

Judges 6-8

Judges: Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons *Doubting God*

William Shakespeare wrote, "Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt." In other words doubt can hold us back. It can shackle us and keep us from really living life.

But C.S. Lewis, the Christian apologist, had another take on doubt. He said, "We're not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be"

Sometimes our problem isn't so much not believing what God says, it's being afraid of where trusting Him will lead us.

We're in a series on the Old Testament book of Judges that we're calling *Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons*.

It's a study of the people of God and how easily they were sidetracked in their walk with God.

These were the Jewish people who had been brought up out of slavery in Egypt to live in the land that God had promised them. It was a land the Bible describes as flowing with milk and honey. It was a rich land, a good land. It was a land of blessing.

It was also a land filled with fierce inhabitants. A generation before Judges 1 some of the Israelites were sent into the land to spy it out. In numbers 13 we get their report.

But the men who had gone up with him said, "*We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.*" And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "*The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.*" Numbers 13:31-33

That's an example of how doubt can stand in the way of life. God said "Go, I'll give you success," and the people said, "That's not going to happen. We're too afraid." As a result God let the people wander in the desert until that whole generation died off.

Finally, 40 years later, God used Joshua to lead that next generation into the land of promise.

God had warned them about the corruptness of the Canaanites who lived there but time and time again God's people got pulled into the corrupt lifestyle of the people around them.

Each time God allowed them to be over run by their enemies until they finally called out to Him for deliverance.

The book of Judges covers about 300 years of this cycle of rebellion. By the time we get to Judges chapter 6, the rebellion of the people is in full swing.

Turn to Judges chapter 6 page 222

Read verses 1-6

I. God Is Always Faithful To His Promises

God had promised Israel a future and a hope. He had promised to make them a great nation and to bless the world through them. What God promises always happens.

But as we saw earlier in this study, God's unconditional promises can have conditional blessings attached to them. In other words God will always fulfill what He says but there can be some serious detours along the way.

In this case the Midianites were devastating the land. In fact it got so bad that the people of Israel were hiding out in caves.

If you turn from God it doesn't matter if your Israel, Britain, or even the most powerful nation on earth like we are. It doesn't matter if you're a religious person or a member of Faith Community Church. It doesn't even matter if you're the pastor of Faith Community Church. If you turn your back on God there's going to be consequences.

Here were the people of the living God hiding out in caves and dens. That's a pretty sorry place for the people who are in the center of God's promises of blessing to be.

Sin always ultimately brings shame and fear.

What's the solution when we're turned away from God? **Read vs 7**

I John 1:9 says *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The Psalmist wrote, *Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; Incline Your ear to me; In the day that I call, answer me speedily.* (Psalm 102:6)

Sometimes God really has to bring the circumstances of life to bear on us. There's two basic responses you'll find in people. Some get angry at God and some turn humbly towards Him. The same sun can harden clay and soften wax.

These people's hearts were softened and they cried out to God. They didn't cry out against God. They didn't blame God. They didn't say, "God how could you let this happen to us." They turned to God in faith.

So here's God's answer. **Read verses 11,12**

The irony here is striking. You don't thresh wheat in a winepress. You thresh wheat out in the open. Gideon's hiding in fear of the Midianites and the Angel of the Lord address him as "mighty man of valor."

So here's Gideon's question. **Read verse 13**

Remember, at this point Gideon's not totally sure who he's talking to. But his question is, "If God is with us why are we suffering? If God is with us where are His miracles? It looks like God's abandoned us."

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt like God's forgotten about you? Let me assure you that never happens. God is there and God is at work.

Here's God's answer, **Read verse 14-16**

God says, "You're the man Gideon. You're going to save Israel from the Midianites."

Now notice, Gideon was the ultimate nobody. He's a poor Manassite, the least in his father's house. He's afraid, hiding out from the enemy, and thinks that God has forgotten His people.

As we saw last week, God delights in using nobodies to get His work done so that everyone will worship Him and not the one He uses.

You might be sitting here this morning thinking “Who am I that I could do anything for God? I’m just a working guy with a family to support, or a mom that’s just trying to take care of keeping the kids in line. I’m just a student who’s main goal is to survive middle school. Who am I?”

That’s exactly what Gideon was thinking. Who am I? Now at this point I don’t know if he doubted because it all seemed so unbelievable or he doubted because he wasn’t sure he wanted to find out what God was going to do through him, but he did doubt. In fact he asks for a sign. We’re going to find out that Gideon was big on asking for signs.

I. God Is Always Faithful To His Promises

II. God Understands Our Questions And Our Doubts

Gideon asks for a sign and God gives it to him. At that point Gideon becomes fearful.

Read verse 22

The Angel of the Lord is God appearing to His people in the Old Testament. The Angel of the Lord is what we call a Christophany, or an Old Testament appearance of the Second Person of the trinity.

No wonder Gideon’s a bit scared. He’s face to face with God and he’s been saying things like, “Oh yea, if God is with us have all these bad things been happening to us? Where’s God?”

Whoops. God’s right in front of him.

At that point you’d think he’d say, “Ok God. Just tell me what to do and I’ll do it.” But really, Gideon’s a whole lot like you and me. He’s still trying to get past his doubts.

Read verses 36-38

That’s bold isn’t it? “God, just so I know you really meant what You said, could You make this sheep skin wet and the ground dry?”

Gideon asks and God does it.

But now if that isn't enough look at what happens next. **Read verses 39-40**

Now people have gone in a lot of different directions with this. Some have taken this as a cue to use fleeces. They say if you really want to make sure your doing what God wants you to do put out a fleece. Ask God for a sign.

Personally I don't feel comfortable with that approach. Gideon wasn't doing this because he had faith. He used the fleeces because he doubted.

But what is striking to me is that God didn't reject Gideon. God didn't say, "Gideon O you of little faith," and open up the earth and swallow him up or something.

The Bible says, *As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.* (Psalm 103:13-14)

God is an awesome, majestic, holy, God. He is the Lord of all. He has every right to say "Jump," and expect us to say, "How high?"

But God pities His children. God knows what we're made out of. He should. He made us!

He knows how weak we really are. So God in His grace understands our questions and our doubts.

God's goal isn't to put us down it's to develop our faith. Gideon's faith is going through a growth process. He's afraid, but he's still willing to obey God. Before the fleece incident Gideon had already put out the call for fighting men and thirty two thousand responded.

I. God Is Always Faithful To His Promises

II. God Understands Our Questions And Our Doubts

III. The Key To Success Is Faithful Obedience

Read 7:1

Gideon and his 32,000 fighting men position themselves to look down on the Midianites who were camped in a valley.

If I were Gideon looking down on those thousands and thousands of enemy troops I might be just a bit worried. I might look at the Midianite army and then look at my army and then look at the Midianite army and look back at my army. See there was no comparison. Gideon was probably outnumbered about 5 to 1.

So his conversation with God might have sounded something like this. “God, I know you said we were going to win the battle but maybe You don’t really realize what we’re up against. Maybe it’s been a while since You’ve evaluated the Midianite troop strength. Maybe we should rethink this whole deal.”

We do that all the time, right? “God, I know you want me to be a witness for you in my school but I’m outnumbered. I feel like there’s only a handful of Christians.” Or, “God I know you want me to reach out to my neighborhood with Your good news but there’s just me to do the job.”

Or, “God I know you want to reach this world with your message of hope but have you see how many people live on the planet these days? Our little church or our little mission board is way out numbered. The job is just too big for us to handle.”

I’m sure that Gideon thought his army was way too small but God didn’t think so. In fact, God thought it was too big.

Read 7:2, 3

Whoops! There goes 2/3 of Gideon’s army. Could you imagine being Gideon watching as 2/3 of your army said, “We’re afraid. We’re leaving.”

What about Gideon? Wasn’t he afraid? If he wasn’t before I’m sure he is now. He’s probably terrified.

But wait. There’s more. **Read 7:4-7**

Oh great. God just reduced Israel’s chances of winning the fight from “hardly any” to “absolutely impossible.”

Now Gideon has to make a choice. He’s gone along with all this whittling down of his army until he’s literally down to a handful of fighters. What’s he going to do?

Well, here’s the choice: believe God and go ahead or doubt God and say, “I can’t.”

How many times is that our choice? Believe God or doubt God.

There's no such thing as "I can't" in the Christian life. If we're walking with God and we say, "I can't."

"I can't win my neighbor to the Lord, I can't stop drinking, I can't be the husband or wife that God's called me to be,' whatever. What we're really saying is "I can't but God can!"

God says, *Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.* (Isaiah 41:10)

The Bible says *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (Philippians 4:13)

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts. (Zechariah 4:6)

And it was God who said to a worried but faithful Gideon, "You're going to win this battle."

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8, 9)

Read 7:16-23

It seemed that every possible advantage was on the side of the enemy, but Gideon went ahead by faith believing that God was at work. Not only that, but the 300 guys who fought with him went by faith. They must have had faith to stick around after they heard the battle strategy.

Could it be that they were nervous, shaking in their boots at what they were facing. I have to believe they were. But that didn't stop them. There was something bigger than their fears. And the thing that was bigger than their fears was God.

They believed that there God was bigger than any hurdle, bigger than any obstacle, bigger than any enemy.

To me the story of Gideon reminds me of the beginning of the church in the book of Acts. There were 120 gathered in the upper room. There wasn't 120 in this church and

120 in the church down the street and 200 in the church in the next town. There was just 120 believers in Jesus.

That's not very good odds considering Jesus' great commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

But you know what happened? A poor unlearned fisherman got up and preached about a local carpenter that had been crucified and 3000 people were added to the church in one day.

Talk about church growth. That was a 2500% increase. In one day!

In Acts 17 when Paul and Silas, 2 first century missionaries, came to town this is what people said, *These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.* (Acts 17:6)

The word translated as "upside down" is *anastatoo*. It's a compound verb made up of two words; *ana*, meaning 'up' and *histemi*, meaning "to stand."

What were they really saying? "These who have made the world stand up and take notice are here."

How did that happen? Paul and Silas believed God and were obedient to their calling. Their life wasn't easy.

Gideon was obedient in the face of overwhelming odds. He couldn't win. But he went.

Paul and Silas were obedient in the face of overwhelming odds. They couldn't win. Yet they went.

They went and God used them. They weren't gods or supermen. They were just flesh and blood people like you and me. What made the difference in their lives? Faithful obedience.

Did you know right now there are Philippino university graduates who have jobs as maids, nannies, and construction workers to get access to Islamic nations so they can act as under-the-radar missionaries.

There's no other way to get in these countries. The Middle Eastern Muslims use lots

of Philippino workers so that's how they get in. They face overwhelming odds, yet they obey God.

In the 1980's American missionary Russ Stendal was trying to reach out in war torn Columbia. On one trip out into the mountains he was taken captive by Marxist FARC gorillas. They held him captive for 5 months tied with a rope made into a slipknot around his neck.

Stendal shared the good news of Jesus Christ with his captors and wrote his story out in Spanish.

He was amazed when the FARC commanders permitted his writings to circulate throughout the camp. You can read his story in the book *Rescue the Captors*.

Gorillas and their leaders started asking Stendal questions about faith and life. Some started expressing doubts about the godless ideology they were devoted to.

Russ Stendal watched this unfold before him and one day he was just so amazed at what God was doing that he told God that he was willing to do whatever God saw fit. He said, "I told Him He could do anything He wanted with me and that I would trust Him completely."

After his release the US Embassy told him to never come back. He couldn't do that. Today Russ Stendal is serving God in the remote areas of Columbia where over the past 3 years 200 churches have been shut down and 35 pastors assassinated.

Today Stendal says, "a large number of people are becoming on fire for God. This is happening in strange and unlikely places like prisons, gorilla camps, and in remote dangerous areas. Only God can start a real movement. We are led by the spirit and place Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts, and events according to the will of God."

His latest project is to bring 1 million Bibles into Venezuela to match the 1 million assault rifles Hugo Chaves is getting from Russia.

Is Russ Stendal super human? Is he ever afraid? Obviously he feels fear. But he does what God has called him to.

Don't ever say, "I can't" when God says do something. When you do, your really saying God can't. Don't let doubt cause you to lose the good you oft might win, by

fearing to attempt.

Don't let questions and doubt stop you because you're wondering how painful God's best will turn out to be.

Our greatest example of all is Jesus Christ. When He was facing the cross the Bible says He, *fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me."* (Matthew 26:39)

In another place it says, *And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* (Luke 22:44)

And that was on a night that was so cold that Peter needed to warm himself by a fire.

Why was Jesus experiencing such painful emotions? Because He knew exactly what He was facing. At the cross He would bear the wrath of God for the sins of the world.

I can't imagine the horror He must have faced. But Jesus didn't turn back from what He came to do. Everything in His humanity cried out in opposition but Jesus submitted Himself to the Father and went to the cross for us.

He went there to pay for the sins that we've committed. He went there to deal a death blow to the wall of sin that stands between us and a holy God.

That's why God calls us to faith in His Son. We couldn't do it. We couldn't pay the price. But He could. The Bible says, *When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* (Hebrews 1:3)

Jesus sat down because He was finished. Have you received life from God through Jesus Christ?

We can't but He can. He has and now by faith we're part of His family. That means that we can do whatever it is that the Bible tells us to do.

Don't doubt the God who's given His Son for you. Receive Him. Trust Him. Obey Him.