

Scripture Reading

Text: Judges 6&7

Before we continue with the service today, I would like to call our attention to a few things going on in the events narrated in the passage we have just read.

Perhaps before talking about the main event, I think it is worth looking into the setup of the events. Here we see a classic trend we can almost always find in the Bible; the old testament especially. Once again, the Israelites have sinned and are now being punished by God. God has delivered them into the hands of their enemies – the Medianites in this case. It is sad to see how many times this pattern is repeated in the old testament. One thing though that is surprising is how long it often takes the Israelites to realise their wrong and return to the Lord. However, we can always be thankful to God's loving grace. When the people of God eventually cried out to Him, He listened. Well, this trend is not only peculiar to the Israelites, even God's people today often in one way or the other end up in sin. But, as 1 John 1:9 tells us, that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. What this means is that we are never farther than "a repentance" away from God.

When God answered the Israelites, we get a glimpse of how God felt about the whole situation. Like an expression of emotions in words, God stated His case. God expresses what feels like a disappointment in a nation He had moved mountains for, to ensure her wellbeing and yet, this nation would not do the one thing God has required of her – to serve Him faithfully. I want us to examine ourselves this morning to see if we too are in some ways like the nation of Israel, reciprocating God's love and grace with unfaithfulness. If there is any area we are falling short, we should not delay on our repentance but rather confess it and make amendments, know that we are only "an act of repentance" away from Him.

Moving on to the main Character, in Gideon. Gideon was the son of Joash belonging to Abiezer, a small clan in the tribe of Manasseh. I remember a pastor once said names often foreshadow what a character will be. So, I looked up the meaning of the name Gideon and it turns out to mean "one who cuts down" originating from the word *hewer* which refers to a great warrior (because of having a stump hand). I think this is interesting, given what the character of Gideon eventually became.

As we look a little deeper in to the events in this passage, I want us to look at ourselves through the lens of the personality and the person of Gideon. I want us to see the parallels that may exist between his character and ourselves. This will help us visualise better, the practical lessons from the passage and also, the applications.

Gideon was introduced in the simplest of ways, he was threshing wheat. There was nothing impressive in his past that was made mention of, nor was there any important role he was occupying. Not only was he from a small clan in his tribe, he saw himself as the least important in his family. He definitely didn't see himself being good enough for any major work, at least

not anything like the deliverance of his nation, not even after several confirmations from God. This just goes to tell us how ordinary Gideon was. I'm saying ordinary not in the negative sense but in a way that we too may look at ourselves today. Gideon was filled with scepticism and he had doubts like we too may have today. I guess what I'm saying is that in one way or the other, we too may have a Gideon in us, who is still in doubt even in the face of what we see God doing or able to do. This may be where we are today or where we once were but I pray that God will take us to the place of faith and total trust which is where God wants us to be.

When Gideon was first approached by the angel, in response to the angel's greeting that "The Lord is with you...", Gideon asked why calamities were upon Israel. Gideon recalled all the great and wonderful things they were told by their fathers that God had done in the past. He then concluded that if God could have done that much and now they are in such hardship, only one thing was possible – God had abandoned them. Again, this is another relatable aspect of Gideon. How many times have we felt that God has forgotten us or borderline doesn't care about us? How many times have we read in the Bible what God did and yet we cannot say the same about our own experience? How many times have we looked at others and thought to ourselves God definitely has abandoned us because others seem to be doing much better and enjoying God's favour while we aren't? Well, I'm happy to report to you that not for one moment does God ever forsake His own. Like we read last week in Matthew chapter 6 that if God cares about flowers and birds, how much more would he care about us – we who are created in His image? God always has us in His hands and regardless of what we are going through, we can be rest assured that it's all in His control. We can forget about God (like the Israelites did) but God doesn't forget or forsake us. And this passage confirms this because not only did God listen to his people when they called out to him, but when Gideon was making these statements, he was addressing the angel of God who has come to call him for the deliverance of the nation.

Speaking of the call of Gideon, we see a very similar call the one recorded in Exodus chapter 6 and a similar response. Basically, God calls man, man gives a logical reason why it won't work. The response of Gideon and Moses is very natural for humans. However, what is wrong about it underlines the main difference between how God works and how man works. For humans, we give assignments; we assign people to go and do some tasks. The possibility and feasibility of accomplishing the said task is largely dependent on the abilities of the person assigned and the resources available to them. This is why Gideon in his rational mind thought it would be impossible that he would be the one to deliver the Israelites from the mighty Medianites. Do we also feel the same whenever we are called by God to do a thing? Do we feel as though God has assigned us to a task which the feasibility of accomplishing it lies in our abilities and the resources available? Well, God doesn't work like men. When God calls us, he doesn't just send us off with some goals to achieve then bid us goodbye, rather, His call is more of a proposal, an offer to allow Him to do His work through us. Our individual abilities while useful are not at the centre of doing God's work. As the name suggests, it's God's work. The moment we take God ways from it, we make it our work and like every other work we do, our abilities become a critical factor.

Looking at verse 16 of chapter 6, we see a profound statement by God which is key to everything in this passage. God told Gideon “you can do it because I will help you”. Gideon was not going to be successful because of some inner abilities or because of some strong armies available to him, but because of God. And it is same for us today, when we lean on God, then we can do mighty things. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians in chapter 4 verse 13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.

God has called Gideon to be used for the deliverance of the Israelites from the Medianites, however, that wasn't the first thing God did after the call. The very first thing God had Gideon do was to tear down the places of idols in his town and replace them with a well constructed altar to the Lord. This can be likened to a process of sanctification or purification. While the deliverance of the nation is important, it is more important that they are right with God. This also applies to us who are willing to be used of God. There are many great things God can do through us but the sanctification of our own lives is of great importance. This is what Paul wrote in his epistle in the book of 1 Corinthians 9:27 “I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified”. We need to rid our lives of any impurity or unrighteousness and allow God to reign supreme in us. Matthew 7:21-23 read last week talks about people who preached God's message in the name of Jesus, cast out demons, and did many miracles but on the judgement day, Jesus will say to them “I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people”. So, to put this in a shorter form, we should allow God to conquer our hearts before we go conquer the world for God. God is not only interested in what we can do for Him but also interested in our hearts. The greatest thing we can offer to God is not our service, but ourselves. Let me say that again, the greatest thing we can offer to God is not our service, but ourselves. Romans 12:1-2 says “¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”. We should offer ourselves first and allow God to take control of it, then can our services be acceptable.

Now, God has called Gideon and he has answered, the altars of idols have been torn down and replaced with an altar to the Lord and it was time to assemble an army to battle the Medianites. So, Gideon did the obvious, he gathered as many men as he could to join him in battle – about 32,000 of them. Remember that we were told earlier on that the Medianites and their camels were too many to count which suggests that Gideon could still be shorthanded with just 32,000 men. But contrary to any human logic, God said that was too many people to work with. It wasn't that God could not have given Gideon victory with 32,000 soldiers or even a million of them, it was a question of who gets the glory. God does not share his glory. Isaiah 42:8 says “*I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to anyone else, nor share my praise with carved idols*”. Gideon's effort to assemble an army that is humanly speaking competent shares the glory of the victory with God. The victory can easily be attributed to their competence and not God's doing. For this reason, God reduces the number of the men to a mere 300. A number obviously not feasible to be victorious and as such, a victory would only be a miracle – hence, the work of God.

I've had a first-hand experience of this myself. When I was in school a few years back and due to some exchange rate issues, I was short on my school fees. I kept waiting, hoping things would get better but that proved futile as they only got worse. The deadline was fast approaching as I had about a week left to make the payment. I didn't want to burden my parents with the matter so I prayed about it. I remember saying in my prayer to God that God's provision was my only plan and I had no backup plan. If I was able to pay, it would totally be God's provision and if I couldn't, it was totally on God. In my attempt to show God I really had no other plan, I decided I wasn't going to tell anyone about it. I was not going to influence the situation in any way. Well, you can guess what happened. God in fact did provide that exact amount I needed, no more, no less. He provided with even about two days to spare before the deadline.

What I'm trying to say is that when we can trust God to take the full glory for himself, He does wonders. We are often either not trusting Him enough or we want some of the glory for ourselves. I know it sure feels good to get compliments here and there, hear our praises sung by others but this robs us of the full capacity of God. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 Paul wrote ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.' We see God the most in our weakness. The greatest work God did for us was in our weakest state – the work of our salvation. It is alright to be weak to allow God to be strong. The more room we give God, the more of Him we will see. I want us to ask ourselves this morning if we are being too strong for God to work with. Are we approaching God's work in such a way that the glory comes to us, rather than God?

In the last part of the passage, we see one of the greatest encouragements and confidence booster in the Bible. After every sign Gideon had requested, he was still in doubts. He knew he was dealing with God but he just couldn't see how things were going to work out. He knew he wasn't a mighty warrior, he didn't have the strongest army and definitely not the biggest army. He was sure the Medianites were many and would be difficult to defeat. One would imagine that after all the signs, his faith would be strong enough. However, God knew Gideon more than he knew himself. God knew exactly what would boost his confidence and faith. God did not just give him a sign but a confirmation. A confirmation from the mouth of the enemy. God knows us and he knows our weaknesses. If we just rely on him to help our unbelief and strengthen our faith, He would. Like the man in Mark 9:24 who said "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!", I encourage us that this would be our prayer. Let us pray that God would help us to overcome our unbelief, that we may totally rely on Him and not our abilities. We see that the help to believe that God gave Gideon brought a different reaction. He fell to his knees and worshiped. At that moment, he no longer needed any more sign or confirmation. It was the ultimate confirmation. It is my prayer today that God will give each one of us that boost in faith that will plant us rock solid in our belief and trust in God.

I know we've gone through quite a few things so I would like to do quick recap of what we've talked about so far.

1. In the setup to main event in the passage, we established that we are never more than an act of repentance away from God. We should not allow ourselves to be deep in sin or long gone in the path of unrighteousness before we turn back to the Lord.
2. Gideon, our main character saw himself as nothing, an ordinary man, but God saw him as great. The angel of God already addressed him as a mighty warrior in verse 12 of chapter 6, long before anything great was said about him. I pray that God will not only open our eye to see Him the way He truly is, but to see ourselves the way He sees us.
3. Like it is for every great character in the Bible, the will to be available for God's use is the greatest ability. We see Gideon often in doubt of the possibility of him being able to achieve what God was going to commission him to do however, one thing that was certain was that he was willing and available as long as God proved it was possible. Like the saying goes "availability is the greatest ability". God will do many things for us but he will not force us to be available for his work. That choice is ours to make and may I ask, what are you choosing today? To be available for God or not? I encourage you to be available for God's use.
4. Before we go out to conquer the world for God, we need to allow God to conquer our hearts. We need to make God the first in our lives and then let him use us the way He pleases. We should not be too focused or carried away by what we can do for God that we neglect where our heart is. God delights in our salvation in our faithfulness to him above other things.
5. There is a subtle yet significant difference between doing God's work and allowing God to work through us. We do not do God's work relying on our abilities and resources, rather, we give all that we are to Him and allow him use us for His glory and His glory alone. It will be a lot of burden if we try to do God's work with our own effort and abilities. We should release ourselves to him and let Him work through us, giving us the strength, grace and help we need. His grace is abundant and always sufficient.

Before we close today, I would like us as individuals to reflect on two questions. Not only as we are seated here but something to always reflect on, every day in our Christian lives:

1. We have said that whatever God uses us for is for His glory and the glory is not ours to take. So, the question is are you doing what you are doing for the sake of your own praise and glory or for the glory of God.
2. And secondly, what is it that you are still doubting in your heart? Is God calling you or laying something in your heart? Trust God today, take the step of faith. Let God do His thing and just be available. There are many ministries for example here at OIC, is the Lord pointing you in a direction, listen to that still small voice. Trust God's help. Let your answer today be "Hear I am, use me Lord".