

“Prudence or Faithlessness”
Judges 8:1-21
(Preached at Trinity, March 29, 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. As we saw in **Chapter 6** God called Gideon as the deliverer of Israel and promised to be with him to defeat the Midianites.
Judges 6:16 NAU - "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man"
2. As the Midianites and the Amalekites assembled for battle it was a fearsome army of great proportion. It is described in **Chapter 7**.
Judges 7:12 NAU - " Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore."
3. The Spirit of God came upon Gideon and he sent messengers throughout the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali to assemble an army. Gideon assembled an army of 32,000 soldiers. Gideon was fearful. His army was tiny in comparison with the Midianite army. So he tests God by demanding a sign through the fleece. God condescends by giving him a sign.
4. The 32,000 was a tiny number compared with the numberless Midianite army. But it was too many. If Israel prevailed in the war and they would boast in their own power.
Judges 7:2 NAU - "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'"
5. God is always mindful of His own glory. God reduced Gideon’s army to 300 so that there would be no doubt as to the source of their victory.
With the tiny army the Midianites were put to flight.
6. With the tribe of Ephraim pursuing the Midianite leaders as far as the Jordan Gideon and his band of 300 crossed over to the eastern side of the Jordan River.
 - A. If you’ll remember from the Biblical account crossing of the Jordan, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half of the tribe of Manasseh requested to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan because it was better suited for their livestock. They were permitted this as long as they did not abandon the other tribes to fight alone.
Numbers 32:18-23 NAU - "We will not return to our homes until every one of the sons of Israel has possessed his inheritance. ¹⁹ "For we will not have an inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this side of the Jordan toward the east." ²⁰ So Moses said to them, "If you will do this, if you will arm yourselves before the LORD for the war, ²¹ and all of you armed men cross over the Jordan before the LORD until He has driven His enemies out from before Him, ²² and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you shall return and be free of obligation toward the LORD and toward Israel, and this land shall be yours for a possession before the LORD. ²³ "But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out."

- B. By now these 2 ½ tribes were settled. As Gideon crosses over the Jordan chasing after the two kings of Midian he and his 300 men were famished.
- C. They came upon two cities, Succoth and Penuel seeking aid.
Judges 8:4-5 NAU - "Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan *and* crossed over, weary yet pursuing. ⁵ He said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian."
- D. The men of Succoth and Penuel were of the tribe of Gad. Gideon was a kinsman pursuing a common enemy. He humbly requested their aid. He had the right to expect their assistance.
7. When Gideon returned he punished them for their actions. Was Gideon's response an over-reaction?
Judges 8:16-17 NAU - "He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them. ¹⁷ He tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city."
8. While it seemed harsh it was actually consistent with the law of God. The behavior of these cities was similar to how the Moabites treated Israel when they came out of Egypt. Of this God said:
Deuteronomy 23:3-4 NAU - "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their *descendants*, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD, ⁴ because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt"
9. On one hand, these cities did not offer any support to Israel when they were under attack from the Midianites. And now they shut up the bowels of compassion when Gideon was in need of the simple provision of a loaf of bread.
10. In the New Testament we read:
James 2:14-16 NAU - "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?"
11. **Matthew Henry** adds – "The warning being slighted, the punishment, though very severe, was really very just. And he punished them with thorns and briers, but, it should seem, not unto death. Perhaps he observed them to be soft and delicate men, who despised him and his company for their roughness and hardness, and therefore Gideon thus mortified them for their effeminacy."
12. If Gideon was justified in his response to the men of Succoth and Penuel perhaps we should consider what might have motivated their actions.
- A. It could simply have been their total disregard for the wellbeing of Gideon and his men. There are people who have no regard for the life of others. They have little capacity to enter into the suffering of others. They aren't willing to be inconvenienced for the sake of others.
- B. More likely, however, the leaders of these two towns were simply doing what they saw as prudent. You can imagine them holding an important meeting to consider the situation. To help Gideon would have made them the enemies of the Midianites. Not being fully confident of Gideon's ability to defeat and capture the kings of Midian, they were not willing to risk the danger to their city.

13. This raises an important question for us. How shall we distinguish between prudence and faithlessness?
- A. It was certainly prudent for them to exercise caution with Gideon. Apparently, they had successfully maintained a safe neutrality with the Midianites. There is certain wisdom in maintaining this position of safety.
 - B. On the other hand, these were their kinsmen and they were in great need of bread. Was not an act of kindness needed? As followers of Jehovah, would it not have been a time of acting in mercy and trusting God for His provision?
14. How do we know the difference between prudence and faithlessness?
- I. Mercy and grace should always be held high when human life is at stake
 - A. God requires of us a high regard for human life
 1. The sixth commandment stresses this principle
 2. The NT applies this principle
Galatians 6:10 NAU - "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."
 3. Love demands acts of sacrificial service
 4. This is particularly true for those in need. The Bible has much to say about the care of widows and orphans. And the Bible has much to say about our care of the poor.
Proverbs 14:21 NAU - "He who despises his neighbor sins, But happy is he who is gracious to the poor."
Proverbs 19:17 NAU - "One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed."
 5. The men of Succoth failed to show the least degree of compassion. Andrew Fausett: "After the men of Succoth had failed to join their brethren in the national struggle of independence, the least they could do was help Gideon's fainting little band with bread; they had not the common humanity to do so."
 - B. Sometimes such care demands risk-taking
 1. There are countless examples of people who have rushed into burning houses to save those inside.
Prudence might bring us to stand at the curb but mercy causes us to act
 2. During WWII Christians hid Jews in Nazi Germany at great personal risk. Prudence might bring us to close our eyes in such situations but mercy causes us to act.
 3. There are sadly many examples of the "bystander effect." This is the social phenomenon where individuals do not offer any means of help to a victim when other people are present. We hear of examples of a person being beaten or raped and no one offers to help.
Mercy demand action.
 - C. None of these cases diminish the importance of caution
 1. Gideon himself demonstrated great caution before going to battle with the Midianites.
 2. But when human life is at stake we act while trusting in God's providential care of us.

- II. The work of the Kingdom must always be given priority
- A. Kingdom work has often been dangerous work
 1. The Gospel had often been carried into dangerous lands
 2. The cost of simply translating the Scriptures into other languages has often been great. William Tyndale was executed for his work in translating the Bible into English.
 3. The blood of the martyrs runs deep.
 - B. Not every Christian is called to be a missionary but all are called to live out the Christian life.
 1. Living the Christian life is not without risk
 2. The Gospel has been entrusted to all of us. There are times when you should feel compelled to speak
 3. There will be times when living out our Christian life will be costly. Will you lie to maintain your position in your company? Will you risk going to your boss to request Sunday's off so you can worship?
 4. When we go to give out tracts there is a certain risk involved.
 - C. This doesn't rule out the need for common sense and prudence
 1. The demands of the Gospel doesn't demand that we rob our employer by spending our day sharing the Gospel instead of being productive in our work.
 2. It wouldn't be wise or prudent to walk into a biker bar on a Friday night, stand on a chair and begin preaching the Gospel.
 3. But there will be many times when God puts us in situations where we boldly stand while trusting in God's care and provision.
- III. The care of our family must never be disregarded
- A. This is where the actions of the people of Succoth and Peniel must be considered carefully
 1. These were cities where families resided
 2. The leaders of the cities had a duty to protect them. They were not willing to risk putting them in danger by aiding the enemy of the Midianites.
 - B. We must give careful regard to our duty of protecting our family
 1. A father would be right to put his family on the lifeboat before himself – this is what happened on the Titanic.
 2. Is a pastor that neglects his family in the care of his congregation trusting God or is he behaving foolishly? This happens far too often.
 3. The NT implies that the Apostles had wives and children. The Apostles were often in dangerous situations and almost all were martyred. We have no record however that any of their wives or children were martyred.
 4. While we must be valiant for the sake of the Gospel we must not abandon our duty to our families. This means we must give great consideration before putting our children in danger. It would be foolish to carry your children with you to do mission work in Iran or North Korea.
 5. Our chief mission field is to our children
 - C. On the other hand, mercy and the Christian life demands bold action
 1. You don't necessarily deny someone the benefit of your booster cables because you have your children in your backseat.

2. Opportunities for sharing the Gospel present themselves in countless ways. It is good for your children to watch you sharing your faith with others. It is good for them to see that you are intentional with the Gospel. It is good for them to see you intentional with your service to others.

IV. We must trust God's almighty power

- A. We've seen the importance of mercy and living out the Christian life
 1. Those who provided shelter for the Jews in Nazi Germany acted courageously and properly.
 2. Being a person of principle and living in unwavering faithfulness and obedience to Christ is always the right thing
 3. Many of these situations will be dangerous but most glorifying to God.
 4. It would have been proper for the people of Succoth and Penuel to have offered aid to Gideon and his men. It would have been the right thing to do. Might it have been risky? We don't know, and neither did they.
 5. The proper thing is to always do the proper thing, and then trust God.
- B. We must have a no compromise principle as we live our life
 1. We saw this clearly with Daniel and with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their unwavering commitment to God was dangerous, even life-threatening. What an example to us:
Daniel 3:16-18 NAU - "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ "But *even* if *He* does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
 2. The men of Succoth and Penuel should have done the right thing and provide bread to these men in need. And then trust God to bless their faithfulness.

Conclusion:

1. This must be the working principle of our lives. Do the right thing and then trust God.
2. God always blesses faithfulness. It is always a good thing to honor Him. May we not be so fearful as to flee from everything that may appear risky. Christianity is for warriors who march forth boldly in the name of Christ.
3. We must learn to trust God in all things. It wasn't the sword of Gideon that defeated the Midianites but the power of God. One of them chased a thousand. We must always do the right thing, and then trust God.