

Judges 6B

- Last week we were introduced to Gideon, the fourth judge in the book of Judges
 - This week we get to know this man personally
 - And as we do, let's remember the age in which he lives
 - The people of Israel are in trouble
 - The men are weak, the women are forced to compensate and the people are increasingly prone to idol worship
 - Gideon's nature and character reflects Jewish society in one way or another
 - As we'll see, he lacks self-confidence
 - He has trouble recognizing the word of the Lord as if he's unfamiliar with the voice of the Lord
 - He needs reassurance
 - Nevertheless, the Lord patiently works with him as He does with all of us
- So we rejoin Gideon as the Angel of the Lord meets him as he threshes grain in the wine press
 - The Angel of the Lord has appeared as a man, but now Gideon has begun to suspect the Angel is something more than merely a man

Judg. 6:16 But the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."

Judg. 6:17 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.

Judg. 6:18 "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."

Judg. 6:19 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.

Judg. 6:20 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.

[Judg. 6:21](#) 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.

[Judg. 6:22](#) When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."

[Judg. 6:23](#) The LORD said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die."

[Judg. 6:24](#) Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

- After hearing that this "man" will be with him in battle, Gideon asks for a sign that this is truly the Lord speaking to him
 - Gideon instructs his guest to stay put while Gideon takes time to prepare an offering
 - The word for offering in Hebrew can also mean gift or tribute
 - So Gideon is preparing a meal as a tribute to his guest
 - Then Gideon goes about several hours of work
 - He prepares a young goat for dinner
 - He makes a large quantity of unleavened bread
 - It was unleavened because he was in a hurry
 - When the goat was ready to eat, Gideon brought the meat in a basket, and the bread and the broth from boiling the goat
 - Rather than eat the meal, the Angel instructs Gideon to set the bread and meat on a large rock, which becomes an impromptu altar
 - Then the pot of broth is poured out on the meat and bread
 - And Angel of the Lord ignites the sacrifice with his staff
 - The entire offering is consumed by the fire,
- As the meat and bread and broth are burned up, the Angel of the Lord vanishes in that instant
 - Between the burning up of the soggy sacrifice and the sudden disappearance of the man, Gideon gets his sign

- At that moment, Gideon understand this was no ordinary man
- In fact, Gideon instantly grows fearful of what he's witnessed
- He knows he's seen the Angel of the Lord and to see the Lord was to die, Gideon thought
- The Lord speaks to Gideon at that moment to reassure him he won't die
 - Gideon didn't see the glory of the Lord
 - He saw a theophany, a physical manifestation of God, similar to the dove that descended on Jesus
 - A theophany does not pose a problem for sinful man, which is why God uses them in place of revealing His full glory
- So having been reassured, Gideon turns from fear to worship
 - He builds an altar for another sacrifice
 - And he named the location the Yahweh Shalom, the Lord is Peace
- Gideon's request for a sign sounds similar to the requests Jesus received while He walked in the Galilee
 - In most cases, the Lord refused to grant a sign when asked in that day

Matt. 12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

- The religious leaders asked for a sign, but the Lord rebuked them for doing so
- But in this case, the Lord concedes to Gideon's request
- Why the difference now?
 - In the Pharisees' case, Jesus had performed miracles already which they rejected
 - And Jesus' identity was clearly known and His qualifications to be Messiah were easy to verify

- Nevertheless, the leaders refused to believe Him
- So Jesus knew that even had He performed more signs, they would not have accepted them anymore than the previous signs
- That's why Jesus told them that they would only have the sign of Jonah, which was Jesus' resurrection from the dead after three days
 - And when Jesus performed that sign for all Israel to see, it still didn't impress these men
 - They refused to accept the truth even after a resurrection
 - So certainly they would have rejected any other sign Jesus could have given them
- Gideon's request was very different
 - He was inclined to accept the words of the Angel of the Lord, and everything he said and did demonstrated that
 - First, he asks the Angel of the Lord to stay put because he wanted time to honor his guest
 - The Pharisees never gave Jesus even a moment of honor
 - Secondly, Gideon prepared a lavish meal for Jesus
 - The Pharisees used meals with Jesus merely as opportunities to trick or deceive Jesus
 - Thirdly, when Jesus performed the sign, Gideon was quick to respond in faith and acceptance
 - The Pharisees credited Jesus' miracles to the devil rather than admit they came from God
 - Finally, Gideon exhibited fear of the Lord
 - The Pharisees openly mocked and hated Jesus for what He did
 - Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge that Gideon's need for a sign was an indication of his spiritual weakness
 - Scripture never looks positively at the demand for a sign from the Lord

- Even when signs are granted on occasion to bolster weak faith, those concessions are not to the praise of the individual
- Consider Jesus' words to Thomas

[John 20:24](#) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

[John 20:25](#) So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

[John 20:26](#) After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."

[John 20:27](#) Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."

[John 20:28](#) Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

[John 20:29](#) Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

- Thomas required a sign of Jesus' resurrection, which the Lord ultimately provided
 - But even as Jesus gave the sign to Thomas, He rebukes the apostle
 - Paul indicates in 1Cor 1 that seeking signs from God in place of accepting His word is indicative of the unbelieving world
- When a believer requires signs and wonders to strengthen his or her relationship with the Lord instead of relying on the word of God, it's a sign of spiritual immaturity
 - Signs and wonders are spiritual crutches
 - They are like spiritual cotton candy
 - It's excites us and looks substantial
 - But once we take it in, it evaporates and we come to recognize its emptiness
 - Even so, once we get a taste for it, we keep going back for more
- Gideon's need for signs is a measure of his spiritual weakness and an indication that he was unaccustomed to hearing the voice of the Lord

- Obviously, Gideon didn't receive a visit from the Angel of the Lord every day, but like all Israel he did have the Law to mediate upon
 - But it seems he wasn't accustomed to hearing the voice of the Lord in His word
 - Believers who are unfamiliar with the Lord's word are usually unprepared to hear the Lord when He speaks (in whatever way)
 - Jesus said the sheep know the voice of their shepherd
 - He was stating a spiritual principle that the people of the Lord will come to know Him by His word
 - So that when He calls, we will know it
 - But believers who stray from the Lord, we can have difficulty knowing His call when it comes
- I often field questions from believers who ask how they can know when the Lord is calling or directing them
 - That question is so hard to answer because it's not something you can switch on when you want
 - You are either practiced at listening to the Lord by study of His word, by prayer and by a general sensitivity to His leading...or you aren't
 - And if you aren't, you're going to miss His voice at times
 - The only solution is to spend time with Him in His word and in prayer
- Gideon is the man God has chosen to lead Israel out of this cycle of sin, but he has difficulty hearing the Lord in confidence
 - He has difficulty in recognizing the Lord's voice and having courage to follow
 - And this tells us how far the culture of Israel has fallen
 - When even Israel's heroes are struggling to hear the Lord
 - So they must depend on spiritual crutches before acting

- And even when Gideon did hear, he acted in fear and with doubts

Judg. 6:25 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;

Judg. 6:26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on the 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."

Judg. 6:27 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.

- On the same night that the Lord appeared to Gideon, the Lord tells Gideon it's time to begin the mission God gave him
 - Gideon doesn't even get a day to contemplate God's call
 - His mission begins right away with a raid against the Midianite high places
 - In this case, the altar of concern is Gideon's father's personal family altar
 - Gideon is told by the Lord to take a team of bulls to pull the altar down
 - And then once the altar is torn down, he is to take one of the bulls and sacrifice it to the Lord on a new altar built to replace the idol altar
 - The wood for the fire would be the wooden idols of the goddess Asherah
 - The symbolism couldn't be clearer
 - Baal was a idol in the shape of a bull
 - So the bull god's altar would be torn down by a pair of bulls
 - And Asherah was the fertility goddess carved from young trees
 - So this tree goddess of life will be burned up in service to the living God
 - And for Gideon, the act testified that he was breaking from his father's worship of idols and aligning himself with the God of Israel

- As Joshua declared, as for me and my house, we will worship the Lord
- The moment was similar to the way Moses had to circumcise his own son before he could call upon Pharaoh to obey the Lord
- As Gideon undertakes his mission, his fear still influences his thinking
 - He takes men from his household and goes out under cover of darkness
 - He's afraid of his father's household and the men of the city
 - What might they do to Gideon if they discover him taking down the altar?
 - What might have happened if Gideon had gone out in the day?
 - Maybe the men of the city would have seen it
 - Maybe they would have charged up to stop Gideon
 - And what can we suppose would have happened next?
 - We can't know for sure, but given what God has asked Gideon to do, we can safely assume that the Lord would have defended Gideon
 - But Gideon doubted the Lord's strength, and his fear resulted in robbing the Lord of a chance to receive glory in broad daylight
 - That's what happens when we obey in the shadows but shrink back in the daylight
 - If you hesitate to speak up for your faith when people are watching or try to blend in when persecution is possible, you miss an opportunity
 - Then you're failing to fulfill the very purpose for your calling

[Matt. 5:13](#) "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

[Matt. 5:14](#) "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

[Matt. 5:15](#) nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

[Matt. 5:16](#) "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- Well, even though Gideon did these things at night, day comes eventually

Judg. 6:28 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.

Judg. 6:29 They said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched about and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing."

Judg. 6:30 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."

Judg. 6:31 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."

Judg. 6:32 Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he had torn down his altar.

- The men discover the altar to Baal and Asherah is gone and an altar to Yahweh has been put in its place
 - Notice they are not pleased to find their idol altar gone
 - These are not Midianites, these are Jews
 - You can see how corrupt Jewish society has become in this time
 - When word gets around that Joash's son was responsible, the men of the city demand that Joash deliver his son to them
 - Joash responds in defense of his son
 - Joash says anyone who wants to defend Baal will be put to death
 - In other words, Joash says you can have my son over my dead body
 - And then he smartly says why should anyone die defending a god over a fallen altar?
 - Let Baal defend himself
 - If Baal is really a god with power worth worshipping, then surely he can defend his own altars?
 - Obviously, Joash knew that no such defense was coming

- And so he saves his son and seems to return to Yahweh as well
- And on that day, Joash renames his son Jerubbaal, which means he contends with Baal
- Gideon's first mission teaches us a several lessons clearly
 - First, the defeat of Midian must begin with returning to Yahweh
 - Israel was in this predicament because they have been worshipping idols
 - And yet they continue to worship idols even after seven years of misery under the Midianites
 - So before the Lord will free them from the Midianites, they must step back from the idols
 - Before they can build up a relationship of worshipping God, they must tear down the altars of worship to false gods
 - God is a jealous God, and He will not share His people with anything or anyone else
 - Secondly, when the time comes for God's people to turn from their sin and disobedience, the change begins in our own homes
 - Gideon couldn't expect to lead God's people out of darkness until his own family had come into the light
 - That's the reason behind the NT's requirement for elders and other leaders to be men of high character
 - We can't expect to make it where God is taking us if we're lead by men and women who won't make the trip themselves
 - Finally, we have to go out in confidence that the Lord will win our battles for us
 - Gideon had nothing to fear, as the next morning demonstrated
 - If Gideon's father could keep the men from killing Gideon the next morning, then he could have done it at anytime
 - For although Baal couldn't defend his altars, the Lord God of Israel can certainly defend His

- But by operating in fear under darkness, Gideon lost the opportunity to give the Lord His desired platform

Judg. 6:33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel.

Judg. 6:34 So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him.

Judg. 6:35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

Judg. 6:36 Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken,

Judg. 6:37 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."

Judg. 6:38 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.

Judg. 6:39 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."

Judg. 6:40 God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

- Most people have heard of the story of Gideon's fleeces
 - Notice it begins with the assembling of a huge number of Midianites who were preparing to enter the land for a mass raid of the Jewish cities
 - This pattern had been going on for seven years
 - We learn later in chapter 8 that the number of this invading horde was 135,000 men
 - Now we understand why the people of Israel have been powerless to stop them
 - The Lord clothed Gideon with His Spirit causing Gideon to determine to fight this horde
 - He blows a trumpet which is a signal for troops to assemble
 - The first to respond were a family of Benjamites

- Later, members of other tribes came as requested to stop the invasion
- But then we see Gideon's fears return leading him to indecision and doubt
 - In this well-known test, Gideon asks God for another sign
 - He places a woolen fleece out in the open overnight and asks God to perform a miracle
 - The fleece will be wet with dew, but the ground will be dry
- The Lord grants the miracle, and Gideon sees it clearly, but then he asks for a do over
 - He asks for the opposite condition this time
 - Either way, it's a miracle for one to be dry and the other wet
 - And once more, the Lord grants it
- Sometimes we remember Gideon's actions as an example of faith, but as we've studied it in context, we can clearly see it's the opposite
 - Gideon is a weak man, a man who reflects the spiritual weakness of Israel's society as a whole
 - He isn't accustomed to hearing the Lord
 - He hears and then doubts
 - He asks for signs even when the Spirit of the Lord has delivered clear instruction
 - And he doubts even the signs God gives
 - He is a man trying to obey, which is certainly notable
 - But to quote the esteem philosopher, Yoda, "There is no try. There is only do."
 - In the end, Gideon's hesitation and inability to act in confidence having heard from the Lord is a testimony against him