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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Judges 2:11-13, 16-19. “Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths...Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord’s commands. Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.”

This is one of the darkest episodes in the history of the nation of Israel. There was a pattern they followed for about twelve generations. There was the sin of spiritual adultery; the sin of idolatry, when they worshiped these other gods. Number two there was slavery. Once again these other nations and cities conquered them and enslaved them. The third step was always supplication. They always cried out to God, “Dear God, deliver us from these people who are conquering us!” Number four there was salvation. God would send a judge to lead them out of bondage and he would save them as the Bible says and they would have salvation. Those four steps became a vicious cycle. They would sin, become slaves, cry out to God and then were saved by a judge. When that judge died, they went right back into the terrible cycle. If you haven’t done so already or recently, read the book of Judges. There are great, colorful stories in the book of Judges.



There were twelve judges. There is the story of Ehud. He was the judge who slipped in to kill one king and because he was left handed, he hid his sword on the inside of his right thigh. Apparently, when they would search warriors coming in they would never search the inside of the right thigh. He went to the king, pulled out a sword and stuck it sword into the fat king’s belly and the king was so fat, Ehud couldn’t pull the sword out—the fat closed in over it. That’s how God used Ehud. There was even a female judge. You may pronounce it DEB-o-rah but in Hebrew it is pronounced De-BOR-ah. This is a great story of the judge, Deborah, and her friend Jael. When the evil general Sisera came into Jael’s tent and laid down and thought he was safe, the Israelite heroine, Jael, took a tent stake and a hammer in her hand and held the pointed end of that tent stake to the temple of Sisera and POW! I mean she nailed him good! She became a hero. There are many of these judges with these colorful stories.

Now the two we are going to talk about are Gideon and of course, Samson. Tonight as we talk about Gideon we are going to learn some principles from God’s interaction with Gideon. Eventually, we are going to learn five principles.

I. GOD OFTEN CALLS PEOPLE WHO FEEL UNQUALIFIED

Principle number one: God often calls people who feel unqualified. Look at Judges 6:11. This is when God gets Gideon’s attention.

Judges 6:11-13. “The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son, Gideon, was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, ‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.’ ‘But sir,’ Gideon replied. ‘if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.’”

So we learn Gideon was from this town called Ophrah. What we know about this town is that it was between a couple of mountains and there was never any wind blowing there so they called the name of this place “Ophrah Wind Free.” (I made that up.) Now I promise you when the angel said to Gideon “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior,” Gideon thought “Who else is he talking to?” because Gideon did not think of himself as a mighty warrior. You say, “Well, how do you know that?” Gideon didn’t know that was an angel. They didn’t have halos or wings. When God ever calls on you to do something, our very first reaction is usually, “Yeah, God. But why aren’t you doing something for me? Where are all these miracles I keep hearing about?” God is often bringing us to a point of total desperation. Sometimes God never will use us until we are desperate enough.

Judges 6:14. “The Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?’”

Here is Gideon threshing wheat. Did you notice it said “in a winepress?” Usually a threshing floor was an open area where literally the wind did blow. They would take wheat and usually have some kind of heavy material either like a log or a rock and they would have oxen that dragged it across sheaves of wheat. Then, they had threshing forks to throw it up into the air and the wind would blow the chaff away and the heavier wheat fell to the floor. But Gideon was not on a threshing floor; he was in a winepress—a small, confined area. He was afraid the Midianites would see him threshing wheat and would come steal it. So, he’s hiding somewhere where literally there is not a good place to thresh wheat and he’s doing it by hand so he’s afraid. The angel of the Lord says, “You’re a mighty warrior. Now, I want you to go and save Israel from the Midianites.” I can imagine Gideon is saying, “Who me?”

Judges 6:15. “‘But Lord,’ Gideon asked. ‘How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’”

Do you know what Gideon said? He said, “Of all the tribes I am in the weakest tribe and in all the clans in the weakest tribe I am in the weakest clan and in all the families in the weakest clan in the weakest tribe I’m in it not only that I’m the weakest individual in the weakest family in the weakest clan of the weakest tribe. In other words Gideon was saying, “Lord, you have the wrong

one! I’m the runt of the litter! You must have somebody else in mind. You can’t use me!”

Having read all of that it brings us to the first principle point—that God often calls people who feel unqualified. Usually when someone feels eminently qualified to serve God, they are not qualified to serve God. I can honestly tell you there have been people in my experience in the ministry who approached service to the Lord as if they were doing God a favor! “God sure is lucky because I’m going to be a deacon.” “God sure is lucky because I’m going to be a preacher.” “Boy, God sure is lucky because I’ve decided I’m going to use my singing talent for him.” God seldom uses those people. Instead the people God really calls usually answer first of all by saying, “Who me? I don’t feel at all qualified to serve you.”

It reminds me of the preacher I heard about who was intellectually superior to most of his classmates. He went all the way through seminary and never preached his first sermon. He had prepared for years and years to preach his first sermon and it was indeed a masterpiece. He had written it and rewritten it and re-researched it and written it again and edited it and rewritten it. Finally, when this preacher had the opportunity to preach this sermon, he literally strutted into the pulpit, laid that masterpiece down and proceeded to do God a favor and preach an excellent, eloquent sermon. But the further this preacher got into the sermon, the more he realized there was just something missing and the more he preached and the further he went into the sermon, the more he realized it just wasn’t hitting the mark. Before long he was just hoping to finish. When he finally finished, he walked off a bent and broken man. There was a wise old preacher that caught him at the door that said, “Sonny, let me tell you something. If you had walked into the pulpit the way you walked out of it, you would have walked out of it the way you walked into it.” In other words he said, “If you had been a broken, humble man when you walked in and just said, ‘God it’s not much, but what I have use me!’” Then you would have walked out proud of the fact God had used someone as unqualified as you.

Dwight L Moody was the Billy Graham of the 19th Century. He was an international celebrity. He was a shoe salesman in Chicago when a Sunday School teacher walked into the shoe shop and led Dwight L. Moody to Christ and he became a Christian. He figured he ought to apply to become a church member, because that’s what you do when you become a Christian. He applied for membership in this church where the Sunday School teacher taught. Did you know he was turned down for church membership? One of the men who interviewed him for church membership wrote these words. “I can truly say that I have seen few persons whose minds were spiritually darker than was Mr. Moody’s when he came into my Sunday School class. I think that the committee of the church had seldom met an applicant for membership who seemed more unlikely ever to become a Christian of clear and decided views of the gospel truth. Still it was obvious that he could never fill any place of public or extended usefulness.” That’s what they wrote about him when he applied for church membership. They said, “Hey you’re too dense you’re too dark and there is no change in your life.” A year later he applied again and they said, “You’re still as dark and dense as you ever were, but at least we think you are sincere so come on and you can join our church.” Dwight L. Moody who was an uneducated, unordained servant of God ended up shaking two continents for Jesus Christ. Today there is the Moody Press, the Moody Broadcasting Network broadcasting on airwaves around the world today and there is Moody Institute, which trains preachers and there is the Moody Bible Church. These are testimonies of a man who really wasn’t qualified—but God used him.

A lot of people who serve the Lord approach it with sort of an inferiority complex. “I just don’t think I’m good enough to do that!” I heard about a guy who went to see a psychiatrist and after two or three sessions the psychiatrist said, “Well, I have good news and bad news for you. The good news is you don’t have an inferiority complex! The bad news is you *are* inferior!” I really think that before you can be used by the Lord you kind of have to come to the point where you say, “I am nothing! I can’t do anything in and of myself but, Lord, if you want to use me as a vessel if you just want to fill me with your power I’ll be available. The ability Gideon showed is the greatest ability any of you can have and that is the ability of “availability.” Are you available? That’s the first point. That’s why I wanted to warn you we were not getting through all of them tonight.

2. GOD CONFIRMS HIS WILL IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

Here’s point number two. God confirms his will in a variety of ways. In other words when God is trying to show his will, he shows it in a lot of different ways. I want you to look down at Judges 6:36. Let me fill in the blanks for you. “The angel of the Lord said, ‘Gideon, God has called you to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites.’” Gideon keeps saying, “No, no, no not me! I can’t do it! I’m too weak!” Gideon took some meat and some bread and he put it down on a rock. He still did not know this was an angel that was speaking to him. Here is what the angel says in the verses we did not read. The angel took his staff and fire shot out of the end and consumed the meat and the bread. Then the angel disappeared. Gideon said, “Oh, my! That must have been an angel!” Then God speaks to Gideon again and says, “Okay, Gideon. I have demonstrated to you once my power. Now Gideon I am calling to you. Gather the Israelites together and lead them against the Midianites.” Gideon says, “God, are you sure that’s what you want me to do?”

In Judges 6:36, Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.” That is where the phrase, “laying out a fleece” comes from. I was in high school when somebody said to me, “You know I had a big decision to make and I didn’t know what the Lord wanted me to do so I laid out a fleece before the Lord and the Lord answered me.” I thought, “Laid out a fleece? Where does that come from?” It comes from right here. Gideon said, “God, if you’re really sure this is what you want me to do, tomorrow morning I want the fleece to be sopping wet and I want the ground around it to be dry.” Sure enough the next morning Gideon got up and picked up that wool fleece and it was so full of water, he wrung out a whole bowlful, and the ground around it was dry. Don’t you think you would have been convinced? Not Gideon. He said, “Wait a minute, Lord. That could have been just a coincidence, so tonight let’s do the opposite. If that’s really what you want me to do, I’m going to put this same fleece out and tomorrow morning I want it to be dry and all the ground to be wet. Sure enough, the next morning Gideon got up, picked up the fleece and it was fluffy dry and the ground all around was wet. Gideon said, “Okay, God, you have my attention!”

The point I’m trying to make is God reveals his will in a variety of ways. Is it okay for me and you to lay a fleece out before the Lord? Christians do it and I’ve done it but it is a dangerous

thing to do. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. Can you give me one other person in the Bible he spoke to out of a burning bush? You make a mistake if you go around to every bush and wait for it to catch on fire for God to speak to you. God spoke to Gideon through a fleece that got wet and then got dry. God blinded the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus and spoke to him in a voice. Are you waiting for God to do that? Who else did he do that to? When you study the word of God you find God spoke in a variety of ways and God has a variety of ways he shares his will.

Some of you have heard of John Wesley. John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist Church. John Wesley came over to the colonies as a missionary before he was even saved. He served in Savannah, Georgia. While in Savannah, at age 36, he met a beautiful, young girl named Sophia Hopkey and he fell in love with her. He really wanted to marry her, but he belonged to something called “The Holy Club” and one of the tenets of The Holy Club was you didn’t get married. But John Wesley was in love with this beautiful young girl. So, he got with one of his friends and they decided they would draw lots about whether or not you could marry. They took three pieces of paper. On one piece of paper they wrote the word “marry.” On the second piece of paper they wrote the words “marry not this year.” On the third piece of paper they wrote the words “do not even speak of marriage.” They folded them up and John Wesley chose the one that said, “do not even speak of marriage.” So with a broken heart, John Wesley broke it off with Sophia. Do you think he found God’s will? John Wesley wasn’t even saved then! Although he was very devout, he wasn’t saved.

It wasn’t until he went back and he heard somebody reading from the preface to Luther’s Commentary on the Book of Romans that his heart was strangely warmed at a meeting on Aldersgate Street and he became a Christian. Later, he decided it was about the time to get married. This was about age 45 and he still was not married. So he met a widow named Grace Murray. This time he didn’t use the “draw straws” approach. He used a more analytical approach. He wrote down seven things he wanted in a wife. The list included a housekeeper, a nurse, companion, friend, and fellow laborer in the gospel. It didn’t say anything about nice, pretty, soft or anything like that. He looked at those seven requirements and Grace Murray met those requirements, so he decided he would ask her to be his bride even though she was older than he. But his brother, Charles, so objected to him marrying Grace Murray that Charles went over to Grace’s house and said to her, “How can you steal my John’s heart?” He was so intent that he fainted. That scared Grace so much she left John Wesley and wouldn’t have anything to do with him.

John Wesley tried one more time. He was 47 years old when he met a much older widow named Mary Vazeille. This time he didn’t use any kind of drawing straws or making a list of seven qualities, he just married her. It was one of the biggest mistakes anybody ever made in their life! You can read all of this in his journal. This woman was not a good wife. She was much bigger than John Wesley. He was about 5’1” tall. Apparently, his wife was a very large woman and she literally abused him physically. People talk about how John Wesley traveled for thousands of miles on horseback preaching. I know why he traveled all those miles on horseback preaching! He endured a marriage with her for 20 years and when he was 67 years old, she left him and this is what he wrote. “I have not left her. I would not send her away but I will not recall her.”

Here’s John Wesley, a great servant of God. Do you ever wonder if he said, “I wonder where Sophia is tonight?” He was really trying to determine God’s will. Do you think drawing lots is the way to do it? Do you think flipping a coin is the way to do it? Do you think laying out a fleece is the way to do it? Let me just tell you what is wrong with laying out a fleece before the Lord: You’re putting God to the test and it’s not our job to put God to the test—it’s God’s job to put US to the test. The only time in the Bible I know where God invites us to put him to the test is Malachi, 3:10 where he says, “If you are not tithing, you are robbing me!” and he says “Put me to the test. Test me and see. Tithe and see if I won’t open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing so big, you can’t contain it!” That’s the only time in the Bible he says, “You test me!” To lay out some fleece before the Lord and say “Okay, God. If you really want me to do this, then you let this happen before 10:00 tonight.” “Lord, if you really want me to do this, then you have to make this and this and this happen for me to do it!” That’s a dangerous thing to do! You don’t need guidance when you have a guide. What’s better if you’re in a strange city and somebody writes down some instructions for you and you’re trying to follow these instructions as you’re winding through the streets. What’s better? To do that or to have someone sitting in your car who is a native of the area and knows where to go? What’s better than guidance is having a guide. Do you know what we have that the people in the Old Testament did not have? The Holy Spirit of God is living inside of us. Do you know what Jesus said about him? “When he comes, he will guide you into all truth.”

I’ll warn you: You don’t need a fleece. Turn over to Psalms, chapter 32 and I’d like for you to see what God promises in Psalms, 32, verse 8. You don’t need to lay a fleece before the Lord because God says, “I want you to know me so intimately that I can guide you easily. Psalm 32:8 says, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.” The King James Version says, “I will guide you with my eye.” I like the way it says that. He says in verse 9: “Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle...” Horses or mules are not guided, they have to be coerced. They have to have a bit in their mouths and have reins to pull them. God says, “I don’t want you to be that way! I don’t want to have to send adversity and tribulation in your life to get you to go in one direction.” He said, “I want you to know me so closely and intimately that I can just guide you with my eye.”

Do you know what it means for somebody to guide you with his eye? I know when I was growing up and we were over at somebody’s house and I was acting up too much, all my Dad had to do was lift an eyebrow in my direction. He didn’t have to say one word. Because he was my father, he could communicate with me by his eye. When we are at some big function and are standing around talking and I am getting tired and want to go home, I don’t have to say a word. I can just look at my wife and that means, “Let’s go home!” She catches that. The only reason she catches it is because we are so close. Nobody else catches it. You have to be really close with somebody for them to guide you with their eye. God says, “You don’t need to lay a fleece out you don’t need to flip a coin you don’t have to draw lots. All you have to do is just know me so deeply and intimately that you’ll know my heart.”

God reveals his will in a variety of ways and any of you who have taken the “Experiencing God” Bible study know that for Christians God speaks to us by the Holy Spirit through the word of God, through prayer, through circumstances and through the church. We have something much

better than laying out a fleece. In my next message, I am going to talk about what Gideon does once God finally gets his attention!

OUTLINE

- I. GOD OFTEN CALLS PEOPLE WHO FEEL UNQUALIFIED
2. GOD OFTEN CONFIRMS HIS WILL IN A VARIETY OF WAYS