

September 18, 2016  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Judges  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2016 David J. Whitcomb

## REAL FAITH RESULTS IN REAL OBEDIENCE Judges 6:11-32

The Bible warns, *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6)*. It also warns that *“whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23)*.

Certainly, we who profess Christ as Savior would all agree that it is impossible for a person to be born again unless he or she trusts God. But what does “trust God” mean? That question opens a veritable Pandora’s Box of other questions about faith. “How much must a person trust God?” “How does one measure faith?” “What is the extent of faith?” “Must a person fully trust every statement of the Bible, even those that are not comprehensible?” “Is it possible to be saved with little faith?” “Can a person have faith in God at salvation and then grow in the process to have great faith?” “If a person ever doubts God, is that evidence that the person is not truly born again?”

God gave us Gideon to serve as an example of how He patiently works with us when our faith is weak. God’s work in Gideon’s life shows us how He draws us along until we can have such faith in God that we are willing to lay it all on the line. In the context, we remember that God sent the Midianites to oppress His rebellious people. They cried out to God and this time God sent His preacher with a stinging sermon about their disobedience. Did that sermon effect Gideon? Based on the evidence of the text, Gideon was a pretty normal guy in the Israeli society. Then one day this angel showed up and turned Gideon’s life upside down. In the process, we see an authentic display of doubt and maybe even cynicism. But as

God worked with Gideon, He brought him to the point that he stepped out by faith into a sea of chaos through which God would bring glory to Himself.

That makes Gideon a great example for us to know and to try to emulate by God’s strength and grace. The Gideon story will challenge us to believe God, trust God, rely on God completely as we step out in obedience to God.

## Doubt Argues With God (vv.11-24).

Sometimes we, like Gideon, reach a point where we wonder if God knows or cares about our situations (vv.11-14). He does, and it is often in those turbulent situations that the LORD chooses His servants. Let’s consider Gideon’s situation. *Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites (v.11)*.

*The angel of the LORD* is a common title for a theophany, an appearance of God in either human or angelic form. There are about sixty-four references in the Old Testament to such appearances. Some scholars are of the opinion that each appearance of the angel of the LORD was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. This is the same angel of the LORD who confronted the people about their rebellion at Bochim (2:1) and is referenced in Deborah’s song (5:23). It would seem that in this case the angel must have looked human or Gideon would have had a much different response from the outset. That Gideon finally figured out who it was he was talking to is obvious from his conclusion in verse twenty-two.

From the reading of our text, it looks like the angel was sitting at the base of the well-known tree watching Gideon thresh wheat for awhile. What He observed was a bit unusual. Typically, the workers threshed wheat by running over it with sledges or by letting the oxen walk on it in order to separate the kernels from the stalk. This was done on a hard threshing floor out in the open where the wind would blow away the chaff as the workers threw the threshed wheat in the air. But, because of the ongoing Midianite threat, Gideon was hiding down in a winepress beating the wheat with a stick. Also, we can conclude that it must have been a pretty meager harvest to be able to

thresh it in such a small spot. Or it is likely that this little bit was all that was left after the Midianites stole the bulk of the harvest. Life was tough for Gideon, his family, and the Israelites – all God’s people.

Finally, the observer spoke to Gideon. *And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor” (v.12).* It was a complimentary greeting to call this man who was hiding out a “valiant warrior.” It was an encouraging greeting to remind the warrior that the LORD was with him. But in the face of hardship caused by the enemy, Gideon didn’t agree with either of those statements. His response reminds us that the hardships and testings of life can make us doubtful and even cynical if we are not careful. The words in 8:18-19 reveal how discouraged Gideon could have been. In that text, we discover that apparently the Midianites had killed Gideon’s older brothers on Mt. Tabor at a time previous to this meeting. Times were tough and Gideon was discouraged.

Nevertheless, the LORD chooses to use even doubters in His plans. Gideon wondered why, if the LORD is with us, “Where is the evidence of God’s presence?” *And Gideon said to him, “Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian” (v.13).*

How Gideon addressed the angel indicates his opinion of the angel. In this first response to the angel Gideon called him “Sir.” The Hebrew word is *aw-done’* which is translated thirty-one times to refer to God, but translated as a term of respect for a fellow human 304 times in the Old Testament. At this point in the conversation, it seems likely that Gideon was convinced he was talking to a fellow human but someone who commanded respect. Maybe he thought of him as a prophet who was telling Gideon “God-kind of stuff.”

We can understand that if Gideon saw the angel as a fellow human he would not hesitate to express his frustration. He essentially said, “Look at the facts! How could God be with us?” He argued that their fathers had told them many stories about coming out of Egypt several generations ago. Everyone, even their enemies, knew about God’s amazing miracles in that deliverance. It is likely that Gideon

had even grown up in the good times of “forty years rest” (5:31). But that wasn’t happening anymore. Obviously, therefore, in Gideon’s opinion, God had forsaken them. To a point that was true due wholly to the fact that *the people had not obeyed His voice* (6:10). So was Gideon angry at God or was he angry at the people for forsaking God and bringing this disaster on the whole nation?

We have to love God’s response to discouraged and even angry people like Gideon and like us. Rather than argue about the accuracy of Gideon’s conclusion, God said, “I send; you go.” *And the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” (v.14).* Rather than get bogged down with arguments, God told His chosen servant to move ahead with the strength He had already given to him. God’s argument was, “Because I am sending you, I will give you the necessary strength to complete the job.” That is God’s reasoning for all of us. The job God had for Gideon was to deliver the entire nation from Midian. Could God use a discouraged, maybe even angry, man?

When Adoniram Judson’s first wife died on the field of service in Burma, Judson was angry with God. Had it not been enough that he had already endured the death of three children? It is no surprise that in the midst of such suffering Judson would write that he hated his life in this world. After the death of wife Ann, Judson went into a period of depression and isolation. But God was not finished with Judson. God continued to prod His missionary and continued to give him a burden to deliver the Burmese people from their bondage to sin.

Okay, maybe God does plan to use me in His service. But why would God desire to use me (vv.15-24)? Now we see another fault of Gideon’s come to the surface. He had doubt (vv.15-16). His response to the angel’s challenge to move forward was, “I’m a nobody.” *And he said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (v.15).* It is important to note that with this response, Gideon’s address to the stranger changed. Now he addressed the angel as *adonai*. This Hebrew word is translated to speak of men two times, but speaks of God 431 times in the Old Testament. It seems that Gideon was beginning to wonder about this “person” he was talking to.

Nevertheless, he was not yet humbled and continued to argue. His argument sounds like something we might say to God. Now Gideon moved from anger to excuses. “What strength are you talking about?” How could he be considered a man of might when his clan really was insignificant in the tribe of Manasseh? And it was probably true that he was the youngest of his father’s sons. Compared to other people, he truly was a nobody.

It doesn’t take too much comparison for any of us to conclude that we are nobodies. There will always be someone more gifted, more able, more popular, and in our opinion, better qualified to serve God. Gideon’s excuses remind us a lot of Moses. When God showed up at the burning bush to enlist Moses to be the deliverer of the nation, Moses also tried to beg off by offering excuses. Both Moses and Gideon offered legitimate excuses to God. They really were somewhat hobbled. Moses’ past actions left a bit of scar on his reputation. Gideon’s modest family certainly would not make him the candidate of choice among his peers.

But how unsuited we might think we are for God’s service is not always a disqualification, because as God pointed out to Gideon the nobody, “I’m Somebody.” *And the LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man”* (v.16). When the mysterious messenger used the personal pronoun “I,” it should have fully convinced the doubting deliverer. He wasn’t talking to a military recruiter—He was talking to God. Therefore, Gideon’s frustration and low self-esteem were non-issues. God isn’t looking for a capable partner. He’s looking for willing servants.

Still our faith is often weak like Gideon’s was. People like that need some pretty obvious proof before they are willing to humbly submit to God’s will (vv.17-21). Weak faith requires physical evidence. To that end, Gideon made a special request. *And he said to him, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speaks with me. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you.”* *And he said, “I will stay till you return.”* (vv.17-18).

Concluding that this man might be a bonafide messenger from God, Gideon desired to show respect. A simple test was whether the messenger would stay long enough for Gideon to prepare the meal. This would probably take a better part of the day. But time was not

a big issue then, and Gideon really wanted some proof. Remember this was also the guy who used the fleece in order to know God’s will.

Gideon prepared and delivered a serious meal, but contrary to his plans, ended up offering a sacrifice. *So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them* (v.19). He was planning on simply showing hospitality. But he was about to learn that God desires worship.

Gideon showed up with the meal. The messenger gave a few simple commands and Gideon obeyed the LORD. *And the angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them.”* *And he did so* (v.20). Now it was obvious that this meal was actually a sacrifice or offering. It resembled the peace offering required in God’s law. Notice that Gideon did not resist by telling the messenger that he had prepared the meal for him.

The servant wanted proof and the LORD would give him undeniable proof. Miraculous fire and disappearance is quite convincing. *Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight* (v.21). The miracle fire consumed the offering and should have been sufficient to convince Gideon about his calling. As if that was not sufficient, the miraculous disappearance of the angel would certainly have convinced him that he had been conversing with God.

What miracle does it take for us to listen to God and obey Him? Is it not true that we find it easy to doubt an invisible God? Do we try to force God to give us proof of His person, character, and will that is more direct and personal than His written Word? Strong faith rests securely in God’s words. Strong faith is developed by walking in fellowship with God every day. Strong faith is not like a new meeting that causes uncertainty about who God is or what our relationship with Him is. Strong faith observes God applying the truths of His Word every day. It realizes that God does not always bring His truth

to bear in ways that we would choose. It realizes that God is true and faithful to do what He promises.

The miracle signs God gave were sufficient to bring Gideon to the conviction that he had been conversing with God Himself (vv.22-24). *Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites (vv.22-24).*

Now Gideon grasped the reality of who had been challenging him. He perceived the Messenger was God. He came to the conclusion through the evidence, became fully convinced, and had no more doubt, no more questions. Are you convinced regarding God's person and character, or is He just an invisible, mysterious, religious concept to you? That Gideon was convinced is obvious as he addressed the angel as God. The title "LORD God" is direct and specific. It proves that Gideon was fully convinced that the messenger was Yahweh God Himself. And he was certain he would die, based on all he had learned about God. The LORD being invisible at this point reassured Gideon that he would not die.

Gideon teaches us that a right and proper fear of God should lead to right and proper worship of God. The altar was an outward sign of the inward heart bowed before God. When we come to an accurate understanding of God's character, we will fear greatly. But the accurate understanding does not leave us in fear. It causes us to be at peace with this amazing God. People at peace with God are ready and willing to do His will.

### **Faith Obeys God (vv.25-32).**

In order to obey God, we need to be familiar with God's order (vv.25-26). God's order for Gideon was to destroy idolatry. *That night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it" (v.25).* It appears from this verse that Gideon's own father was a leader in the town (mayor?). That also put him in charge of Baal worship, which was a

replacement of God and a gross offense against God. Why was an Israelite, one of God's people, leading false worship? They did that, like we disobey God, because the heart is more deceitful than anything and desperately sick (Jeremiah 10:9). God's command for His new servant was to destroy the outward expression of inward rebellion.

The second part of God's command was for His servant to worship Him alone. *"And build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order. Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah that you shall cut down" (v.26).*

Tearing down the expressions of acceptable religion would have serious consequences. Setting up an altar to the true God would infuriate those who were under Satan's influence. Killing Dad's bull as an offering to the true God was really going to upset the apple cart. When we get serious about serving the true God and worshiping Him in a way that He prescribes, we are going to shock our family and peers.

Consider the newly enlisted deliverer's response to God's order (vv.27-32). Obedience to God is not always appreciated, especially by people who are in rebellion against God (vv.27-30). God gave the order and Gideon obeyed. *So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night (v.27).* Would obedience to God be dangerous and costly? Yes. But the person who has sincerely met God and been drawn into His service will obey. Fear of men might still cause us to do the right thing under cover . . . for awhile. Remember that this was Gideon's first ministry opportunity. . . and be understanding.

Gideon did what God told him to do and his peers were really angry. *When the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built. And they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And after they had searched and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing." Then the men of the town said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it" (vv.28-30).*

As expected the vast majority of the town, being people who had rejected God, hated God's work. They demanded to know who was responsible for this attack against their approved religion? A secret left with ten men is not a secret and soon everyone knew that Gideon was the culprit. The servant of God who is willing to stand for the truth about God as it is stated in God's Word better be ready to face the anger of false religion. In America, the acceptable religion is no longer Christianity. It is humanism. Worship of the individual is the only acceptable religion in our culture. Therefore, when the truth of God's Word disapproves of or condemns worship of so-called human rights, anyone who is bold enough to declare that truth will be attacked without mercy. Ask the governor of North Carolina what that feels like.

When the test is laid down, it becomes very clear that the One true God is mightier than all gods of human imagination. *But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down." Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he broke down his altar" (vv.31-32).*

One man's influence can impact a lot of people. Gideon stood for God and suddenly his father, who was the leader of false worship, defended him. It was the classic challenge of "Back off and let's see if Baal is able to defend himself." That would be Elijah's challenge to the same kind of false worshipers in his day. One might conclude that Joash really did know that Baal was a fraud and the whole worship thing was a charade.

This is our battle not only daily but moment by moment. We bring all thoughts in our own minds and in our culture face to face with God's truth. Which one will win the battle? The answer should be obvious. Therefore, *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).*

If you really trust God's Word regarding the finished work of Jesus Christ as the acceptable payment for your sins, you are in a spiritual battle daily. Because our God is invisible and audibly silent, it is easy for us to doubt. When we begin to doubt, it is very easy to worship Him slightly so that we do not offend our peers who worship at the altars of humanism. But when we come to grips with who and what our God is, when we realize that He has called us to represent Him in truth in a world of error, we will not be afraid to expose that error. Exposing the spiritual error of our peers will result in vicious attacks against us. But we do not know who or how many the truth will impact for God's glory. Our great need is to know God, trust God's Word, and stand boldly with it and for it. The day when it will be costly to stand on God's truth is not in the future. It is here!