



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Judges 6:11-40

“Gideon and the Call of God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well we are turning to Judges chapter 6 for a series of three studies on Gideon. So will you take your Bibles and turn with me to Judges chapter 6. And I want to read a rather lengthy portion from the 6th chapter of the Book of Judges.

Let me just for a moment recount the situation briefly. The children of Israel have gone into the land. But unfortunately, as is often the case, they have not taken advantage of the presence and power of God with them. They have gained an incomplete mastery of the land. And consequently, as a result of that, there has been military leagues with those who were supposed to have been driven out, and as a result of the military leagues, there developed intermarriage and ultimately idolatry and apostasy and captivity. And the Book of Judges is the treatment of a series of failures on the part of the nation and also a series of deliverances by the Lord in wonderful grace through the judges. And Gideon is one of the judges. And the children of Israel have been under the thumb of the Midianites for seven years as the story of Gideon begins. And so will you turn to the 11th verse of Judges chapter 6 and listen as we read the story of God's call of Gideon to the ministry of deliverance.

“Then the angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged unto Joash the Abiezrite: as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, in order to save it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.” Then Gideon said to him, “Oh my Lord, if the LORD is with us, why then 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 hand of the Midian.” And the LORD looked at him, and said, “Go in this your strength, and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have not I sent you?” And he said to him, “Oh Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house.” (That word may mean the least in the sense of the least significant. But most of the commentators, I believe, think of it as being the youngest in my father's house). But the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.” So Gideon said to Him, “If now I have found favor in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who speakest with me.” (The emphasis in that text rests on that word thou. That it is thou who speakest with me). “Please do not (Did I say Greek text? The Hebrew text), “Please do not depart from here, until I come back to Thee, and bring out my offering and lay it before Thee.” And He said, “I will remain until you return.” Then Gideon went in and prepared a kid 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. And 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. 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.” (It has become clear to Gideon at

this point that this being that was before him was a divine being. And he knew the Old Testament Scriptures which said, “There shall no one see My face, and live.” And since he thought that he had now seen God therefore that was an omen that he was shortly to die). And the LORD said to him, “Peace be to you, do not fear; you shall not die.” 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. Now the same night it came about that 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 (the authorized version has grothe) the Asherah that is beside it. (Asherah is a reference to a female goddess. And usually they worshiped it in the form of a wooden image. So this would be a wooden image of a female goddess. Of course, it was idolatry). 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.” Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and it came about because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, that he did it by night. 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. And they said one to another, “Who did this thing?” And when they searched about and inquired, they said, “Gideon the 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.” 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.” (It’s very interesting to see that Gideon’s father is encouraged to take a stand by the faith of Gideon). Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, “Let Baal contend against him,” because he had torn down his

altar. (That’s the new name that Gideon has, Jerubbaal. “Let Baal contend against him”). 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. So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. And 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. Then Gideon said to the Lord, “If Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast 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 Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken.” 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. Then Gideon said to God, “Do not let Thine 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.” And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.”

May God bless this reading of his word.

For the next two or three Sunday’s we are going to be studying the life of Gideon. And our subject for this morning is “Gideon: The Making of a General by God.” Under an oak in Ophrah, on a hidden wine press a furtive eyed Hebrew deep in the swamp of doubt beats out a few lean ears of wheat. The reason that Gideon is so anxious to be unobserved in the work that he is doing is because of the Midianites. The Midianites for seven years have had Israel under their thumbs. They have come down at the time of the harvest and have stolen all of the harvest. They have left no sustenance there. No sheep, no ox, nor even donkeys. The only things the Israelites had were a few that they

managed to hide from these invaders who have come down from the east in order to harass the children of Israel.

“Palestine,” Dean Stanley once wrote, “is an island in the midst of pirates. The Bedouin tribes were the corsairs of the wilderness; and the plains which run into the mountains are the creeks into which they naturally penetrate.” The Israelites in the days of Gideon would surely have understood that because they had been plagued by them now for seven years. Little did Gideon realize that the threshing of the few grains of wheat was an emblem of the work to which God was calling him. Because that was exactly what he was going to call him to do except on a higher plain. He’s not going to thresh a few ears of grain in order for a few little pieces of wheat. But he’s going to thresh the Midianites in order that the children of Israel might be delivered from them.

How old a story and yet how contemporary it is because the spiritual problem of doubt and the spiritual problems of apostasy and intermarriage and the military leagues with the enemies are still with us, though under slightly different forms. I know that we are inclined to say with our mouths, “Our God is the living God.” But we often indicate by the things that we say that we really don’t believe that. We say, for example, “Wouldn’t it have been wonderful to have lived in the days of John Calvin and Martin Luther? Then the people would know that our God is truly a living God.” Then you read the writings of the reformers and you will find them saying, “It would have been great to have lived in the days of the apostles because in the days of the apostles God really worked mightily. And then people would have known that our God is a living God.” I’m sure that in the days of the apostles the saints then also said, “Wouldn’t it have been great to have lived in the days of Elijah and the prophets of the Old Testament because God was really active then?” And I know that the prophets said these things because you read the prophets and they will say, “Don’t you remember what God did for us when he brought us out of the land of Egypt, the mighty miracles that he performed through Moses?” It’s characteristic of human nature to think that things were much greater in years

past than now. And we are inclined to think that our God was a living God then. But there is some question about it now.

I always think of the little girl that was listening to a story from the Bible. And when the story came to an end she said to her parents, “Wasn’t God much more exciting then?” Well, God was not more exciting in those days. He’s just as exciting today as he was then. And the part of the ministry of the word of God through the Holy Spirit is to bring us to the place where we realize that the God of the word of God is just as exciting today as he was then.

The lesson of the Book of Judges is failure though compromise. Israel failed to make a complete conquering of the land as God had told her to do. So then she made military leagues with the unbelievers thinking that thereby she would be helped. That’s always a mistake. The military leagues led to intermarriage and deeper entanglement with the forces of opposition to the Lord God. And the intermarriage led to idolatry. And the idolatry led to apostasy. And apostasy led to divine discipline in captivity. And like a cycle, this went on over a lengthy period of time. And God, after the children of Israel were reduced in their captivity to the place where they cried out to him, then he would answer and give them deliverance through a judge.

The children of Israel had been under the hands of the Midianites for seven years and finally they cried to the Lord we read in the 6th verse of Judges chapter 6. And so God sent them a prophet. I would imagine that was the last thing that they really wanted, a preacher. They wanted deliverance from the Midianites, but God sent them a prophet. And his word to them was simply, “Don’t you remember that the God whom we worship is the God who brought you up out of Egypt? He brought you out from the house of slavery. He delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians. And he dispossessed the people in the land before you. And he told you not to fear the Amorites. He told you to take the land, but you have not obeyed him.” That was the problem.

Well, the story of Gideon begins as a kind of special application of those great principles. And so Gideon's call is referred to in verse 11. That's the situation in which Gideon is and in which the message comes to him that he's going to deliver the children of Israel from the hands of the Midianites. I think the interesting thing that strikes you immediately is that God prepared Gideon by seven years of calamity. Often the things that happen to us are means by which God puts iron in our soul. And that was what was happening to Gideon. For seven years he had to live under the Midianites in order that he might become the kind of man that God wanted him to become.

James Garfield was one of our past presidents and he was also president of Hiram College in Ohio before he became president. There is a story about him. One day a father of a prospective student came to him to talk to him about his son enrolling in the college and getting a degree. He was making an investigation of the sort of curriculum that his son might expect to have when he registered. Well, Mr. Garfield enumerated all of the requirements, the required courses and the electives. And finally the father said, “Mr. President, that's far too complicated. That's going to take a lot more time than is necessary. Can't you reduce the program somehow to make it easier and make it go faster?” And he said, “Yes, I could do that.”

But you know when God wants to make an oak tree, it takes a hundred years. But it takes only three months to make a squash. [Laughter] Well, which do you want to be, an oak tree or a squash? [Laughter] In the work of the Lord, it's very much like that, you know. It is the preparation often that God puts us through that makes us what he wants us to become. And if he wants us to become something that is really worthwhile he may pass us through some experiences that are not so nice. The seven years of calamity were seven long years of calamity for Gideon, but God prepared him for a great work of deliverance thereby. What kind of man was Gideon? Well, I notice first of all that he was a spiritual man.

Now, when I say spiritual I mean simply he was interested in spiritual things. Not that he was in the kind of relationship to the Lord that he should have been at that point necessarily. You know a spiritual man is a man who is interested in spiritual things. And in that sense I'm using the term. He was a spiritual man. He was like Jacob. Jacob had a lot of refining to do, but Jacob was on an infinitely higher plain than Esau. Esau was a man of the flesh. Jacob was a man of the spirit. But Esau, at one point, was probably the more attractive of the two, the more likable of the two, surely. But there burned within the heart of Jacob a faith in the living God in the midst of all of the unsanctity of his thoughts and life he had that basic fundamental trust in God. And there was something with which the Lord would work.

Gideon was a spiritual man. His heart beat with the Lord's calls. He blamed the Lord for what was happening. He said, "Where has the Lord been all of this time?" But he did believe that he was there. So he was a spiritual man. Listen to what he says, for example, in verse 13. "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then 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?'" He had been thinking about these things. His heart had been dwelling upon them. And I learned first of all from this I think that it is the man whose heart burns with spiritual truths who may be one through whom the Lord is able to work.

Waiting in a steamship office to be interviewed for the job of wireless operator many years ago, a group of applicants filled the room with conversation and noise. After they had been there for sometime there walked in a young man. He sat down with them, sat very erect, he was very quiet. Messages were coming out over the intercom and he heard some dots and dashes. And suddenly this young man, who had come in after the others, sat up erect, then stood up and walked immediately into the room. And when he came out he came out with a smile on his face and the others said, "How did you get in there? You were after us." He said, "Didn't you hear the message? The message that



came out over the intercom in code was, “I want a man who is alert on my ships. The first man in, I will put him on one of my ships.” Then he said, “I got a job.”

Well, that’s the kind of man that the Lord is interested in. He is interested in the man who is interested in spiritual things, a man whose heart does burn with the interests of the Lord. And Gideon was a humble man and a spiritual man. It was evident that he was a humble man because listen to what he says in verse 15. “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.” As far as he was concerned, his thoughts were, “I do not have the necessary capabilities to perform the work of deliverance.” He had learned the truth the apostle learned, that our sufficiency is not of ourselves, but it is of the Lord.

And finally, he was a weak man. He was a man who was in the swamp of doubt. I love that expression because that so expresses how you feel when you’re in the swamp of doubt. When you’re in doubt, you’re in a swamp. And he was in the swamp of doubt. And listen to the favorite words of Gideon. Do you notice what his favorite words are? “O.” “If.” “Why?” “Wherefore?” “O.” “Where with?” You wouldn’t think this is a great man of faith whose name would be in the Westminster Abbey of Faith and Hebrews chapter 11, would you? But his name is there. He was a man of faith, but he was a weak man. His heroism later was not the product of his natural makeup. I know that the angel said, “The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.” That means, “O man of strength.”

Now Gideon’s name means hewer. So he may have been a hewer of wood or a hewer of rocks. And he may have been strong man physically, but the angel speaks of what God is going to make Gideon as a result of his grace, because naturally he was a weak man. He was a spineless kind of man, but who finally ultimately - really a kind of spiritual jellyfish - but he finally finds himself in the ranks of the faithful of the New Testament because of the power of God in his life.

Like those spies who went into the land. Someone has pointed out, some Bible teacher, that the spies went in and there were five g’s in the land. There were the grapes.

There were the great cities. There were the giants. And the people were great and mumble like grasshoppers, these mighty men in the land. But then there is God. And when the ten came out and gave their report to the children of Israel, they looked at those grapes. But they looked at them in the light of the giants and the great cities and the numerous people and the strong armies. And so they put all of these things between themselves and the promise of God. But two, Caleb and Joshua, came out and they put God before all of these difficulties. And they said, “Let’s go in. We’re able to take them all.” But the children of Israel refused.

So Gideon is a man who is now caught in the paralysis of unbelief. Listen to the message that came to him from the angel. This suddenly winsome stranger that is sitting in the dust as the chaff is being blown from those few grains of wheat that Gideon is beating out with a stick in order to escape the attention of the Midianites. He says in verse 12, “The LORD is with you.” Verse 16, “Surely I will be with you,” the Lord said. What a beautiful promise that is. That’s the promise we have incidently. “Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the age.” Gideon didn’t have any better promise than I have.

And then he was given a message to go. Verse 14, “And the LORD looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian.” I like that expression, “The LORD looked at him.” Napoleon soldiers used to say, “When Napoleon takes our hands and looks at us, we feel like conquerors.” And so the Lord looked at Gideon. And I’m sure that when he looked at Gideon there came over Gideon the strange sense of the presence of God and perhaps some indication of what God was going to do through him. Gideon, we would say, was chicken. But that look from the Lord makes a great difference. And finally, he’s given a promise that he will smite the Midianites in the 16th verse.

Now Gideon was a man who feared self deception evidently. Because he says in verse 17 after he has had this wonderful commission, “If now I have found favor in Thy

sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who speakest with me.” Isn't it wonderful that God deals patiently with us in our doubt? And here is a striking miracle that he will perform in order to encourage Gideon who is in doubt. And the way that he does it is most remarkable because it is not only remarkable as a miracle, not only remarkable as the presence of God in Gideon's presence, but it's remarkable also as indicating the source of the strength of every Christian in the work of God. He said, “Show me a sign.” And then he said, “Don't depart until I come back.” And he rushed off. I wonder if he was thinking about Abraham and Abraham's experience many hundreds of years before. But he rushed off after getting the promise from the angel that he would remain.

“And he prepared a kid and some unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and broth in a pot, and brought them to the angel. And the angel said, 'Pour out the broth and put the unleavened bread and put the meat over on the rock.' And Gideon did this. And then the angel reached out with his staff and he touched the rock and suddenly there was a flame that came up and consumed the meat and consumed the bread. And the angel vanished from sight.”

Well, there's a remarkable thing about this. I want you to turn back and notice the wording of this passage. Will you look at verse 11? We read, “Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah.” Verse 12, “And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.’” Verse 13, “Then Gideon said to him, 'O my lord, if the LORD is with us.’” Well, look at verse 14. “And the LORD looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength.” And verse 15, “And He said to Him, “O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel?” Verse 16, “But the LORD said to him.” And then finally in verse 20 we read, “And the angel of God said to him.” Isn't that remarkable? We have the angel of the Lord, the angel of the Lord. Then suddenly the angel of the Lord becomes the Lord. And then we have the angel of God again.

What is this? Why this is a theophany. This is an appearance of God. This was the appearance of one of the persons of the trinity before the time of the incarnation.

Now we have many of these in the Old Testament. We have theophanies in the life of Abraham. We have theophanies in the life of Jacob. We have theophanies in the life of Moses. We have theophanies in the life of Daniel. Down through the Old Testament at particular points in Israel’s history, God came and appeared to Israel in the form of the angel of Jehovah. Most of the students of the Bible believe that this was a pre-incarnate appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why theophanies? Why theophanies were given to prepare Israel for the coming of the incarnate Son of God. So they would not be so startled with the idea that the second person of the trinity should come and tabernacle in our midst. Remembering the appearances of the angel of Jehovah, they would have been prepared ideally for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I want to make a point here which I think is extremely important. I want you to notice that this sign by which Gideon is confirmed is a sign that convinces Gideon that God and he had come to have personal relationship with one another. For after this mighty miracle, we read in verse 22 that “Gideon, when he 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.’” Why should there be any “alas” about that? He might have shouted, “Praise the Lord or Hallelujah! I’ve seen an angel.” But for him it was “Alas, O Lord God! I’ve seen the angel of the Lord face to face. And the LORD says, ‘Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.’”

Why is there any question about dying? Well, because Gideon, as well as other Israelites knew the Old Testament more than once had said, “You shall not look upon my face and live.” And Gideon had come to realize that this person who had been with him was the divine person. It was Yahweh of the Old Testament, the covenant keeping God. And now knowing that he had seen him, he feared that he would soon die.

Now that's important for this reason. Not simply that there is such a thing as a theophany. But I think the important thing about it is that before Gideon can be the kind of leader that God wants for Israel he must have personal relationship with God himself. And I do believe that has a very definite application to every one of us who are Christians. We can never expect to be fruitful in the Lord's work if we do not have a personal relationship to him.

Now, of course, we're inclined to think about people who preach. And it is certainly true that the man who preaches the word of God who has never had any personal relationship with the Lord, who has never really gotten down upon his face and perhaps over a lengthy period of time sought to come to a relationship with God that is fundamental like this. It's probably that that man will never preach in the power of the Holy Spirit. You can always tell the difference with a man who has had firsthand relationship with the Lord and one who hasn't. There are those who speak out of the experience of the presence of God in their lives and then there are those who speak as if it came to them secondhand.

Now that is important for preachers. And for you in the audience who preach or who teach, you'll never be the fruitful kind of servant that God would have you to be if you've not really had this firsthand experience with him. But it pertains to our Christian life too. We will never be the kind of Christian in our business, in our home, in our school, if we have not had personal relationship with the Lord.

Now I want to stress the fact that this came to Gideon by the grace of God. It was the angel who appeared to Gideon. It was God who moved out. The initiative comes with God. But Gideon was responsible. And we're responsible. We're responsible to know the Lord, to seek the Lord. And I urge you as Christian men and women to set aside some time and go into your bedroom or wherever your closet may be, to use the biblical term, and seek the face of God. And if you don't get any answer for some time, continue to seek him until the experience of the presence of God grips you and your life

will be different once the touch of God has come upon it. That’s the important thing. That’s the start of the work of God in Gideon, the relationship with the Lord that makes everything different thereafter.

Well, now there’s another lesson Gideon has to learn and it’s very important too. To put it very simply, Baal must go before Midian can go. And so the word comes to Gideon. “Gideon, there are a couple of things you’ve got to do. First of all, you’ve got to tear down the altar of Baal. I will not deliver Israel as long as they are in idolatry. And then I want you to take the Asherah and I want you to use that wooden goddess in order to have a fire and a sacrifice.” The Lord is certainly not considerate for the feelings of the religious people who worship Baal. He says, “I want you to take their god, their goddess, and I want you to use it for kindling for the sacrifice to me.” And Gideon is still a little afraid of what people will think, so he won’t do it in the daytime, he’ll do it at night. Can you imagine that?

Now here is a man who’s seen the angel of Jehovah. He’s heard the Lord say to him, “I’m going to deliver you and I want you to do this.” And still, he does it not in the daytime, but by night. Oh, how terrible it is to be gripped by doubt. But God is very patient with doubters. Believers, he was a believer, but you know God is so patient with these doubters. There’re many of us who are doubters. And if we’re not doubters now, we probably shall be at some time. We honor doubt so much that we named an apostle Doubting Thomas. He was a great apostle when he said, “My Lord and My God,” he rose to a faith that was higher than any expressed by any of the apostles. But nevertheless, we call him Doubting Thomas.

Was it Henry Martyn who said he feared the sneers and the scorning of his friends more than he feared the brick bats of his enemies? You can be in school and one of your schoolmates will say something about your own Christian faith that will make you run, turn tail and run. Or in business, if they should say a few things about the fanaticism of

your faith, you're so fearful you don't want them to really know. All of us have had those fears.

Well, Gideon does it. The altar of Baal incidently stands for what we have today. I'm sure that in Gideon's day it was something like this. “We've been seven years under the hands of the Midianites. Yaweh is not doing us any good. Give us the gods of Baal. Give us the gods of the Midianites. Give us modern gods. These old gods are not helping us at all.” And today that's what the Christian church is afflicted with. We have all kinds of gods. We have the gods of Bultmann, the gods of Moltmann. We have existentialist gods. We have the gods of process theology, the gods of the theology of hope, and all of the other types of secular beings that the Christian church unfortunately has sought to make out to be leaders of us who are the followers of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Well, I think this tells us exactly what God thinks about bishops Pike and Robinson and the rest and Bultmann and Moltmann and all of the other modern theologians. He says, “Tear down the altar of the Baalim, take the wooden goddess and burn it and make a sacrifice to me.”

Now when the worshipers of Baal rose early in the morning someone has said, “The worshipers of Baal never neglect their morning devotions.” [Laughter] So they arose to do their little work of devoting. And when they went out to the Asherah they discovered that instead of the goddess there was a fire and the remains of a sacrifice to Jehovah. They were very upset. They went back to Joash because the word was out that Gideon had done it, so they went back to Gideon's father and they said, “Put him to death,” because of what he's done. But the faith of Gideon has now strengthened Joash. And so Joash who had been a wreck follow of them stands up and says, “Are you going to contend for Baal? Baal is God. Or will you deliver Baal?” He says, “Whoever will plead for Baal let him be put to death this morning. Put you to death, not Gideon. If Baal's a God, let him contend for himself,” very good reasoning.

It reminds me on John Knox who one time he was a very vigorous man. Mr. Knox didn't mind doing anything if he thought it was right. He didn't mind even though people might object. And one day he was on one of his ships and he had a little model of the Virgin Mary and it was wood and he tossed it out into the sea and he said, "Let her ladyship now save herself. She's light enough. Let her learn to swim." That was his way of saying, "We will not worship the Virgin Mary. We will worship the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There is a story which I've always liked of a young man who went to a Christian leader. J. Oswald Sanders, I think, told this story. He said that there was a problem in his life and he had heard a message on Acts chapter 10, I think it's verse 14 where when Peter was told to rise and eat these unclean animals he said, "Not so, Lord." And the Bible teacher had pointed out you cannot take "not so" and "Lord" and put them together. You can say, "Not so." But you cannot say "Lord" when he's given you a command. Or you can say "Lord." But if you say "Lord" you cannot say "not so" if he's given you a command. So this young man came, Mr. Sanders, and he had a problem. It was a sin in his life. And he said, "I pointed it out to him that you cannot have sin and have the Lord at the same time. You cannot say 'not so, Lord.'" And he said, "So I just wrote out on a piece of paper "not so" and "the Lord." And I handed it to the young man and I said, "Take it and pray about it and in the morning come back and let me see which one you've crossed out." And the next morning he was kind of interested. And the young man came and he put the piece of paper on his desk and he looked down and "not so" was crossed out. And it was "Lord." But he had added "and Master, Jesus Christ."

So will you plead for Baal? Well, now we read in verse 33, I'll just have to hurriedly go through these last verses. I suggest you read the lesson for a little fuller treatment. Not only must Baal go before Midian can go, there can be no real effective victory for Israel until God the Holy Spirit works through this chosen deliverer. And so we read, "Then."



Isn't it interesting in the Bible. You know the Bible, every word of the Bible is inspired by God and worthy of the most minute study. It just happened – this is the way a man reading it would say – it just happened that at the time God is working with Gideon and preparing him for the work of deliverance, it just happened that the Midianites and the Amalekites over in the east were saying, “I think we better go back to the land of Palestine and get some more animals and some wheat.” It just happened. Well, there're going to get quite a different reception this time. “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 (Where many of the battles of Israel had been fought. And we read in verse 34), So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon.” I love the way that's put in the Hebrew text. It's the Spirit of the LORD clothed himself with Gideon. So you can see the spirit of the Lord, it's actually the figure of speech of a person putting on a garment. So it's like the spirit of the Lord has put on a cloak and the cloak is Gideon. And the Midianites are going to discover that they're not fighting Gideon, they're really fighting God. And the victory, therefore, is certain.

Well, Gideon still needs a little convincing. And so this strange fantastic request, evidently from doubt of the promise's reality, not from the power of God. So he asks that there might be dew on the fleece only. And he gets that. Well then he says, “Now, I want one more thing. Don't be angry with me Lord. I would like the dew on all the ground round about.” Oh, the ingenuity of unbelief and doubt. A beautiful test he's thought of. “Put the dew on the fleece only, then put the dew everywhere else, but have the fleece dry.” And it's so.

Well, you can see that Gideon is a man who is full of doubt, but he's a man who's had an experience with God. And that experience with God is the transforming experience. I have no doubt that the conquering of doubt by the vision of the presence of God and the casting away of the weights and the sin that doth so easily beset us is the necessary preparation for looking off unto the Lord Jesus and doing exploits for him.

May I ask you as I close to consider your own personal life as Christians before the Lord? It's probably – many of us ought to pass a reform bill at home. Many of us need to tear down a few of the altars of the Baalim that we have erected by compromise with the world. We need to build a new altar and then take a look within at some of the dark chambers of our own Christian lives, some of the secret sins that really are gripping us and holding us and preventing us from accomplishing the things that God would love to accomplish for us, those hidden loves, love of pleasure, love of other things that stand between us and a fruitful life with God.

Above all, how important it is that we each know what it is to have a personal experience with the Lord. Do you have a little place where you get off by yourself, get down upon your knees with an open Bible, read the word of God asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten the pages and then pray to him and ask him to transform your life to deliver you from the secret loves and the secret sins and the failings and the failures and the doubts and enable you to be what God would have you to be? And you who want to preach and teach do you have that little place? Will you really seek his face? You'll never be the kinds of men and women that God would want us to be if we do not have it. May the Lord work in our lives to that end. Today's the best day to begin.

And if there is someone here who has never believed in the Lord Jesus, I'm not speaking to you. Your first responsibility is to seek Christ as the one who has died for sinners upon the cross. To see him as the one who delivers from the penalty of sin. And to bow at the cross acknowledging your sin by the help of the Holy Spirit, acknowledging the sufficiency of the blood that was shed for forgiveness and trusting in him, fleeing to him, leaving any trust in good works, the church, culture, education, whatever it may be that your trust has been in and looking off unto him and trusting in him and receiving eternal life from him. Then you come into the family of God. Then God, the Holy Spirit, begins to work in sanctifying grace having brought you in saving grace to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. May God work in your heart.

We're not living in the days of the Midianites, but we're living in days that are just as significant. We're living in days in which the people of God are really under the thumb of Satan and under the thumb of the world, under the thumb of the pleasures of the world, the patterns of the world, the style of the world. And we're not accomplishing what God would have us to accomplish because of our own captivities. May God deliver us. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for these lessons that have come to us from the life of one of the great men of faith of the Old Testament. A man great, not because of natural abilities, but great because of the working of the Holy Spirit. We praise Thee. We pray, oh God, that Thou wilt give us deep desires to know Thee. And enable us, Lord, to be fruitful in the age in which we are living. Deliver us from fear. Deliver us from doubt. May grace, mercy and peace go with us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.