

{un}faithful – Gideon  
The book of Judges 6-8

Over the last couple of weeks we have been looking at the book of Judges. We have called the series {un}faithful as there is this endless cycle of Israel's unfaithfulness and God's faithfulness. Matt last week described the cycle as Sin, slavery, shout, salvation.

As I said a couple of weeks ago, on its own the book is a bit of a nightmare, but we need to remember that the book of Judges is just one part of the bigger God story, the story of God on a mission to gather a community of worshippers from within a rebellious world.

There is this repetitive theme of, "everyone did what was right in their own eyes," and this cycle of faithfulness and unfaithfulness of the people of Israel

Two weeks ago we came across Ehud – who remembers what he did?

- Turned the people to God, stabbed Eglon the fat king of Moab, defeated his army and peace reigned for eighty years
- After Ehud died the Israelites stopped obeying God and God allowed the Canaanite King conquer Israel until Deborah the prophetess came on the scene. Matt spoke about her last week and told us about Jael who hits a mean tent peg. (moral of that story is never sleep in a strange woman's tent)
- We are told again that there was peace in Israel for about 40 years. By the way when they mention 40 years, it may not be exactly 40 years, the term in this context generally means a generation.
- And after 40 years the cycle continues and the Israelites start disobeying again and God gave his people over to a nomadic mob of people named the Midianites.

Over the course of seven years, the Midianites would routinely swarm in like locusts during harvest, and each year God's people would flee to caves in the hills to hide. The Midianite mob would devour all of their fields, slaughter their livestock, and leave Israel devastated - physically, emotionally, and materially. Now hungry, poor, tired, and living like cavemen, Israel again cries out to God and he sends a prophet to try and bring them into line. The basic problem is: you have forgotten God's grace and not listened to his voice.

While the prophet is challenging them, God is preparing to deliver them through a bloke called Gideon, whose name means “hacker of trees”. He wasn’t a leader, he wasn’t a Politian, he was just a normal “hacker of trees”.

With the story of Gideon, we get a picture of how God calls an ordinary man onto a new mission. And even though an angel from the Lord speaks directly to him, Gideon is very reluctant to follow. God’s commands are not confusing, they are very clear but, instead of listening to God’s voice, he spends most of his time interrupting God, debating, and complaining. Gideon talks about all the ways that God has let him down, why God has chosen the wrong guy, and basically how God’s plan won’t work. Let’s read from Judges 6.11...

### **The call to mission V. 11-16**

#### **Judges 6:11-16**

<sup>11</sup>Then the angel of the LORD came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup>The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, “Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!”

<sup>13</sup>“Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The LORD brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.”

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”

<sup>15</sup>“But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!”

<sup>16</sup>The LORD said to him, “I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.”

This is Gideon receiving a pretty direct call from God, but he is completely unaware. Gideon is hiding in a winepress, built into the ground, just doing his normal stuff, going through the daily grind of beating out wheat. Usually, this would be done on a threshing floor out in the open where the wind could blow

away the chaff. But this is his attempt at hiding his food from the Midianite (locust) people who routinely come and steal everything. The angel of the Lord shows up. The first thing he says to this simple farmer hiding in a winepress is: "Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!"

"Mighty hero"? Unimpressed, Gideon doesn't appear to recognize the heavenly messenger. This angel didn't arrive in some beaming flash of light but appears to look like a man—or perhaps he is too enthralled in thrashing wheat. His negative response reveals Gideon's true nature, which is filled with scepticism and despair over the current situation and the situation of his people. He is over being flattered.

He responds, "Yeah right!...if the LORD is "WITH US", then why has all of this happened to US?" He's referring to the seven years of devastation at the hands of the Midianite mob. And here he is stuck in a winepress beating wheat so he can feed his family—hardly a mighty hero - actually life stinks. Where has God been for the last 7 years? Where is this powerful God I heard about growing up? Where is this God who took us out of Egypt? If God is WITH US, why do we feel so abandoned?

It's hard to condemn Gideon's attitude, because I think we have all been there. He asks some honest, real, and raw questions. But his pity party has blinded him to the truth about the real problem—the real reason that God has been passively silent - that God let his people go only because they stop listening to him, only after they had already ran after other gods. God doesn't force himself upon us.

The Angel of the Lord does not feel the need to answer his questions or defend himself—God never does. He quiets Gideon's whining by speaking truth again. Much like a parent with a whining child—reasoning with them is not always the most fruitful option.

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

Gideon starts to listen, signalled in verse 15 by him calling him LORD instead of SIR (v13). But he hasn't heard any call from God, he is still hearing through self-centered ears. It is clear that he understands WHAT God is saying, what he is commanding. So he begins to make excuses as to why God's plan won't work:

I am nobody. I am ordinary, and ordinary people never do extraordinary things. I am from the weakest clan. I am weak, and you need someone strong to fight this enemy. I am the least in my family. I am less than everyone else, there are others much more qualified.

So when Gideon responds with, Who am I? The LORD says, ‘you are who I say you are, and I say you are a ‘mighty hero’. He tells him he has everything he needs to do His will. He tells him he does not need anymore time, strength, or knowledge to obey His commands. Gideon’s job is not to understand *how* God will work, but to simply do *what* work God says to do. Even if Gideon, does not feel ready, it doesn’t matter, God says he is.

Gideon argues, <sup>15</sup>“But Lord, how can *I* rescue Israel?. And the Lord agrees by responding with one of the most powerful statements in Scripture: “I will be with you.”

It’s not about Gideon...or you. It’s not about what you don’t have, what you can’t do, what you must change...it’s about listening to God, and believing that following Jesus onto a “risky” mission is infinitely safer and more satisfying than sitting fearfully comfortable in a winepress thrashing wheat without him.

### **The confirmation V. 17-24**

But a word from an angel, who looks like a man, just isn’t quite enough—‘give me a sign’, Gideon says, ‘prove it’s you Lord’. Let’s read on

#### **Judges 6:17-24**

<sup>17</sup>Gideon replied, “If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the LORD speaking to me. <sup>18</sup>Don’t go away until I come back and bring my offering to you.”

He answered, “I will stay here until you return.”

<sup>19</sup>Gideon hurried home. He cooked a young goat, and with a basket of flour he baked some bread without yeast. Then, carrying the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, he brought them out and presented them to the angel, who was under the great tree.

<sup>20</sup>The angel of God said to him, “Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock, and pour the broth over it.” And Gideon did as he was told. <sup>21</sup>Then the angel of the LORD touched the meat and bread with the tip of the staff in his hand, and fire flamed up from

the rock and consumed all he had brought. And the angel of the LORD disappeared.

<sup>22</sup>When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he cried out, "Oh, Sovereign LORD, I'm doomed! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"

<sup>23</sup>"It is all right," the LORD replied. "Do not be afraid. You will not die." <sup>24</sup>And Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and named it Yahweh-Shalom (which means "the LORD is peace").

### **God's Sacrifice**

Gideon asks him to perform a sign for him, and entices GOD with a present. Basically, he wants God to do a magic trick, or make lighting flash, so he knows what he says is true—prove yourself to me God. We often ask the same... 'I know I have Bible verses, which are your words, but you know how those can be misunderstood'. God's Word is not enough. If we don't get the big miracles or the big emotional rush—I can't, I won't follow! I'll follow if I get a flash of lighting, a burning bush, a talking horse, or something else amazing. Prove this will work out for me God—there lies Gideon's problem, and here lies our problem.

Considering his poverty, Gideon brings a costly present. But God is not impressed.

- Gideon expected proof and God gave him peace.
- Gideon wanted his fortunes taken from the Midianites restored and Jesus restored his relationship.
- Gideon desired freedom from his oppression, and God gave him forgiveness of his sin.
- He gave him a fear for God AND a peace with God at the same time. Peace led him to start worshipping and stop whining.

### **The mission before the mission V.25-27**

Total peace, leads to pure worship, leads to bold mission. God has called Gideon on a mission, a mission to rescue his people, but the mission of God always begins in our heart, then overflows into our family, before we head off to fight bigger battles.

## Judges 6:25-27

<sup>25</sup>That night the LORD said to Gideon, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. <sup>26</sup>Then build an altar to the LORD your God here on this hilltop sanctuary, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."

<sup>27</sup>So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD had commanded. But he did it at night because he was afraid of the other members of his father's household and the people of the town.

For those who follow Jesus on mission, there is always a mission before the mission. Gideon's Father built the city altar on his property. Even as Israel is crying out for God, even as Gideon himself is complaining about God's inaction, there is an idol to Baal in his backyard.

### **Tear down an old altar**

Yahweh commands Gideon to tear down the old altar in his own home and build a new altar to Him. But Gideon is scared. Not only is he afraid of the men of the town, he is afraid of his family—something that often stops a lot of us from being obedient to God.

Even though Gideon has just built an altar and called it 'The Lord calms our fears' Gideon is still working on applying that principle into his life!!! It is tempting to look down on Gideon as someone who was not "bold enough" to obey in the daylight, we see the reality that the call of God does not necessarily remove every fear we might have. It is scary to start tearing down idols in your own home. But God's peace empowers us to not be controlled by those fears. In many ways, it empowers us through these fears—the fear of being disliked, misunderstood, hated, hurt, or worse. So, under the dark of night, he goes and he tears down the altar.

### **Build a new altar in its place**

But destruction of the idol is not complete faithfulness. Not only must we destroy that which leads us to worship false gods, we must worship the one true God. Gideon is commanded to build a new altar on top of the old one, and to sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering—using the gods they once worshipped as kindling for the fire. It's all very well to get rid of the bad/unhealthy stuff in

our life, but we also have to fill the space with things of God. And when we do that, things don't always go smoothly.

### **The changes pure worship brings V. 28-31**

#### **Judges 6:28-31**

<sup>28</sup>Early the next morning, as the people of the town began to stir, someone discovered that the altar of Baal had been broken down and that the Asherah pole beside it had been cut down. In their place a new altar had been built, and on it were the remains of the bull that had been sacrificed. <sup>29</sup>The people said to each other, "Who did this?" And after asking around and making a careful search, they learned that it was Gideon, the son of Joash.

<sup>30</sup>"Bring out your son," the men of the town demanded of Joash. "He must die for destroying the altar of Baal and for cutting down the Asherah pole."

<sup>31</sup>But Joash shouted to the mob that confronted him, "Why are you defending Baal? Will you argue his case? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If Baal truly is a god, let him defend himself and destroy the one who broke down his altar!"

Though Gideon acted as a priest to deal with their sins, God's own people complain about the fact that their precious idols have been destroyed. They're defending their sin. They are so upset that they want to kill Gideon.

When I read this I am thinking this is exactly the situation that we are in here in NZ. We used to be a nation who followed the ways of God, even those who didn't call themselves Christian. But as time has gone on we are a bit like Israelites - we have given up on God and turned to other things.

And just like what happen to Gideon, people get pretty annoyed when you start attacking their personal idols and bring to light those sinful things that are making them comfortable, secure, and satisfied. Possible reactions of people are enough for us to remain silent about our love for Jesus. Faith in the living God is not meant to remain in the dark, not with our families, not with our friends, not with our neighbours. Sure we hope and pray that despite us remaining silent people will see Jesus in our lives. And yes that is true, but

there are times when we need to take action, to do, or say something and we need the wisdom of God to discern that.

Luke 12:8-9 8 "I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God.

We need a few more Gideons today, because the truth is there are a lot of lukewarm, mediocre, part-time, obey-when-it's-convenient people who think they are faithful Christians—while they refuse to listen to anything he says. Have you ever read about Jesus' opinion of the lukewarm? Read Rev 3:15ff We may argue 'Well if God showed me a sign, I'd do what he says.' Well that's not what Jesus experienced nor what history tells us.

John 10:25-27

<sup>25</sup> Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. <sup>26</sup> But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

### **Conclusion:**

What's our take away in this story?

- **God uses normal, cynical, doubting, complaining people.**  
That's encouraging!
- **Don't sit in your winepress, hiding from the world, going through the daily grind, complaining about everything that God has not done for you.**
- **If you don't listen out for God, who is talking to you, you can't see beyond your nose.**  
You tend to focus on what you can't have, what you can't do, or what you can't change.

The irresistible voice of God changed this man from Gideon-the tree hacker to Gideon - the mighty hero. He did not suddenly figure it all out and get it all right instantly. In fact if you read the rest of the story of Gideon, he was a slow learner and continued to doubt and test God. I find that encouraging because despite that God still continued to use him.

So it is not about what you don't have, what you can't do, what you've must change...it's simply about listening to God, and believing that walking with God into a "risky" mission with Him is infinitely safer and more satisfying than sitting fearfully and comfortably in a winepress thrashing wheat without him.