

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #12

Judges 8:22-35

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson once told the story of the famed Bible teacher from England whose name was F.B. Meyer. F.B. Meyer was a Baptist minister who wrote many good devotional expositions that have ministered to many people. In fact, at one time he was considered to be one of the great Bible teachers and preachers in the days of Spurgeon and Moody. F.B. Meyer preached successfully for many years, and then for some unexplainable reason he quit preaching. He went into some decline for a period of about nine years. Those who heard him said he didn't preach much of anything. He didn't even seem to stand for truth (*The Backslider: Judges 8:1-32*, p. 3). That is so sad because here was a man who was being greatly used by God and somehow he got sidetracked and lost his way.

It doesn't matter how old a person is or how long a person has walked with God or how much one has seen God do in one's lifetime; **if a believer specifically stops obeying the Word of God, his life will end in a mess.** I am certain all of us know believers who at one time were on fire for God, but not anymore. They have drifted away from God and His Word and have lost their focus. That can happen to any believer and the proof of that is what happened to Gideon.

Someone once said the only believer who can afford to let his guard down and be assured that he will not stumble is one who is in the presence of God. Many passages of Scripture teach us that life is short, but as one commentator observed, life is long enough for a person to make a mess of it if that is what the person wants to do. We must always be on the alert until we get out of this world, because if we let our guard down things will deteriorate quickly.

Just before the Apostle Paul died he assessed his Christian life and said this: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (II Tim. 4:7). I hope that will be the testimony of every one of us. It was not however, the testimony of Gideon. The point we want to see is this:

GIDEON ACCOMPLISHED GREAT THINGS FOR GOD AND WAS BLESSED BY GOD, BUT HIS LIFE ENDED IN WAYS THAT WERE NOT RIGHT WITH GOD BECAUSE HE DRIFTED AWAY FROM THE WORD OF GOD.

Gideon is a faith hero. He is one of the people named in Hebrews 11:32. So he was no light-weight man of God. There were some amazing things that happened in the life of Gideon. He became a mighty man of God and he was greatly used by God. But his life ended on somewhat of a sour note. Somehow as time moved forward, Gideon's spiritual life moved backward.

Last time we were together we saw that Gideon did a couple of odd things that don't seem to square with the Word. Instead of just disciplining people, he killed some of his own people because they did not help him (8:17) and he was prepared to not kill two Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna (8:19). God wanted these Arab idolaters destroyed and Gideon is wavering in regard to the Word of God.

I think this goes back to Gideon's fleece sign requests. God's Word told him what to do, but he wavered at that and wanted fleece signs. It appears Gideon struggles with obeying the Word of God. I don't care how long a believer has walked with God, if he does not stay committed to understanding and obeying God's Word, life can end a mess.

Now Gideon has come back a victorious man. God had used him to rout the Midianites and there are three final postscript parts to Gideon's life:

FINAL POST SCRIPT PART #1 – Gideon responds properly to the people's request. **8:22-23**

Someone said if the story of Gideon's life would have ended here, it would have ended great. The men of Israel wanted Gideon to be their king and they wanted him to form a dynasty with his family.

Now notice carefully from **verse 22** why they want this, because they said "you" have delivered us. Now it is true that God had greatly used Gideon, but it is also true that God was the one who gave Gideon the victory. **There was not anything wrong with them honoring Gideon, it was a God-honoring thing to do, but they are forgetting God.** They are truly missing the key ingredient to all of this. It was God who had delivered them. Had they been worshipping God and praising God in honoring Gideon, this would have been fine. But instead of doing that they are only praising Gideon.

Now we will admit that Gideon deserves to be praised in a proper context. The Scriptures teach that we are to give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7). Gideon was the key instrument that God used; however, **the request they are making for Gideon to become their king is not a request based on what God has told Israel to do, it is a request based upon what they want to do.** They wanted Gideon to be their king without knowing exactly what God's will was.

Back in the days of Deborah when there had been great victory there was great praise that broke out in Israel. It was a song of praise that did honor those God had used, but it was also a song of praise that started off by bringing great glory to God (5:2). That praise was lacking here. Instead of Israel singing praise to God, they are trying to get Gideon to become their king without consulting God.

We must wonder how many times we have neglected to give God the praise and the glory that He deserves for things He does. How many times have we praised ourselves or others for accomplishments when in fact it was God who did it? How many times have we left Him out? I think a good example of this is when some people give their testimonies. Some praise themselves for making a decision and some praise someone else who was part of the decision, and many leave out God, who actually saved the person.

It seems to me that there are two extremes the spiritually wise believer will avoid. It is certainly proper to honor those who have been greatly used by God. Some people are so proud they don't want to honor anyone ever. Second, it is right to honor those who have been greatly used by God in the context of what God has done. Don't leave this point out.

Now most political leaders, if they would have been in Gideon's position, would long and crave for this kingly opportunity and political power. Kings in this time had absolute power and authority.

Every four years in this country we see people who will give up almost everything they have and will do almost anything they have to do including lie, to become President of the United States. Most political leaders crave power. This past week Betty Ford died and that reminded me of something that happened when President Ford died. I think it was either Donald Rumsfeld or Dick Cheney who said at President Gerald Ford's memorial service, that when most political leaders in Washington D.C. look into the mirror they see the next President, but not Gerald Ford.

Gideon was not that way. Gideon said "I don't want the job" and to Gideon's credit, in **verse 23** he turns the opportunity down. Gideon was not some power hungry, self seeking, ambitious political leader looking to gain more authority by being a king. He says I and my sons will not rule over you, God is the one who rules over you. Jehovah is the one who is your King.

When you read these two verses, you say what a great man of God. Gideon had become a valiant warrior, but he never aspired to be some dominant king and he turned the job down.

It is a shame that some leaders in churches cannot learn the lesson of Gideon here. There are some leaders who crave and want dominant power over people. I have seen it with some pastors, elders, and deacons. They want to be viewed as the king, as the big shot ruler, as the one on top. Now I will admit that the gift of pastor/teacher is important to the church; however, there is no place where the Scripture turns the absolute power of a church to the pastor as king. There should never be some dominant elder who arrogantly wants political power. The federal head of the church is none other than Jesus Christ. The job of the leaders is to move the church in the ways of the Word of God that please Him.

Gideon turned the opportunity down and as one commentator said, this was the high point of his entire life.

FINAL POST SCRIPT PART #2 – God's people respond generously to Gideon's request. **8:24-26**

In **verse 24**, Gideon makes an odd request that the people give him one of the earrings of each Ishmaelite. Here is where things get weird. Now the Ishmaelites are Arabs and they wore earrings and when God destroyed the Midianite army comprised mostly of Arabs, there were lots of gold earrings and other things taken in the spoil. There were 135,000 military men and they all wore earrings plus all the other supplies they had. So Gideon requested that each person give him a gold earring.

God never once told Gideon to do this. Gideon is beginning to drift away from the Word of God and the will of God to following his own impulses and desires.

Now naturally in view of all Gideon had done, the people were more than willing to give him what he requested. According to **verse 25** every family willingly did this. They spread out a garment and each family gave Gideon a gold earring. The calculation of which was 1700 shekels, which is somewhere around sixty pounds of gold (**verse 26**).

Now to give you an idea of how much it is, we need to look at some numbers. Precious metals such as gold are weighed by what is called a “troy ounce” and there are twelve troy ounces in a pound of gold. In sixty pounds of gold there are 720 troy ounces. If an ounce of gold is worth \$400, the total value of these earrings is about \$288,000 dollars.

Not only did the people give him this much in earrings, but **verse 26** also says that they gave Gideon crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes that had been worn by Midianite kings, and neck bands that had been on the camels.

It is fair to say that Gideon had been well compensated for his achievements. The people were generous and happy to share with Gideon some of their spoils.

FINAL POST SCRIPT PART #3 – Gideon makes something idolatrous with what the people gave him. **8:27**

Without consulting God or seeking His will, Gideon takes it upon himself to make a priestly “ephod.” He is not authorized by God to do any of this. He just decides this is what he is going to do.

His initial motives may have been right, but he is not following God’s Word and he is beginning to drift away into his own direction. Gideon did not start out to design an idol, but this is what it would become. Probably Gideon sensed the need to promote a true spirituality, but the true spirituality would come in a relationship with God, not in a relationship with a robe.

An ephod was an elaborate priestly apron that was to be worn by the high priest (Exodus 28:6ff). It was to be elaborately designed. Apparently Gideon decided to design his own. **He did not see himself as King of Israel, but apparently he was beginning to falsely see himself as some sort of priest.**

There are big problems here. The priests are supposed to be Levitical; they are not in the Tabernacle at Shiloh, they are in Ophrah and the garment is not being precisely designed in accordance to Exodus 28. **So as good as this appears to be, this act is contrary to the Word of God. This is not God’s will, it is Gideon’s will. Gideon is in direct violation of the Word of God.**

We do not find in the book of Judges any priest functioning properly as a priest. Gideon decided he would design his own priestly garment and probably wear it as some priest. All of this would backfire. He took the ephod to his hometown of Ophrah and “all” of Israel worshipped it. All Israel played the harlot which means the entire nation was unfaithful to God. This ephod became an idol. It became a “snare” to Gideon. Gideon, who had been used so greatly by God, ends with a life “tainted with failure.”

By this act of Gideon, he actually seduced an entire nation from worshipping God to worshipping a garment he had made. Gideon led people from true worship to false worship. Gideon established a worship center in Ophrah all because of this garment. Where is the tabernacle, where is the altar, where is the furniture? This was a religious system invented by a man.

I began tonight's exposition with an illustration about F.B. Meyer. I have tried to do some research and see where F.B. Meyer went wrong. There was a period of time in Meyer's life when he drifted away from a focus on God's Word to fighting social things. He became very political and went on a crusade to close down saloons, houses of prostitution and other things. As a result he drifted from God's Word.

I don't like to speak negatively about the dead, but when I read what happened to Gideon I could not help but think of what happened to Jerry Falwell. Jerry Falwell at one time was a pastor devoted to preaching God's Word. He drifted away from that focus and became a political crusader who said things on TV that weren't even biblical. How sad. Now I know God will judge him and God will judge me, but here is the thing. When their lives ended you did not say there was a great man of the Word of God. That is what happened to Gideon. His life ended with a wrong focus.

Now the final glimpses we get of Gideon's life are found in **verses 28-35**: Gary Inrig called these verses "Gideon's backsliding" (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, p. 155). There are ten final facts brought out about Gideon:

(Fact #1) - The Midianites were subdued and did not dominate Israel anymore. **8:28a**

What wonderful new freedoms were enjoyed in Israel because of Gideon.

(Fact #2) - There was peace in the land for forty years. **8:28b**

Israel should have used this peaceful time to enjoy life and worship God.

(Fact #3) - Gideon went and lived in his own house. **8:29**

Gideon retired from public life. He lived a life of luxury. There is nothing wrong with retirement, but in retirement stay committed to understanding and applying God's Word.

(Fact #4) - Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants. **8:30a**

Gideon established a very large family.

(Fact #5) - Gideon had many wives. **8:30b**

Gideon didn't want to become a king, but he apparently wanted a harem like a king. Gideon's family will become disturbing. This is "large scale polygamy" which is certainly not sanctioned by God.

(Fact #6) - Gideon had a concubine with whom he had a son named Abimelech. **8:31**

Not only did Gideon have multiple wives, he had a concubine in Shechem who bore him another son named “Abimelech” whose name means my father a king. We will meet this son of his next time and it is not good.

(Fact #7) - Gideon lived to be an old man and died at a very old age and was buried at Ophrah. **8:32**

God did grant Gideon a long life.

(Fact #8) - As soon as Gideon was gone the sons of Israel worshipped Baal. **8:33**

One must think had Gideon stayed on the front lines of promoting obedience to God’s Word, things could have been different.

(Fact #9) - As soon as Gideon was gone the sons of Israel forgot God. **8:34**

We are right back to the pattern of Judges. Things go good and then go bad. Israel serves God one day and doesn’t serve God the next day.

(Fact #10) - As soon as Gideon was gone the sons of Israel stopped treating Gideon’s family honorably. **8:35**

The fact is Israel did owe a debt to Gideon because of all the good he had done, but they soon forgot it. I think it thrills the heart of God that we continue to support Mrs. Miles and one of the Miles children. This church realizes all the good Mr. Miles did in giving us a proper doctrinal foundation, and we honor that to this day. But not Israel and Gideon.

This text is a warning to us all. We could all name people who at one time seemed to be on fire for God and were involved in a fruitful ministry; who fell away and got involved in scandal. One of the things that this should cause all of us to do is to get down on our knees and ask God that He would not ever let this happen to us.

This is especially true if the hair is gray. One of the saddest things to ever see is a man or woman of God who was greatly used by God, who has drifted away from a focus on God’s Word and God’s will.

What a testimony we will have if people say - those people at Texas Corners Bible Church regardless of their age, sure love God and they love the Word of God. That is the testimony we want until we get out of this world. We must not ever compromise our commitment to accurately understanding and obeying God’s Word, no matter how old we are.

As the song says “prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love, here’s my heart - o take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.”