

IMPERFECT FAITH

Hebrews 11:32 & Judges 6:25-7:25

April 22, 2007 Sunday a.m.

INTRODUCTION

- A. One day in children's church, the teacher taught about Gideon. The following Sunday, for the sake of review, the teacher asked who remembered last week's Bible hero. No hands went up. "Okay," he said. "I'll give you a clue: he fought a battle using only lamps, pitchers, and trumpets." Still no response. "Maybe you remember how he used a fleece to learn God's will," he said. Ten little blank faces stared at the teacher. "One final clue," the teacher pleaded. "There are people today with the same name as our hero, who go around hotels putting Bibles in the rooms." Finally an eager 8-year-old boy shot up his hand and said, "Oh! Oh! It was Hilton!"
- B. Gideon is included in the great chapter about faith-Hebrews 11:32.
 - 1. His faith, though, was far from perfect.
 - 2. He actually grew in his faith and that's the way most of us do it.
 - 3. Let's see how Gideon's experience helps us define what faith is and what it is not so we can grow in our faith too.

I. FIRST, IN GIDEON WE SEE WHAT FAITH IS NOT.

- A. First, faith is not the absence of doubt.
 - 1. Gideon's faith was not free from doubts.
 - a. In 6:17 he asked for a sign to help him with his doubts.
 - b. Then he proceeded to ask God for two more signs-6:36-40.
 - 2. Other great men of the Bible had doubts-John the Baptist, Thomas, even Peter when he walked on the water.
 - 3. There have probably been times when we doubted too.
 - 4. It's good to know that faith is not the absence of doubts, but perseverance in spite of our doubts.
 - 5. A definition of faith that continues to help me is "Faith is walking in darkness, but refusing to quit."
 - 6. Polar Express clip.
- B. Neither is faith the absence of fear.
 - 1. Gideon was afraid- 6:17 and again in 7:9-11.
 - 2. Even the Apostle Paul admitted to sometimes being afraid-I Corinthians 2:3.
 - 3. No doubt the heroes at Virginia Tech (32 killed by fellow student on April 16, 2007) who gave their lives to help save others were just as scared as everyone else. Courage isn't the absence of fear, and neither is faith.

II. IN GIDEON WE ALSO SEE WHAT FAITH IS.

- A. Faith is obeying God even when we don't understand.
 - 1. Gideon didn't understand why God told him to reduce his army from 32,000 to 300-7:1-6. But Gideon obeyed God anyway.
 - 2. Abraham is another example of someone who, like Gideon, obeyed God even when he didn't understand what God was doing-Genesis 22.
- B. Also, faith is not just an affirmation, its action.
 - 1. Gideon didn't just say he had faith in God, he demonstrated it when he tore down his father's idols (6:33-35) and when he faced the enemy's army with 300 instead of 32,000 (7:15b-25).
 - 2. The Billy Graham Center is located on the campus of Wheaton College in Illinois. It houses an auditorium, classrooms, and a museum containing priceless artifacts.
 - On June 8, 2004, fire engulfed a portion of the center's roof. The thick cloud of black smoke was visible from miles away. Workmen apparently caused the accidental blaze, which left a portion of the building damaged by smoke, fire, and water.

When the alarm sounded, some of those in the center evacuated the building immediately. Fear kept others inside, remaining there until firefighters arrived and escorted them to safety.

A woman named Joylin was one of the fearful ones uncertain about what to do. She recounts, "One of the women said, 'Why don't we stay back and pray?' The rest of us were like, 'I think we need to get out.'"

Who was right, should they have prayed or run? The right thing to do is to pray and run! Faith is not just words, its action.

C. Another thing Gideon teaches us is that faith is only as good as its object.

1. In the beginning, Gideon's faith was in his army of 32,000.
2. His army was reduced, however, so there would be no doubt about who won the victory-7:22.
3. But remember, faith is only as good as its object. If we trust people, we get only what people can do; if we trust money, we get only what money can do; if we trust ourselves, we get only what we can do; but when we trust God we get what only God can do.

CONCLUSION

- A. Faith isn't the absence of doubts or fears.
- B. Faith is obedience even when you don't understand, its action and not just talk, and its only as strong as its object.
- C. Where is your faith and trust?