

July 10/11, 2021

“Who Are You?”

Messes. Choices. Faithful God Series

Judges 6:1-40

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I have a question for you this morning. Who are you? Now when someone asks you that, typically you give them your name or maybe your vocation or something about what you do, or perhaps something about your family or your relationships. That's not what I'm asking. I'm asking, in the light of day, when you look in the mirror, what do you think about you? When you lay awake in the dark of night, how do you assess yourself in your life? Who are you? I'd like you to keep that in mind as I lead us on a journey this morning, into the identity of one man. If you have a Bible with you, turn with us to Judges, Chapter 6, verse 1:

Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian for seven years. The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, and they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. And so Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD. (*NASB, Judges 6:1-6)

This is a heartbreaking story. After all, who are we talking about? We're talking about God's chosen people—His treasured possession—the ones that He literally pulled out of slavery and oppression in Egypt, formed in the wilderness, and sent victoriously in to conquer and possess a land flowing with milk and honey. Where are we now? Living in the midst of oppression and devastation. Verse two says that the power of Midian was so great that the Israelites literally aren't in their homes now. They are hiding in crags in the rock, in caves. They're digging out dens in the hillsides. They are almost living like animals, in fear for their very lives. And oh, by the way, who are they hiding from? Verse three says it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites.

Remember when we first encountered the Amalekites? It was the first people that went to war against Israel in the wilderness in Exodus 17. And as Moses had his arms upheld by Aaron and Hur as a symbol of dependence on God, Israel saw God bring their first great victory over Amalek. And then in the next chapter, it was Moses' very own father-in-law, Jethro, who was the priest of Midian, who comes and helps organize the people of God in the wilderness. Now who's oppressing them? It's the Midianites, the Amalekites and Arabs from the East who are going against them, camping against them, to destroy the produce of the earth, coming from the East, as far west as the Mediterranean, and leaving no sustenance. It was in Bryan's visitor center

introduction and overview of the book, that we read in chapter 2:14, that God would give them over to plunderers who would plunder them, and the pattern in the cycles thus far has been that the oppressors would come and rob Israel of its goodness.

Now we see that not only in Judges are there repeated cycles, there is a downward spiral because now things are even worse. They aren't coming in to plunder the land; they are coming in simply to devastate it. Notice the wording, **destroy the produce, leave no sustenance, devastate the lands**. In the last cycle, Israel went up against nine hundred iron chariots. Now it is camels that are innumerable, and men and armies so great that they're described as coming in like locusts.

You know, I encourage you, sometime during the summer, to read the latter chapters of Deuteronomy, because none of this is a surprise. You see, life and flourishing are only found in God. And when people step out of the umbrella of God's provision and protection, flourishing no longer occurs. And it's in Deuteronomy 28:38, when God is foreshadowing all of these things, and telling them what will happen if they abandon Him. He says they will sow greatly, but reap very little. Why? Because locusts will come in and consume everything. And how are these armies described? Like locusts in number. And so, what did the Israelites do in the oppression of Midian? They did what any of us would do. They cried out to the Lord.

Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel... (Vs. 7, 8a)

It's usually at this point in the cycle, when the nation of Israel cries out, that God raises up and sends a judge, a deliverer to deliver Israel. But again, in evidence that things are getting worse, this time God does not send a judge at this point to deliver Israel. Instead, He sends a prophet to indict her.

...and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all of your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, and I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear (reverence) the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.'"" (Vs. 8b-10)

The prophet is sent by God to bring understanding, to make sure that it is crystal clear what is happening and why. And shouldn't it be crystal clear by now? After all, we read in Judges 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, and now 6:1, almost the exact same words: **The sons of Israel did again what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and thus the Lord gave them over**. The prophet is making crystal clear why Israel is suffering oppression: **You have not obeyed Me**. How important that will be to keep in mind as we go through the rest of the story. In spite of Israel's continued cycles and patterns of rebellion against God, even now, still He is merciful. Verse 11:

Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites.

Here we have our first introduction to Gideon. Who is he and what is he doing? He's the son of Joash, and he is down in a wine press, which would be dug out in the ground, used to stomp out grapes. But he's beating out the wheat, which would usually be done on a threshing floor or outside so that the chaff could be blown away. But why is he down there? He, like all his people, is in fear for his life. He's hiding in a hole, trying to hold on and save the very little that he has. That's our introduction to Gideon, which makes the next verse so shocking. Verse 12:

And the angel the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."

That's so shocking to Gideon that he probably can't even process the second half of the greeting, doesn't even address it. He just zooms right in on the first half of what the angel said, **The LORD is with you**. Verse 13:

Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, then why has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now, the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hands of the Midian."

Gideon says, in essence, to the angel of the Lord, when the angel says, "The LORD is with you," he says, "No, he isn't. Where's the evidence of that? Where are all the miracles we heard about? Where are all the good things He did for our forefathers?" No, he goes so far as to actually say, **"The LORD has abandoned us."** Remember that, because it will be important as the story advances as well. Gideon is making two mistakes, and they are two mistakes that we are prone to make as well.

First of all, Gideon is allowing his understanding of his circumstances to shape and determine his view of God, rather than determining to have a right view of God shape his understanding of his circumstances. What I mean is, Gideon is looking at what's going on all around him, and it's horrible! And he is concluding that because things in his life are horrible, and things in Israel are horrible, God has abandoned them.

How prone we are to do the same? Things don't go well. We're struggling; we're not experiencing flourishing in our soul. How quick we are to say, "God must not be good," or, "God must not be able to deliver us or to help us." What a mistake we make, instead of choosing to allow the Word of God to shape a right view of God in giving us a right lens to interpret our circumstances. When we get it upside down, our conclusions can be completely off, and Gideon's were 180 degrees off, totally upside down.

The second mistake that we're prone to make as well is, look how quickly we are, when things aren't going well, to look externally. When we're struggling, when we're not experiencing flourishing in our life or our soul, it is so easy to look *out there*. "Well, look what he did to me." "Look what she did to me." "It's certainly someone else's fault that I'm not experiencing joy and flourishing in my soul. Maybe it's even God's fault." But how slow we are to look inside. Say instead, "What is it about my life or my choices that have perhaps put me in a position where I am

not able to experience the peace and the flourishing of God?” Gideon has things completely upside down. In spite of that, the Lord is still calling him. Verse 14:

The LORD looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?” He said to Him, “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.” (Vs. 14-15)

Gideon says, “You’ve got the wrong guy. I am the most insignificant member of the weakest family in my clan. What are you talking about? How can I be the one to deliver Israel?”

But the LORD said to him, “Surely, I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as (as easily as if they were) one man.” (Vs. 16)

The calling of Gideon is bookended by the promise of the presence of God. The Lord said, **“Surely I will be with you.”** This is important to see who matters most in this story as it progresses.

So Gideon said to Him, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me.” (Vs. 17)

Gideon is still struggling with all of this. So he asks God for a sign. And what is the essence of the sign that Gideon requests? “Well, if You’re with me, show me a sign it is You.”

“Please do not depart from here, until I come *back* to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You.” And He said, “I will remain until you return.” Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot and brought *them* out to him under the oak and presented *them*. The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. (Vs.18-21)

Gideon asks for a sign. “Who is this one who is with me?” And like Moses before him and Elijah who would come after him, Gideon experiences a theophany, a visible manifestation of God through fire. For Moses, it was in the bush that burned but was not consumed. For Elijah, it was the fire that fell from heaven, and for Gideon, it is fire springing from a rock. Who is this One who is with him? Oh, God gives a clear answer. He is the One for whom nothing is impossible. He is the great and mighty and awesome God. And when Gideon, like anyone who truly encounters the awesome nature of God, sees this, he is terrified, literally thinking that he is going to die. Verse 22:

When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said “Alas, oh Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!” The LORD said to him, “Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.” (Vs. 22-23)

What a beautiful picture! This God who is so awesome that nothing is impossible for Him, is the same God who is so tender as to speak peace and kindness over Gideon's troubled soul. **"Peace to you. Don't be afraid."** Then Gideon responds in the only way that would be appropriate in a moment like that. He worships. Verse 24:

Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. And to this day, it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

So now we're ready, right? It's time for Gideon to be raised up as the judge to deliver Israel, right? Not quite. Verse 25:

Now on the same night, the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; and build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down." (Vs. 25-26)

Wow, what a different picture. Now we get to the heart of the matter. Gideon, who said God had abandoned them, was actually a part of the family that was leading his entire city in abandoning God. It was the sin right in his own backyard that was the source of trouble. And before he can be called of God and used of God, God says, "You have some unfinished business. You need to go and tear that altar down, cut that Asherah down, and restore the rightful worship of the one true God. Repent of the direction you've been going, and return to Me."

Often it is so easy for us to look at our circumstances and think God has abandoned us, when in reality, the likely story is that we have moved away from Him. Gideon must deal with the sin in his own heart and the junk in his own yard before he can once again lead Israel to experience flourishing under the rightful reign and rule of God. That's what God commands him to do. So does he do it? Absolutely! Sort of. Verse 27:

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.

I like what one commentator said, "We shouldn't be too hard on Gideon being afraid and doing this during the night rather than a bold stand in the middle of the day. It's obedience that's essential. Heroism, that's optional." (*laughter*) And it's understandable that perhaps there was a reason that Gideon was afraid. Verse 28:

When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar, which had been built. They said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched about and inquired, they said, "Gideon, son of Joash did this thing." Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah, which was beside it. (Vs. 28-30)

Gideon did have reason to fear, for that idolatry was deep in the hearts of the people of his city, and they are ready to kill him. Maybe Gideon was the first one, ever, to utter that phrase, “Just because you are paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you.” They were out to get him. Ironically, it’s his father who owns the idols, who comes to his defense and rescues the day. Verse 31:

But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar.”

Joash brilliantly turns the tables by saying, “Now wait a minute, you’re all upset. But if Baal is a god, surely he can fight his own battle. In fact, you’re insulting him by implying he’s not able to. And if you’re that person, then you’re the one who should die.” And the people back off.

Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, “Let Baal contend against him,” because he had torn down his altar. (Vs. 32)

What this means is there’s a name that was added to Gideon: Jerubbaal, and it then served as a living testimony making Gideon’s life a constant reminder of the impotence of Baal. Baal did nothing. He didn’t contend for himself. He didn’t come after Gideon because he is a dead and lifeless and worthless god, one to be torn down and turned away from. Therefore, Gideon now lives with this name, Jerubbaal, as a testimony to his impotence.

As I was studying this week, I got to thinking about us. I thought, you know, maybe we all need a name added to our names, Jerub-Something, whatever it is that is or has been an idol in our life. In our culture that is driven by sex and a sex-defined life, perhaps it should be Jerub-Sexual Immorality, an idol that we need to tear down and to stop believing that life will be found in that direction. Jerub-Substance Abuse. If you’ve looked to alcohol, or drugs, or food, or any other substance to be the source of life for you, it’s an idol to be torn down. Returning to the Lord, Jerub-Success and Power, Jerub-Popularity, could even be Jerub-Spirituality and Good Works. Whatever it is that we look to other than the Lord to bring life can be an idol in our lives. And just like Gideon, we need to get rid of the sin in our heart and the junk in our yard and live as testimonies to the impotence of those false gods. And now we’re ready for the deliverance to begin. Verse 33:

Then all the Midianites, the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel.

Here we go again. Here they come again, another time of oppression and devastation. But verse 34:

So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they were also called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them. (Vs. 34-35)

Scholars say that verse 34 is the turning point of the Gideon story: **The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon.** The word that's translated **came upon** means *to be clothed in*. It's the same word that is used in Genesis 3:21, when God clothed Adam and Eve after the Fall. It is as though God is so great upon Gideon, He's completely covering him with Himself and His presence, and this is the turning point in the story. So now finally, we are ready for Gideon to go out and deliver Israel, right? Not quite. Verse 36:

Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel through me as You have spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me as You have spoken." (Vs. 36-37)

For countless years, Christians have talked about Gideon's fleece and debated, "Is this a valid means of seeking to discern the will of God?" Well, I'll just tell you simply and straightforward, "No, it's not. God calls us to follow His Word and to be a people who walk by faith, not by sight. Yet there's probably not one of us who, at some point, hasn't tried some version of Gideon's fleece. Usually it's something like this: We say to God, "God, I'm just not sure. If You want me to do "X", then You cause "Y" to happen—something unusual, maybe even miraculous—then I'll know it's your will, Lord." But you know, when we think about this, Gideon is actually not even seeking direction from God. God's will is already crystal clear. Gideon even said it, ...**as You have spoken**. Gideon's fleece is not even about seeking guidance from God. What Gideon was seeking was encouragement and confidence. And God so kindly, and so graciously gives it. Verse 38:

And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece a bowl full of water.

Now we're ready to go. Right? Verse 39:

Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground."

I can almost picture the wheels turning in Gideon's mind. It's like, "Oh man, that was dumb. That fleece is made of wool. It's super absorbent. Maybe there was water in the ground and the fleece drew it all in? I'm not sure. But if we flip that over and the fleece is totally dry and the ground is wet, then I will know that God will do what He has said." Amazingly, God does not burn with anger against Gideon. God so kindly and graciously confirms. Verse 40:

God did so on that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

You know, based on what we've studied here in Judges 6, if I were to give a name, a title, to Gideon, it would be *Frightened Little Man*. But that is not what God calls him. God called him a **valiant warrior**. Do you realize that Gideon shows up in the Hebrews chapter 11 *Hall of Faith*? We'll find out more about why that is next week.

But for this morning, there is one critical lesson that we cannot miss. God does not look at a person merely as he or she is. He looks at them as He intends them to be. I began by asking you, “Who are you? How do you see yourself?” How do you even answer that question? I have no idea what thoughts go through your mind when you look in the mirror or you lay awake at night about you. But I am willing to bet that most of us in this room have two words in common in our description. “Not enough”. Somehow, we’re not enough. Not good looking enough, tall enough, thin enough, smart enough, successful enough, funny enough, popular enough, athletic enough. We’re just not enough. And it makes total sense because, from a cultural context of a worldview of purposeless chance, you have no identity, no true source of value or significance, except for what you create for yourself through the world system. And that is based upon other people’s opinions of how you perform in whatever area it is you’ve chosen to pursue. What a shaky and unstable foundation for a life!

I want to implore you this morning, that “Who are you?” is the wrong question. And we need to stop living our lives seeking to answer that question. Instead, there is a far more helpful question that we should consider. Not, “Who are you?” but, **“Whose are you?”**

It is only in relationship with a living God that we find true and solid identity, not because of who we are, but because of who He is. In spite of Israel abandoning God, who was God to Gideon in this chapter? He was personal, caring, and loving him. He was present right there in the mess with him. He is extremely kind and gracious. He is extraordinarily powerful and able. He is for Gideon. He sees more in Gideon than Gideon sees in himself, and He is calling Gideon to a life of impact in the midst of a hurting and broken world. That same God—who was God for Gideon—is right here today to be God for you and me.

The question that matters is not, “Who are you?” It’s, **“Whose are you?”** We need to consider that this morning through two lenses. First, perhaps there are some in this room who have never placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. They’ve never trusted all that they are to Him, and believe that His finished work on the cross is the only way to be brought back into a right relationship with God. If that’s you, oh how I encourage you this very day, in the quietness of your heart, to just say to God, “I want to be Yours. I trust in Jesus as my Savior and Lord; I give my life to You.”

But for most of us in the room, we’ve been Christians for a long time. So the answer is obvious, right? “Whose are you?” “I’m God’s, of course.” And yes, it’s true. If you’ve trusted Christ, you have been adopted by Him, and you are always His. But let us not miss the lesson of Judges. The people of Israel were God’s, but they weren’t living like it. God had not abandoned them, but they had abandoned Him. Flourishing and life are only found in God, and when they stepped out away from God, out of God’s umbrella of provision and protection, they began to experience devastation and destruction. And even in the New Covenant, the same is true for us.

Hebrews 12 tells us as a good, good Father, God chastises those who rebel against Him—His own children—as any good father would. And the natural consequences of life that take place are devastating when we step out from underneath the umbrella of God’s provision and protection. So when I ask you, “Christian, whose are you?” what I mean is, “Who are you really living for?” Are you living daily, pointing the trajectory of your life toward seeking God, seeking to know Him, to

follow Him, and to obey His will as expressed in His Word, living under the rule and reign of God, expanding the kingdom of God by shining with His brightness in the midst of a dark world? Or are you, perhaps, living for self, going your own way, doing your own thing, trying to find life and make it happen through your plans, in your strength? Or perhaps you're living under the tyrannical, oppressive idolatry of our culture, which is constantly telling you to jump through another hoop to be this or that to be a good person? Whose are you? Who are you living for?

Life and flourishing are only found in Christ under the rule and reign of God, seeking Him, following Him and obeying Him. I ask you this very day, take time to deal with your own heart, perhaps the junk in your own yard. Sincerely ask God to help you answer the question, "Whose are you?" Are you living for yourself? For the world? Or for Him?

Jesus, oh how we thank You for Your Word, for Your truth. God, we get confused just like Gideon. We think You've abandoned us. We've got it completely upside down. We're the ones who walk away from You. Oh, God, call us back this very moment, this very place. Call us back to following You as the true King of our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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