

# Keynotes from Brian Rawlings am Sermon on 1/08/2021

Title: "Gideon the insecure"

Text: Judges 6 v 1-24

## Scripture references from the ESV

**Judges 6:1-24** *The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. <sup>2</sup> And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. <sup>3</sup> For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. <sup>4</sup> They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. <sup>5</sup> For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number—both they and their camels could not be counted—so that they laid waste the land as they came in. <sup>6</sup> And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD. <sup>7</sup> When the people of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of the Midianites, <sup>8</sup> the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery. <sup>9</sup> And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. <sup>10</sup> And I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice. <sup>11</sup> Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup> And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." <sup>13</sup> And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." <sup>14</sup> And the LORD<sup>[a]</sup> turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" <sup>15</sup> And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." <sup>16</sup> And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "If now I have found favour in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. <sup>18</sup> Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return."*

*<sup>19</sup> So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah<sup>[b]</sup> of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. <sup>20</sup> And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so. <sup>21</sup> Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. <sup>22</sup> Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." <sup>23</sup> But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." <sup>24</sup> Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.*

If we are honest, we have to admit that we often make the same mistakes over and over again rather than learning from them. Certainly, the people of Israel did not learn from their mistakes. Their history, as we see from the Old Testament, was a continual cycle of sin, servitude, sorrow and then pleading to God to save them, followed by God's gracious deliverance.

The book of Judges covers a time of national apostasy and moral pollution which lasted over 325 years. During this period, God kept his remnant in Israel, and the darkness was lit from time to time by the emergence of a judge, who, to a greater or lesser extent, led the people back to God. They are a good illustration of the kind of ordinary people that God uses in times of crisis. Judges is also a book about sin and its consequences.

- As in our own time, 'everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (**Judges 17:6** see p4). People think there will be no consequences but in fact the consequences are a matter of life and death. **Romans 6:23** (see p4).

Israel's unfaithfulness and its consequences are described in **Judges 2** (see p4). When they cried out to God, he would raise up a Judge to deliver them, in faithfulness to his promises and out of his loving kindness. For a time, there would be peace but then came complacency, disobedience, and worship of other gods and the cycle would start again.

- We need to ask ourselves whether we obey the commandment of putting God first, or do we too worship other gods by putting them before the Lord – gods such as our family, career, finance, home, TV and so on.

God used a variety of ordinary people to deliver his people and lead them into freedom and true worship. When we look at different Bible characters, we should be able to see ourselves – our victories and defeats, our strengths and weakness, our willingness or otherwise to obey him. God uses those who trust him and listen to his voice to accomplish his purposes – he is not looking for those who are brilliant and successful in human terms.

Gideon was one such flawed, reluctant hero. He was very insecure and did not consider himself worthy of God's call. He was frightened and nervous, and in despair over Israel's situation, but God called him and used him despite his doubts and insecurities, as he will use us despite our faults, if we are willing and obedient.

### 1. Gideon's call (v14)

God sent an angel to call Gideon into service, though it took Gideon a while to recognise him as such (**v 11,12,20,21 and finally v22**). The angel arrived without any special effects, just as an ordinary man. God often comes to us in mundane ways, when we least expect it, as he has done throughout history. **Hebrews 13:2** says 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares'. When the angel met him, Gideon was hiding and working secretly in the winepress (**v11**).

His greeting (**v12**) was surprising, given that Gideon was not a good example of a courageous person, nor did it appear that the Lord was with Israel. However, it demonstrates the point that when we feel that God has deserted us, it is actually the other way round. God is longing for us to recognise that there is sin in our lives, coming to repentance and asking for forgiveness so that we can be restored to Him. The call in **v14** was absolutely clear. God had selected Gideon for the task of saving the nation. Gideon's response (**v15**) was entirely understandable! He was convinced he was not the man for the job, almost certainly the youngest in a family that was pretty low down in the pecking order. God's reply, however, was 'but I will be with you' (**v16**).

- Today, we are surrounded by problems that are just as intimidating, when we look at the growing apathy and resistance towards God, and the moral and social decline in our nation.
- Like Gideon, we hope that God will find someone else to do his work. We consider we are far too insignificant and inferior to witness for him, not good at speaking, not clever enough, or don't know the Bible well enough. We think God should use someone else! The message of Gideon is that we are all called to serve Him and witness for him, but **God says to us, as he did to Gideon 'Go and I will be with you'**.

## 2. Gideon's doubts

Despite the presence of the angel, Gideon wasn't sure that the message was from God so he asked for a sign (v17). In the burning of the meal (vv20-23), God was giving Gideon an enduring memory to strengthen him in the difficult days ahead. Though Gideon was terrified by the thought that he had been arguing with an angel face to face, he was reassured by the Lord speaking to him. We know that God often spoke directly to people in the Bible, but somehow, we think that won't happen to us. **God can and does speak to us in direct ways, even today, so take care not to quench that inner voice of conviction.**

As you offer yourself to him, scripture promises that you will know the will of God. (Romans 12:1-2 see p4).

Despite the clear call, and the promise that God would be with him, Gideon still struggled with doubts. He remembered that he was a farmer, not a soldier and asked for another confirmation. (Judges 6:34-40 see p4). We might be tempted to criticise Gideon for his insecurities and for seeking a second sign, but God is not like us. He is a patient and compassionate Father, who knows we are fragile and weak. He accommodated Gideon's doubts, making him doubly assured. An important lesson here is that the fleece was not used to **determine** the will of God, but to

**confirm** it. Guidance comes in many ways and can be confirmed by the Word of God, by prayer, by circumstances or by the wisdom of others. Putting out a fleece will often give us the assurance we need.

### 3. The Tests

- a) **Tearing down the shrine to Baal (6:25-28** see p4). It was not possible for Gideon to lead a battle campaign while the shrine was still in place so it had to be removed. Gideon was afraid to do this and carried out the task under cover of darkness, so that no one would see and stop him. God had met with Gideon and flowing out of that, God gave him a task to do. The same is true for us. Our service for God will flow out of our fellowship with him.
- b) **The size of the army (7:1-8** see p4). Gideon amassed an army of 32,000 men. This was a small number compared to the size of the enemy's army (v12) but God reduced it down so that the Israelites could not think that they had won the victory, but would know it could only have come from God. Pride makes us want to say 'I did it' but **humility and complete dependence on God will delight in saying 'God did it'**.

- The faint-hearted were sent home. Would you have passed the fearlessness test – unafraid of the fight to come because you are relying on the strength of God?
- Those who weren't alert at all times (drinking by lapping from the river) were also sent home. Would you have passed the faithfulness test – always alert and keeping an eye out for the enemy?

We are exhorted to be on the alert (1 Peter 5:8, Ephesians 6:11 see p4), and in today's world we especially need this with the pervasive influences of social media, TV and newspapers. We do this by building a wall of faith with regular times of prayer and Bible study. Watching and praying go together, as we see from Jesus.

The battles we face are very different to Gideon's yet we will only win them as Gideon won his – with the knowledge, by faith, that **God is with us every step of the way**. We have that same promise.

**What lessons can we learn?**

- Gideon was certainly not a mighty man of valour when the angel first met with him. He seemed pessimistic, demanding and unbelieving. Insecurity lay behind his attitude, not unbelief, and this gave way to an absolute confidence in the sovereignty of God, as he learned how to simply and humbly accept God's help.

**If we are prepared to face up to the challenges God gives us, our weaknesses can become strengths.**

- God calls us and uses us just as we are when we trust in him and accept his promise that he will be with us. The vast majority of those we come into contact with are heading for death and a lost eternity without Christ. They may never know of him if they don't hear of God's love and Christ's sacrifice from us. Every one of us who claims to be a follower of Christ is a witness for him. You may feel totally inadequate, insignificant, without enough Bible knowledge or afraid of rejection, but God is not prepared to accept these excuses. We are all called to speak of our faith simply and humbly to those we meet as God gives us the opportunity. We need to pray on a daily basis for those encounters to happen.

**God uses ordinary people like Gideon or you and me to achieve his purposes.**

**May each of us respond to God's call to service and trust him to equip and provide us with the strength to overcome our uncertainties and insecurities. May God help us to have an attitude that transforms every insecure struggler into a 'mighty man or woman of valour', knowing that he promises to be with us in all we do as we trust him for everything by the power and strength of God's Holy Spirit and for his glory.**

**Judges 17:6** In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

**Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Judges 2: 11- 22** And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. <sup>12</sup> And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup> They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and

the Ashtaroath. <sup>14</sup> So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. <sup>15</sup> Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress. <sup>16</sup> Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup> Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so.

**Romans 12:1-2** I appeal to you therefore, brothers,<sup>[a]</sup> by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world,<sup>[c]</sup> 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.

**Judges 6:36-40** Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, <sup>37</sup> behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said." <sup>38</sup> And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. <sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew." <sup>40</sup> And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

**Judges 6:25-28** That night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it <sup>26</sup> and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order. Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah that you shall cut down." <sup>27</sup> So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night.<sup>28</sup> When the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built.

**Judges 7:1-8** Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.<sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' <sup>3</sup> Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.<sup>4</sup> And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take

them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." <sup>5</sup> So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." <sup>6</sup> And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home." <sup>8</sup> So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

**1 Peter 5:8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

**Ephesians 6:11** Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.