC: 17:1 – "Those whom god has accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."

B. Such assurances never lead us to presumption

1 Corinthians 10:12 NAU - "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."

1. Our heart must be steadfast and immovable, faithful and uncompromising through every day of our life. The decisions we make in the small things are important.
2. Many have had their faith shipwreck on the rocks of poor decisions that violate the conscience.
1 Timothy 1:18-19 NAU - "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, ¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith."

3. The decision to skip Bible study or worship is not an insignificant decision. I've seen Christians faithfully attending while in great physical discomfort while others stay home at the slightest infirmity.
4. The decision to make a small concession at work or to relax our diligence with our children is not a small thing. Satan is continually tempting us. Will you be faithful in the small things so that your faith will be continually strengthened for the major trial?
5. Are you being equipped to finish well?

III. We need to recognize our weakness and God's almighty power

- A. At the beginning we found Gideon keenly aware of his own weakness
 1. He saw himself as the most insignificant
Judges 6:15 NAU - "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."
 2. When God told Gideon to go to the city and destroy the altar of Baal he went by night out of fear for the men of the city..
Judges 6:27 NAU - "Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night."
 3. When God called him he continually sought proof
 4. God continually showed pity upon Gideon's weakness and demonstrated His mighty power. But in the end Gideon forgot his weakness and forgot God.
 1. Was Gideon looking to God when he stripped the ornaments from the camels of his enemy?
 2. Was he looking to God as he took wife after wife?
 3. Was it by God's direction that he fashioned the ephod?
 5. God had become insignificant in the eyes of Gideon
- B. We are continually in great need of God's powerful hand upon our lives
 1. We should seek Him in all things
 2. When God is at the center we are less prone to turn our hearts to lust after this world's goods.
 3. When God is at the center of all things His Kingdom will have priority.
 - a. Our hearts will continue to maintain Kingdom work as a high priority
 - b. We will be less inclined to seek pleasure above all else.
Paul wrote of the danger of pleasure seekers
2 Timothy 3:4-5 NAU - "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these."
 4. We should pray each morning, "Oh God, help me to honor you this day. Help me to seek you continually? Help me to make every decision with you in mind." We should repeat the words of the Psalmist:
Psalms 143:8 NAU - "Teach me the way in which I should walk; For to You I lift up my soul."

Conclusion:

1. Human beings at their best are still filled with great weakness. It should humble us and drive us to maintain constant vigilance. It should keep us looking to Christ.
Psalms 62:2 NAU - "He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken."
 David was a mighty warrior but he never forgot the source of his power
Psalms 144:1 NAU - "Blessed be the LORD, my rock, Who trains my hands for war, *And* my fingers for battle"
2. At the end of our days may we be able to look back at a life lived in faithfulness to God. May we be able to repeat the words of Paul:
 "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."
3. We need God's preserving hand of grace upon our lives. We must never forget how absolutely dependent we are upon Christ.
John 15:5 NAU - "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."
 - A. He has sent forth His Spirit to dwell within us, the Spirit of power and preservation, the Spirit of gracious comfort and unqualified love.
 - B. We have the promise of our gracious Savior that He will never forsake us, that nothing shall separate us from His love.
 Walking with Him is the greatest of all blessings. May we keep our eyes fixed above where He sits at the right hand of majesty reigning as our great Mediator.