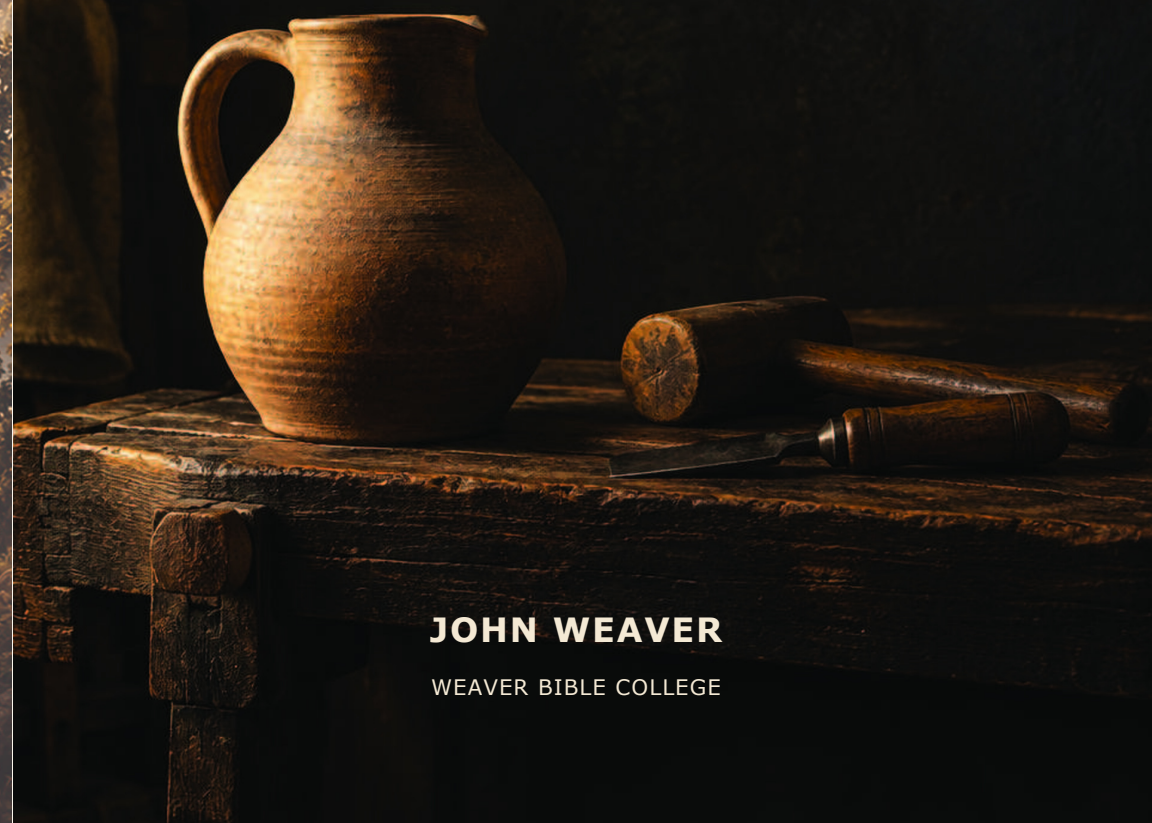
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Prerequisites to be Used by God

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

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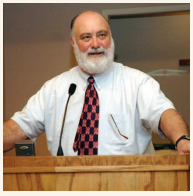
A vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

2 TIMOTHY 2:21, EXCERPT

Useful service begins with the condition of the servant. John Weaver considers the spiritual prerequisites of being ready for God's work, connecting humility, repentance, obedience, and dependence on grace. These messages invite readers to examine the obstacles to faithful service and to pursue the preparation that Scripture requires.

“If we followed God's commands, each of us would be readily available for the master's use.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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CHAPTER 1

Prerequisites to be Used by God - 1

Prerequisites to Be Used of God

SCRIPTURE READING - Judges 6:11-17 (KJV)

Introduction: God Uses Men, Not Committees

There are a number of things that I want to bring to you in preaching, but I passed through the book of Judges again, reading it. You remember that a couple of months ago, I preached several messages from Judges, chapter six, on the life of Gideon. As I came to this chapter, I read it and thought, I have already preached from this chapter several times. Then I looked at it, and, lo and behold, here was new material that I had not even seen as I preached through it before. I want to bring a message today which will probably continue for two or three weeks.

Judges chapter six, verse eleven:

> “And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak tree which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezarite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.
>
> And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all these miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.
>
> And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.
>
> And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.”

And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face.

And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and

called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezarites. And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

Each of us knows and understands that God used Gideon to deliver his nation from God's enemies, the Midianites. The life of Gideon gives us many important lessons and principles to live and govern our lives by. Gideon may have failed at certain points, as all of us do, but one thing is for certain: he was a man used of God. He was mightily used of God. I suppose that one of the greatest desires of every true Christian, and especially of every true preacher, is to be used by God.

We not only want to be vessels of mercy, according to Romans 9:23; we also want to be vessels of honor. In 2 Timothy 2:20-21, the Word of God says, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, that is, those which are of dishonor, if a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." So God says that if we purge ourselves from the dishonorable vessels, we will be an honorable vessel, sanctified and meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work. God commands us in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 that each one of us should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor.

The vessel there refers to our body. At all times, we should know how to possess our bodies in sanctification and honor. If we followed God's commands, each of us would be readily available for the master's use.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, the Bible says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." God says we are to cleanse ourselves not only from the filthiness of the

flesh, but also from the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. When we cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh, that is external; when we cleanse ourselves from a filthy spirit, that is internal. All of that is equal to 2 Timothy 2:20-21: purging ourselves from vessels of dishonor so that we may be an honorable vessel fit for the Master's use. When we cleanse ourselves externally and internally, we are indeed purging ourselves from that which is dishonorable.

God used Gideon. No one can deny that fact. God used Gideon mightily. We look around today and see our nation in basically the same situation that Gideon's nation was in during his time. They were oppressed, they were persecuted, and the enemy had the upper hand. And God used Gideon.

Gideon: A Man of Character

God does not use committees. I read one man's writing one time, and he said, "For God so loved the world that he did not send a committee." That is so true. God does not use committees. God does not use corporations. God uses men. He came to Gideon and found a man whom He could use to deliver His people from the hands of their enemies. Now, my question is very simple: would you not like to be used of God to deliver our people from the hands of the enemy?

The answer should come back, yes. If that is so, then there are some prerequisites that God lays down in Judges chapter six that are required if we are going to be used of God.

The First Prerequisite: A Man of Character

Today, I am only going to cover one point. What is the very first prerequisite? Gideon was a man of character. Notice, if you would please, in Judges chapter six, verse eleven, the angel of the Lord comes to Gideon as he is threshing wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. Then in verse 12: "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor."

I have often smiled at this. If Gideon was a mighty man of valor, why was he hiding by the winepress? Let me point out the fact that

God called him a mighty man of valor. The Hebrew word for valor is chayil. It occurs 37 times in the Old Testament. Every time the word valor appears in the Old Testament, it is always from the same Hebrew word.

Valor is usually given to us in a military sense. David's warriors and the Israelitish soldiers who were brave and courageous were referred to as mighty men of valor. Usually, when you read the word valor, it has the context of military strength or military might. But the word goes beyond military strength and military might. The word valor can mean not only strength or force, but can also be used to understand virtue. Gideon was not simply a man of strength; he was a man of virtue. Actually, the angel of the Lord said, "Hail, thou mighty man of virtue," which included strength and a number of other things as well. He was indeed a man of character.

Principles of Character

General Principles of Character

Before we begin to look precisely at Gideon's life, I want to give you some broad principles concerning character. First of all, it has been well said that character is what a man is in the dark.

The explanation is simple. You tell me what you would do if you knew that no one would ever find out about it, and I'll tell you exactly what you are. If you knew no one else would ever find out about it, and you would run off with old sister so and so, you are an adulterer. If you would go steal all the gold in the world, you are a thief.

Character is what a man is in the dark. Character is what we are alone before God. Character is not what we put on in front of everyone else; character is what we are by ourselves. The second thing about character is this: the test of your character is what it takes to stop you.

If that is a true statement—and it is—very few people in this day and time have real, genuine character. To stop the average individual, all you've got to do is gossip about them, insinuate something, hurt their feelings, or not let things go their way. Their

attitude is, “If you can't play by my rules, I'll take my marbles and I'll go home,” because their feelings get hurt.

Do you realize there is absolutely no comparison between the Christians of today and the Christians of the first century? The Christians of the first century were willing to die for their faith, and some of the ways they died were not too pleasant. But so often we let little things hinder us and stop us from doing that which is right and honorable and biblical. So the test of your character is what it takes to stop you.

The third thing is this: God may use you on credit the first years of your life. After that, he will use you on character. And if you don't have any character, you might as well forget God ever using you.

There are a few exceptions to that statement. God used Balaam, and he certainly had no character. God used Balaam's ass. But I do not want to suffer the fate of Balaam. Balaam was the false prophet who said, "Let me die the death of the righteous," but you cannot die the death of the righteous unless you live the life of the righteous. It is true that God used Balaam, and Balaam had no character, but he was the exception and not the rule.

The Bible says in 2 Chronicles 16:9, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." In other words, God is looking for someone whose heart is perfect toward him. God is looking for someone whose life measures up to what God requires. Here is the truth: God may use us on credit during the first years of our life. But after that, he is going to use us on character. If we do not have any character, we might as well forget God ever using us.

Here is the fourth general principle: character is not something that can be attained overnight. It is not something that can be attained in an instant of time.

Character and Hard Work

God may use us on credit for the first years of our lives. But character is something that grows, builds, and increases over time. It is the habit, disposition, attitude, and actions of a lifetime. One should increase in character as he grows older, wiser, and meditates

upon the Word of God. But that does not automatically happen. We build character not simply as we read and meditate upon the Word, but as we apply it to our lives and bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God. As we do that, slowly but surely, we begin to build a godly character.

Our biblical convictions should become deeper, stronger, and firmer over a period of time. You should have more godly character today than you had last month and more than you had last year. We should be better men today than we were last year, because character builds over a lifetime. If you will slowly but surely not only study the Word of God, but ask, “How can I apply this in my life? How can I make my life more biblical, more in conformity to the Word of God?” you will find that you are progressively changing to become a more godly person. Thus, you will develop a biblical and godly character.

Here are four very general principles. Let us consider what God reveals about Gideon and his character. In Judges 6:11, the Bible says, “And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak, which was at Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezarite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress.” The first thing the Bible shows us about Gideon is that he was a hard worker. He was threshing wheat. Threshing wheat is hard work, but what Gideon was doing was harder than normal. He was not necessarily using an oxen or any mechanical means. In fact, the word thresh literally means to knock wheat out with a stick.

Gideon Was a Hard Worker

If you will turn in your Bibles to the book of Ruth, chapter two, and look at verse 17: "So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley." If you knocked out wheat with a stick, it indicated that you were extremely poor. You remember Ruth was the widow woman, Naomi's daughter-in-law. How did she beat it out? She beat it out with a stick. So when Gideon was threshing the wheat, he was not sitting back watching oxen do it. He had a stick and was beating out the wheat himself. Threshing in this manner was hard, meticulous work.

Let me make a point. I am going to make a broad generalization, then narrow it down. The ministry is no place for a lazy man. Any service of God has no place for a lazy man. God requires that we be diligent. When He came to Gideon, He found him hard at work.

I remember when I was a boy, I wanted to be a preacher. I want to confess something to you: my motives were not pure. Do you know why I wanted to be a preacher? All I saw the preacher ever do was Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. I figured, for three hours a week, with the rest of the week to play, that would be wonderful. If I could preach a couple of hours a week and have the rest of the week to play, I would be set for life.

God did call me into the ministry, but it did not work out the way I thought it would. I found out that it is seven days a week and, many times, many nights during the week. Every time you plan to take a day or a couple of days off, usually somebody gets sick, somebody dies, somebody wants to get married, or somebody needs counseling. Inevitably, you end up in the ministry seven days a week and sometimes many nights of the week. I am pointing out the fact that when God uses a man, He expects that man to be a hard worker.

Hold Judges 6, but turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2. God gives us eight pictures of the ministry in this chapter. These could be eight pictures of any man that God uses. Notice 2 Timothy 2:1: Paul is writing to Timothy, his young understudy, and says, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Then, in verse 2, he gives us the first illustration of what the ministry is like: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” What is the picture? Here is a picture of a teacher.

If you have never taught, you do not know the work involved. You do not know the hours of preparation, the hours of communication, and then the hours of correcting and grading papers. Although the school day may only run from 8:30 until 2:30 or 3:00, that does not mean a thing. A teacher is someone who wants to communicate truth, and therefore a lot of study and work go into it.

Sometimes it is difficult for a pastor to grasp why someone cannot understand and comprehend in one hour what it took him fifteen or twenty hours to dig out. You will never grasp it in one hour. If it took him fifteen or twenty hours to get it, it will probably take you that long as well. That is the necessity of sometimes repeating truth over and over so that we can grasp it.

But here he gives the illustration of a preacher. That is not all. Look at verses 3 and 4: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” In these verses, the ministry, or the work of God, is compared to being a soldier.

I was in service, as were many of you. You know that your day normally starts at 5 a.m. and usually stops around 10 or 11. You know the hard things that you have to do. God says, “Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” He also speaks of the fact that God has chosen us. The ministry, then, is compared to a teacher and to a soldier. That is not all. Look in verse 5.

"And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." Now it is compared to an athlete.

There are many things I cannot do, athletically speaking, and a lot of things I would like to do. But do you realize the hours those gymnasts put in just to be able to do those handsprings and mad exercises? Can you imagine some of the martial artists—jumping in the air, twirling and kicking, and doing two or three things at one time? Can you imagine the practice, day after day, hour after hour? Can you imagine someone who runs fifteen or twenty miles?

This is what he is talking about: "If a man also strive for masteries," that is, an athlete who wants to win something, "yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." He has not only got to follow the rules; he has to be a fine, fine, disciplined individual.

Then, if you look in verse 6, "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits." Now the ministry is compared to a farmer. I was raised on a farm, and I can tell you that, especially usually every summer, we were up at 3 a.m. when I was a boy. You would work in the barn until daylight. Then you went to the field,

and you did not come in from the field except for dinner. When it got dark, by the time you got in and got a bath, you were not interested in going anywhere except to bed.

So God here likens the ministry and His service to that of a farmer. Look in verse 7: "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." Now here is a student. What does a student do? He studies and meditates over and over and over. Most of us do not breeze through the universities, colleges, or schools.

We have to work at it. We have to study. Look down in verse eight: “Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.” Here, the minister is compared to a preacher, someone who is looking for the fulfillment of the promises. Then, in verses 9 and 10: “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” Here, the minister is compared to a witness. In verse 15, he says, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” The word workman is the word for toiler or laborer, someone whose occupation is working—not someone who sits in an air-conditioned office, comes in at nine, leaves at five, and has three breaks and a two-hour lunch period. Here is a man who is a toiler, a laborer. Eight pictures given to us in 2 Timothy chapter 2 show clearly that the ministry and service of God is hard work.

If you turn back to Judges chapter 6, you will notice that when our Lord came to Gideon, He did not find Gideon sitting under a shade tree sipping lemonade. He found him threshing wheat with a stick, hard at work. The very first thing we find in Gideon as a man of character is that he was a hard worker. You have always heard the expression, “If you want anything done, ask a busy man.” That is about the truth. Ask a hard worker; they are the ones who get things done.

Gideon Was Honest

But notice secondly: not only was Gideon a hard worker, Gideon was honest. What was he doing when he was threshing out that wheat?

He was providing for his family. According to Gideon's own testimony, he was poor. In verse 15 he said, “And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.” Not only was he poor, but he was the very least in his father's house.

Two New Testament principles appear in Ephesians 4:28 and 1 Timothy 5:8. The Bible says, “Let him that stole steal no more.” In other words, if you are a thief, repent. “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” God says what we should learn to do, if necessary, is labor with our hands. Why? Not only that we may provide for ourselves, but also that we may have to give to him that needeth, that we can be generous and gracious to others. We are not merely to work for our own provision, but also to have something to give to those in need.

First Timothy 5:8 says, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” This is a particular statement made by the Apostle Paul. Here is a man who was a hard worker. But you must say this as well: he was an honest man. He was not a con artist. He was not a fraud. He was not a thief. He was a man that was working with his hands. He was a man that may have been poor, but he was making an honest living.

You know, there are so many dishonest preachers today. There are many dishonest Christians. But let me tell you something, folks: preachers take the cake. Anyone should understand that if you're going to preach the truth, you at least ought to have character enough to live the truth.

I remember one preacher. I was a boy, and he got three men in the church, one of them my father, to lend him a large amount of money. Then, that Sunday before he got up to preach, he told one of them he had left his watch at home and asked if he could borrow his watch that day. The man gave the pastor his watch. After Sunday morning, when we assembled Sunday night for church, there was no preacher. He took the money, took the watch, and left town. A thief. Now, he didn't count on one thing: he didn't count on my father. My father

and another man tracked him down, and they got the watch and their money back.

Can you imagine anyone having the nerve to do something like that? Absolutely, totally dishonest. Most people find it easier to be a thief than to live within their own means. Isn't that amazing?

Our Lord says in Luke 16:11-12, "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"

Do you hear what our Lord is saying? If we cannot be faithful in our money, who's going to give us the true riches? If we cannot be faithful and honest in that which is least, who's going to commit to us that which is the greatest? If I cannot be faithful in that which belongs to another man, who's going to give me that which is my own?

If I borrow Ed's vehicle and tear it up out of carelessness and unconcern, what makes you think God's going to ever give me something of my own? If I can't take care of his, I certainly wouldn't take care of my own. And if I can't be faithful in my little bit of money, do you think God is going to bless me with a tremendous spiritual blessing and use me to turn many to righteousness? No. We've got to learn to be faithful in the little things.

Honesty is not only needed and necessary. I deal with folks all the time, and I check every bill that I have. When I see a discrepancy, I tell people, “Look, I can assure you I’m going to pay what I owe, but I’m not going to pay one penny that I don’t owe.”

You can mark that down right now. As we used to say, put it in your pipe and smoke it, whatever. But look in Deuteronomy, chapter 25, beginning with verse 13. Watch carefully, by the way, as you turn there. Do you realize one of the qualifications of a pastor is that the pastor must be a man of good report from them that are without? How can you be a man of good report if you’re dishonest? You can’t.

Look what God says, Deuteronomy chapter 25, beginning there at verse 13: “Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small.” By the way, why would anyone have different sizes of weights? To cheat, to defraud. He said, You’re not going to do that.

“But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.”

So here’s a man who was a hard worker. Here’s a man who was honest. That’s not all. Look back in Judges, chapter 6. Here’s the third thing: he was innovative and wise. How do I get that? One must ask this simple question. Look at verse 11: “And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezarite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.”

Now, one must ask, why in the world was Gideon threshing wheat by the winepress and not on a mountaintop? The easier place to thresh wheat is where the wind can catch the chaff and blow it away. The wind cannot catch the chaff by a winepress, or down in a hole. Why was he there? Very simple: he was hiding it from the Midianites. What were they doing? Look in Judges 6, beginning in verse 3.

Gideon Was Innovative and Wise

"And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord."

Now, what was Gideon doing? He was hiding the fruits of his labor from those who would steal it, from those who would confiscate it unlawfully. Does not our Lord say in Matthew 10 and verse 16 that we are to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves? Gideon was being wise. In fact, Gideon was exercising a biblical attitude. He was not courting danger.

He was not tempting God. He was not challenging the Midianites to a fight that he knew he could not win by himself. He was using avoidance, deception, and camouflage to keep away from danger and to provide for himself and his family.

There is a verse that occurs twice in the Bible, in Proverbs 22 and verse 3 and Proverbs 27 and verse 12: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." A prudent man, that is, a wise man, foresees the evil. What does he do? He hides himself. In other words, he keeps himself out of danger. He keeps himself from being stolen from and ripped off when there is nothing else that he can do. But the simple, who are unwise, pass on and are punished.

Now look in your Bibles to the book of Proverbs 28, verse 12. The Bible says, "When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden." Why is a man hidden when the wicked rise? Because they are always trying to destroy or to steal. Look in verse 28 of the same chapter: "When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase."

Gideon had biblical character. He was not only a hard worker and honest; he was innovative and wise. He was hiding what little he had from those who would steal from him. Let me give you a simple biblical principle: do not tell everybody your business. Do not tell everybody what you have or what you do not have.

I realize that some are close friends, brothers in the Lord whom you trust implicitly. But I have heard and seen people openly broadcast to anybody walking by what they had, what their business was, what they were doing, and what they were not doing. That is like going downtown in a bad section, reaching into your pocket, pulling out a roll of money, and letting everybody see it. Guess what is going to happen? Sooner or later, you are going to get mugged.

There are some things that other people have no business knowing. The Midianites had no business knowing what Gideon had or did not have, nor where it was, what he was doing, or how he was providing for his family.

Gideon Was Not Easily Discouraged

Here was a man with godly character. He was a hard worker, honest, innovative, and wise. But fourthly, he was not easily discouraged. Judges 6:11 says, “And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezarite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.” How long had Gideon been threshing wheat by the winepress? How long had he been doing this work the hard way?

Judges 6:1 gives the answer: “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.” For seven long years, Gideon had faithfully discharged his duties under the severest oppression. The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel, and the Israelites made dens in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. The oppression was so severe that most of them hid themselves. For seven years, Gideon knocked out wheat with a stick by the winepress—the hard way.

Note that Gideon did not give up. He did not give in, and he did not give way to despondency, discouragement, and defeat. He simply kept on doing what was right. He kept on doing what he knew needed to be done. Let me put it another way: Gideon was consistent and dedicated. Dr. Bob Jones Sr. had a saying, and it went like this: "The greatest ability is dependability."

Now stop and think about that. Most of us do not have great abilities. But the one ability that we can have is dependability. We can be faithful, and we can be consistent. One of our biggest problems as Christians is that we have not learned to stay faithful, regardless of the circumstances. What we do is this: we get to looking at the circumstances. We get to looking at the situation. We get looking at the times, and we become discouraged, downhearted, and despondent. Then we take a defeatist attitude: "They can't fight City Hall." You have heard that all of your life. "Well, the wicked's got the upper hand, man; they got the guns, they got the bombs, they got this, they got that."

But let me tell you something, and I am going to point it out in just a moment. If you want to be discouraged, you just look at the

circumstances and keep your eyes on the situation. But if you want to be dependable, if you want to be thankful, if you want to be someone who is not easily discouraged, then you need to keep your eye on the Word of God.

Let me show you Galatians 6 and verse 9. I can quote it, but I want you to turn there. Is this not the absolute truth? Is this not God's Word? "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." God did not say that we would reap if the circumstances were right or if the situation was okay. No. He said, you just be consistent. You do not give up, give in, or give out. You do not become discouraged. You just remember one thing: in due season—that is, in God's time—we shall reap, if we faint not.

What God requires of us is faithfulness, dependability, and doing our duty regardless of the situation and the circumstances. Look back in your Bible to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 12.

I understand that we live in hard times. But that does not mean it is not going to get any worse. That does not mean it is not going to get harder. Look at the question God asked through Jeremiah: “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

If you have been running along with a footman and became tired and discouraged, what are you going to do when the horses come along? And if, in the land of peace, in the time of prosperity, you become discouraged, what are you going to do with the swelling of Jordan? That is, when Jordan overflows her banks and you are in really deep trouble. What are you going to do?

If we understand the truth of God's Word, there is no reason to be discouraged. Someone asked me last week, and it kind of took me by surprise, "Are you ever discouraged?" My answer was, "Hardly ever." Why? Because I know that God is sovereign. I know that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. My wife can tell you this; I have told her innumerable times.

The one thing that would discourage me is her. I am serious. I told her years ago that I can take everything the world throws at me. I can

take what the ungodly throws at me. I can take what other Christians throw at me because of their own ignorance and misunderstanding. But when I come home, I do not want someone on my case, griping and complaining and jumping up and down. I do not want someone at home turning against me. That is the only area in which I could become discouraged. And since she has been such a good wife, I would never get discouraged. But you understand what I am saying.

How in the world can you be discouraged if you understand that the sovereign, omnipotent God of heaven and earth is in control? God came to a man who, for seven years under the severest oppression and persecution, remained faithful. That is a mark of character. He never gave in. He never gave up. He never gave way. Why? Here is the fifth point, demonstrating his character: because he is a man of faith.

Gideon Was a Man of Faith

Look in your Bibles to Judges 6, verse 10, and then 11. Here is what the prophet says through the power of God: "And God said, I said unto you, I am the Lord your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice. And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak, which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezarite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress." Evidently, Gideon was one of the few who did not fear the gods of the Amorites. He was one of the few who continued to obey God.

There was a large number of the people who had apostatized, but Gideon did not. If we are a people of faith, it does not matter how many are on the other side. It does not matter what everyone else is doing. We understand the Word of God. What does the Bible say in Hebrews 11:6? “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

What kept Gideon faithful for seven years? He knew that God was going to reward him sooner or later. He did not know that God was going to come in this miraculous manner, but he knew that God was going to come. The name Gideon means “hewer.” God used Gideon

not just to hew down the image of Baal, but to hew down Baal worship.

Faith does not look at circumstances. Faith does not look at situations. Faith does not determine and is not determined by our feelings. Faith only looks at the Word of God. First John 5:4 says, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” What is it that gives us victory over the world? Our faith—faith in God, faith in his word, regardless of the situation, regardless of the circumstances. Faith—and a man of faith—is not easily discouraged. A man of faith can be faithful even in the severest oppression. A man of faith can continue to be honest and continue to be a hardworking man, even in light of persecution.

Applications: God's Sovereign Call and Our Responsibility

In Judges 6:11, we read, “And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak tree, which is in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezarite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.” Note that “there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak.” It was God who came to Gideon. It was God who called Gideon. It was God who initiated the conversation, the calling, and the promises. God calls whomsoever he pleases.

When I was a child and in school, and the teacher would begin giving us an oral quiz, she would sometimes ask an easy question. You know what we would all do? “Me, me, choose me, I know, I know.” I always wanted to answer the easy questions, but she did not always call me for an easy question. When she asked a hard question, nobody raised their hand. Everybody pointed at somebody: “Don’t call me, call him.”

We can say, and we should say, “Lord, here am I, send me.” But God still calls and uses whomever He pleases. Know what the Bible says in Hebrews 5 in verse 4? “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” No man taketh this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. God will sovereignly raise up a man. He always has and always will. God will sovereignly raise up a man to save His people, but it will be a

man of God's own choosing. I can assure you, first and foremost, it is going to be a man of character.

In Mark 3, verse 13, the Bible says concerning our Lord, "And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him." Who did our Lord call to be His disciples? Whomever He pleased. And when He called them, they came.

Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah 23 and let me show you one of the greatest problems that we have in this day and time. Look at Jeremiah 23, verse 32. God is dealing with the false prophets, with the false preachers. Here is what He says: "Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord."

We have men that have never been called of God. And therefore, says God, they will not profit. They will not benefit this people at all. Do you understand, folks? You can build great cathedrals and great works; you can have thousands in attendance and the best music ministry in the entire world. But if there is not a man there who has been called of God, it will not benefit or profit the people at all. For God said, "I sent him not. I commanded him not. And yet he ran." We need to pray that God would raise up a man in this country.

I don't know who he is or from where he will come, but I know this: when God raises him up, each of us will know that he is God's man. Because he will have a godly character, he will evidence it.

The second application is simple. Each of us should understand the importance of developing a biblical, godly character. Without godly character, we are useless and unusable. We need to pray not merely that God will give us that character, but that He will enable us to apply His Word to our individual lives, bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God, and thus produce that character.

The older we get, the more godly, firm in our convictions, and greater in character we should become. Our young people need to understand that the foundation of their lives is being laid right now, determining what they will be ten or fifteen years from now. If you

and I cannot be faithful in that which is least, how is God going to use us in that which is greatest?

Consider 1 Corinthians 1:25: "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." Gideon said he was the least in his father's house—"I'm nothing." Verse 31 says, "That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory

If God chooses the weak, if God chooses the foolish, if God chooses the base, most of us qualify—if we have character. You understand that? What did he say? “I’m the poorest, and I’m the least of my father’s house.” God can use a crooked stick to draw a straight line.

Let us pray. Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that thou wouldst help us. Lord, we need thee. We need godly character. We need to be used of thee. We want to present ourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto thee, which is our reasonable service. May we, Father, be usable vessels, whether thou dost ever choose to use us or not. That is thy divine prerogative. But Lord, may we always be at thy disposal. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Prerequisites to be Used by God - 2

SCRIPTURE READING - Judges 6:11-22 (KJV)

And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak, which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite. And his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewithal shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in

> thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face.

And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

Introduction and Review of Character

Last week I began a brief series entitled Prerequisites to Be Used of God. I pointed out how we need men in this nation, individuals who are usable by God and for God's honor and glory. The point I emphasized is that God uses men. He does not use committees or corporations. He uses men.

As I came to church today, I noticed again the church building down the road with a sign something like this: “The Church of God by Faith Incorporated.” I thought, How can it be the Church of God if it is a state corporation, and how can it be by faith if it is

incorporated? That is the sign they have out. But God does not use committees or corporations; He uses men. Read Hebrews chapter 11, and you will find men named one after another whom God has been pleased to use. The Bible teaches that God searches for men whose hearts are right toward Him, that He might use them for His honor and glory.

He found such a man in Gideon. The first prerequisite we saw last week—and I spent the entire sermon on this first point—was that Gideon was a man of character. The Bible tells us in 2 Chronicles 16:9 that God looks for individuals whose hearts are perfect toward Him. Several things demonstrated Gideon's character. The very first was that he was a hard worker. The Bible tells us that the angel of the Lord found him as he was threshing wheat by the winepress.

The word thresh literally means to beat out with a stick. As I pointed out from the book of Ruth, chapter 2, this is how poor people thresh their wheat. Evidently, not only according to Gideon's own words but according to his actions as well, he was indeed a poor man, but he was a hardworking man. Secondly, he was an honest man.

He was thankfully trying to provide for himself and for his family. The third thing that illustrated his character was that he was wise and innovative. He was hiding his wheat by the winepress. Normally, you thresh your wheat on the mountaintop; you throw it up in the air, and after you have done everything, the wind separates the chaff from the wheat, blowing the chaff away. But Gideon could not do that because of the Midianites. They would invade the land and rob, steal, and confiscate everything they possibly could. Therefore, he was hiding his wheat down by the winepress. He was wise and innovative, trying to preserve and protect that which God had given him and not allow it to be stolen from him.

Another thing that demonstrated his character was that he was not easily discouraged. He had been doing this for seven years. For seven years the Midianites had oppressed him, and for seven years he faithfully discharged his duty. Lastly, he was a man of faith because he did indeed trust in the Lord. The Bible says that many followed the gods of the Amorites in verse 10, but Gideon evidently was not one of them.

The very first prerequisite that God looks for in a man is that he must be a man of character. God may use us on credit during the first years of our life. After that, He will use us on character. If we do not have any character, we might as well forget it. God is not going to use us.

I know there are exceptions, such as Balaam and Balaam's ass, but I do not want the fate of Balaam nor of Balaam's ass. To be honest, God uses men of character. The important thing to grasp from last week is this: character cannot be developed on the spur of a moment. It is the habit, the attitude, and the disposition of a lifetime. You and I should be constantly and continually developing a biblical character as we read, study, and apply the Word of God to our lives.

Gideon, a Man of Understanding

Gideon as a Man of Understanding

In Judges chapter 6, verses 12 through 13, we see the second characteristic of Gideon: he was a man of understanding, or discernment. I could have used the word discernment. He was a man of discernment. Either one would be sufficient. But notice verse 12: “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.” And Gideon said unto him, “O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

When I say that Gideon was a man of understanding, or that he was a man of discernment, what I mean is simply this: he was a man who saw things clearly and distinctly. He saw things as they really were. He was not a dreamer. He was not a visionary. He was not someone who absolutely could not grasp reality. He was a man who could correctly ascertain the situation of his time.

The Bible says in verse 11 that there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak, which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite, and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. When that angel came, in verse 12, he

spoke to Gideon, and the angel said to him, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.”

The Identity of the Angel of the Lord

I am going to take a little time and explain who this angel really was. When the angel said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor,” Gideon did not at first perceive who the angel really was. Therefore, in verse 13, Gideon said unto him, “O my Lord.”

The word Lord there, and I will explain the difference in just a moment, is the word Adonai, which is the term of reverence and respect. It is an ordinary form of respectful salutation. What Gideon was doing was very politely and civilly addressing the stranger. He acknowledged him, and then he proceeded to express himself very clearly and very distinctly. Now, the angel in verse 11 is none other than the angel of the Lord, who is, in this instance, none other than Christ Himself.

This is what is known in the Bible as a Christophany. You will find a Christophany several times in the Old Testament. A Christophany is a pre-incarnate appearing of Christ in the Old Testament before Christ was ever made flesh in the New Testament. When I say pre-incarnate, the incarnation speaks about God becoming flesh.

Do you remember John 1:14? The Bible said, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” So Jesus Christ was made flesh. In 1 Timothy 3:16, the Bible says, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.” When Jesus Christ took upon Himself the form of man, according to Philippians 2:6–7, that is referred to as the incarnation. Therefore, when I say a Christophany is a pre-incarnation, or a pre-incarnate appearing of Christ, it means that Christ is appearing in the flesh or in human form in the Old Testament, before He ever became flesh in the New Testament.

Now look carefully at verse 11: “And there came an angel of the LORD.” Then look at verse 13: “And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord.” Do you see any difference between the word Lord in verse 11

and the word Lord in verse 13? In verse 11 it is all caps, while in verse 13 it is lowercase except for the L.

Do you know how we got the phrases uppercase and lowercase? Alice and I visited an antique print shop years ago, and the man explained that uppercase refers to capital letters and lowercase to non-capitalized letters. In the print shop, all the capital letters were kept in the upper end of the case, and all the small letters in the lower end. It had nothing to do with anything except where they were in a box. So the word LORD is all caps in verse 11, but small in verse 13.

Look at verse 14, and then go back to verse 11 for a moment: "And there came an angel of the LORD." Note the expression, "the angel of the LORD." Now look at verse 14: "And the LORD looked upon him and said." Do you see a distinction between verses 11 and 14? Who is speaking in verse 14? The Lord Himself, God Himself. Yet verse 11 plainly says that it was an angel of the Lord, and verse 12 says the same. How can Christ be called the angel of the Lord when verse 14 says that God Himself spoke to him and the Lord looked upon him?

Anytime in your King James Bibles that you see capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, it demonstrates that this is a translation of the sacred name of God, Yahweh, Jehovah, or Yah, as some pronounce it. Whenever you see all caps, it is the sacred personal name of God Himself: Yahweh. When you see capital L followed by small o-r-d, it is Adonai, or simply Lord, Boss, Owner, Master, Sovereign. Here, however, you have the specific name of God. Thus, in verse 12, the angel of the Lord speaks, but in verse 14, it is God Himself.

How, then, can Jesus Christ be referred to as an angel of the Lord? It is very simple. The Greek word for angel is angelos, and it means messenger. What is an angel? He is a messenger.

He is a sent one. Do you know the phrase that our Lord used of Himself over and over in the New Testament? He was a sent one. He said, "The Father hath sent Me." He is the sent one.

Now, if you will hold Judges chapter 6, look in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 3, verse 1. Let me show you another phrase that will explain that He is a sent one. Notice Hebrews chapter 3, verse 1.

Look what the Bible says: “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.” Isn’t that interesting? Here Jesus Christ is called an apostle. Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. Do you know what the word apostle means? The Greek word is apostolos, and it literally means “a sent one.” So literally, it says, consider the sent one and the high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. Not only, then, is the angel directly referred to in Judges 6:14 as Jehovah Himself, or Yahweh Himself.

Notice what happened in verse 22: “And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not, for thou shalt not die.” Then Gideon built an altar there unto whom? Yahweh. And called it Jehovah, or Yahweh Shalom. Unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Here you find the angel of the Lord received worship at the hand of Gideon. The point is this: nowhere in the Bible does a mere angel ever receive worship. Only God receives worship—certainly not a good angel, not a holy angel. Hold Judges chapter 6, but look in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 19. Revelation chapter 19, and then we will go to chapter 22. Notice verse 10; in fact, let us begin reading with verse 8: “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”

Now look what John did: “And I fell at his feet to worship him.” And he said to me, “See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Look in Revelation 22:9: “And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.” Nowhere in the Bible does a mere angel of God receive worship. Yet in Judges chapter 6, this angel received

worship, and therefore he was indeed God himself. When the angel addressed Gideon in verse 11, he said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor”—that is, Yahweh or Jehovah is with thee.

Gideon's Honest Assessment of Israel's Condition

The angel was speaking to Gideon, but Gideon did not yet perceive who was speaking to him. Gideon was a man of understanding and discernment. He instantly understood what was meant by the angel in verse 12. When the angel said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor,” Gideon understood that to be a promise. Then he applied that promise not only to his present situation, but also to the condition of Israel.

This explains what I mean when I say that the man God uses must not only be a man of character, but also a man of understanding and discernment. He is a man who can face reality. He is not someone who always has to sugarcoat things. Gideon said, “O my Lord, if the Lord, if Yahweh, if Jehovah be with us, why then has all this befallen us? And where be all these miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.” Gideon’s understanding of the present state of his people led him to ask a series of simple questions.

The first one is this: If God is with us, why are we in this mess? That is an important question. Notice how Gideon applies the promise of God to all of God's people. In verse 12, the angel of the Lord said unto him, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.” The promise is singular: “thou.” In verse 13 Gideon answered, “O my lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?” Gideon took the promise made to him and applied it to all of God's people.

Before I explain this, understand that Gideon's reply to the angel—or to Christ, who was in reality speaking to him—was not rebellion. His answer demonstrates that he saw, comprehended, and understood reality. His question revealed that he perceived the state of things as they actually existed.

Can you imagine Gideon? He was working and sweating, probably tired and worn out, looking over his shoulder and wondering when the Midianites would come bounding around the corner. Suddenly, a stranger appeared and said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.” Gideon may have wiped the sweat from his brow and said, “I have a question. If Yahweh is with me, why am I beating out my wheat here by the winepress? Why am I not up on the mountaintop, where it is easy?”

“If Yahweh is with us, why do the Midianites come year after year, devour our substance, destroy our land, and impoverish us? If Yahweh is with us, why has all this befallen us? If Yahweh is with us, where are all His miracles and mighty acts? Where are all His deliverances that we have heard from our fathers?” In effect, Gideon said, “It is not that Yahweh is with us. Yahweh has forsaken us and given us over into the hands of the Midianites. Yahweh is not for us; Yahweh is against us.”

The Need for Repentance and Remembrance

When Gideon said this, it was not an attitude of rebellion. He was not sugarcoating things, nor was he a philosopher and follower of the power of positive thinking. Norman Vincent Peale wrote the book on the power of positive thinking; of course, he denied the deity of Christ. I like what one man said: “I find Norman Vincent Peale appalling and the Apostle Paul appealing.”

It was a good play on words. But there was no positive thinking here, no attempt to look on the bright side or overlook the facts and reality. He saw and understood things as they clearly were.

I have known preachers who had extreme problems within the church, yet every time someone asked, “How’s the church doing?” they answered, “Oh, great. Wonderful. Couldn’t be better.” I know one preacher who kept saying that until the church disintegrated and the property was sold. He could never face reality. Some people think that if they overlook problems, the problems will go away. If they sugarcoat things, they will go away. They do not. Gideon was a man who could face reality.

We could apply this to our country. This country is referred to as a Christian nation. I believe it was founded on Christian principles, and many of our founding fathers were godly Christian men. But we have to ask, If God be with us, why then is abortion on every hand? If God be with us, why are the sodomites running wild? If God be with us, why do we have such corruption and fraud in our government? Am I trying to sugarcoat things when I say, "We are the best nation on the face of the earth"? We still may be, but that does not mean we are sinless or guiltless. We have enough sins of our own. We need to be honest with ourselves and honest with our state. God is not going to use a man who cannot see reality, face reality, and be truthful about the facts. How can God use someone who will lie about the facts or ignore them? Gideon was not ignoring the facts, and he was not lying about them.

He says, "We're in trouble. We're in deep trouble." What were the facts? The facts were these. First, the nation was under the judgment of God. Second, they were delivered into the hands of the Midianites because of their sins. Gideon was right when he said what he said. Judges 6:1 says, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hands of Midian seven years." The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel, and because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made themselves dens in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. When Israel had sown, the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the children of the east came up against them.

Note that the children of Israel had sinned against God. Who delivered them? God. Therefore, thirdly, God's hand was against them. Up to that time, there had been no miracles and no deliverance. What was Gideon doing? He was acknowledging the reality of the situation. When he acknowledged it, he was also confessing the righteous judgment of God upon that nation because of its sins and rebellion.

Unless we are honest with ourselves, and unless we are honest about the state of our nation, we will never repent individually or nationally. It is just like people who are drunkards. Most of them do not ever think they have a drinking problem: "Why stop? I can stop anytime I want to stop." They never consider the fact that they

simply never want to stop. How in the world can you deal with any sin unless you are willing to face it and be honest about it?

These truths are necessary in order to properly ascertain where we are as an individual, as a people, and as a nation. God tells the church in Revelation 2:5, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” The very first thing He tells us is to remember: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen.” It would pay us to remember our first love. That is exactly what this chapter is talking about. When God first saved us, how zealous we were for Him.

How thankful and obedient we were to Him; we could not do enough to honor and please God. But as the years go by, we begin taking everything God does for granted, and our love and zeal cool. Therefore, He says, “You had better remember from whence you are fallen.” Remember what your first state really was.

The same thing is true of our nation. We need to remember what our founding fathers gave us: until 1913, there was no public debt except for short periods of war; there was prayer in every school and home; Bible reading, with the Bible as the main book taught; and our congressmen served at their own expense.

We have fallen from all of that. The very first thing we need to do is remember. The second thing we need to do is repent.

Look in Judges 6:13. Gideon said unto him, “O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

We do not remember from whence we have fallen. We do not only need to repent; we need to recall the mighty works of God. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 44. I usually preach from this text, especially this time of year. The world has just gone through what most folks refer to as Halloween. Actually, it was Reformation Day, October 31st, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the castle church door in Wittenberg, Germany. All Saints Day, of course, is a

pagan holiday, and all of that is wicked and wrong. Nobody ever hears of Reformation Day or Reformation Sunday. Usually I preach on Martin Luther this time of year. I did not this year. The fact is, when you think about the Reformation, you begin to recall some of the mighty works of God.

Psalm 44 says, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them." That is a recalling of the mighty works of God.

That is exactly what Gideon is doing in Judges chapter 6. He said, "If God is with us, where are all those mighty works we have been told about? All that mighty deliverance. All that mighty power. Where are God's miracles, and where is His deliverance?"

Now look back in Revelation chapter 2. God says we need to remember from whence we are fallen, individually and as a nation. We need to repent and recall. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." What does God say? "I just remove you."

I get so tickled at people when they think that nothing catastrophic could ever happen to America. What did God do to Judah and Jerusalem? He removed their candlestick. What did He do to the ten northern tribes? He removed their candlestick. Look at all the peoples of this earth that are now extinct. Why? God removed them. God took them out. He said, "You better remember. You better repent. You better recall."

Symbolism of Threshing and the Divine Commission

If you do not, He will remove you. Gideon was a man of discernment and understanding. He saw things clearly, called a spade a spade, and could face the facts. He never sugarcoated anything. If you are

going to be used of God, you must not only have character; you must have understanding—simple, common-sense understanding.

Third, if you are going to be used of God, you must be a man who is divinely commissioned and sent. Judges chapter 6, verse 14, says, "And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Gideon had no rebellious attitude and was not being hateful or ugly in verse 13. Verse 14 says that Yahweh looked upon him, or literally turned toward him. The phrase illustrates that fellowship had basically been restored between Gideon and God, and therefore between God and His people.

Several symbolisms in this passage cannot be ignored. First, Gideon is threshing wheat by the winepress.

If you study through the Bible, you will find that wine and bread are the food of kings. Read Genesis chapter 40, for instance. In Genesis 14:18, when Abraham returned from the slaughter of those who had stolen Lot and many other people, when Abraham returned from defeating them, Melchizedek met Abraham with bread and wine, indicating that Abraham was the true king of Canaan. Bread and wine were the food of kings, and God was going to use Abraham mightily as a king to deliver His people.

I hope you can see the fulfillment, or the antitype, in that. Jesus Christ is the greater Melchizedek. Therefore, according to Revelation 1:6, He hath made us kings and priests unto God our Father. Jesus Christ is the One who gives us the true bread and wine—His body, His flesh, His blood. Bread and wine, then, are a symbol of the food of kings.

Secondly, what was Gideon doing by the winepress? He was threshing. Threshing in the Bible is a sign or symbol of historical judgments. It is a picture of the judgment of God in time and in history. When you thresh, it is a winnowing process: you are separating the grain from the chaff. The grain is that which is beneficial; the chaff is that which is absolutely worthless.

In Luke 3:16-17, John the Baptist tells us that this is exactly what Jesus Christ is going to do to the world: "John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I

cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, that is, he shall separate the wheat from the chaff, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." The Bible tells us that Christ is going to thresh the world. Thus, Gideon is going to thresh Israel, starting with his own father's house, which we will look at next week.

Now turn to 2 Samuel chapter 24, beginning with verse 18. There is something there that most people have not picked up on.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 24:16-25 (KJV)

The judgment of God began to fall, and people were dying like flies. I think it was 70,000 men that were killed.

"And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite." Where was he? By the threshingplace.

"And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house. And Gad the prophet came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite.

"And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded. And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him: and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground. And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the Lord, that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood. All these things did Araunah,

> as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The Lord thy God accept thee.
>
> "And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.
>
> "And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel."

Can someone tell me the significance of this place? This is where the temple was built on the threshing floor of Araunah. What does that tell you? Does it not tell you this is a process by which the kingdom of God is actually built—God's winnowing, God's separating the chaff from the wheat?

First Peter 4:17 should make it exceedingly clear: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" What did he say? The time is come that judgment must begin first at the house of God. God always winnows His own. He always separates the wheat from the chaff. And if God does that to His people, what will be the end of the ungodly? Of course, it will be utter and total destruction.

Now, let us go back to Judges 6, because we are looking at verse 14: "And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" We are on the third point: Prerequisites to be used of God must be a man of character, a man of understanding, and divinely commissioned and sent. The point that needs to be emphasized is that God called and sent Gideon. The one thing we are missing today in the ministry as a whole is an awareness and a conviction of the divine call.

Pastors are not employees of a church. They are not administrators or tools of a deacon board. They are not spiritual burpers who go around burping spiritual babies who should have matured forty years ago. No. They are to be the servants of God. God

calls them, and God sends them. Pastors are to be, first and foremost, the representatives of God.

The Promised Presence as Gideon's Might

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul is talking about pastors and preachers. He says in verse 20, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.” All my life I've been taught that everyone is an ambassador for God. Well, that's true in a very general sense, but then it's really not true as well.

The Southern Baptists always had a group of boys called the Royal Ambassadors, the RAs. In one sense of the word, we are representatives of Christ, generally speaking, because whatever we do or say reflects upon Christ in the ministry. That's certainly true. But when you talk about an ambassador, you're talking about a horse of a different color. To be a real ambassador, you have to be appointed by a government. You have to be sent by a government.

For instance, suppose you and I took a trip to England. While we were over there, we decided we wanted to go see the Queen. We go up to the Queen's palace, where there are guards everywhere, and start to knock on the door. Someone steps up to us and says, “Where do you think you're going?” “We're going to see the Queen.” “But what makes you think you can see the Queen?” “We're ambassadors. We represent America. Whatever we do over here reflects upon America, and we want to have an audience with the Queen.” You know what the guard's going to say? “May I see your papers?” We don't have any diplomatic papers.

Our government never appointed us; we are just general ambassadors. I may generally tell you to turn around and get out of here before I arrest you. But if you were appointed by the United States government, sent with your diplomatic papers, and needed an audience with the Queen, you could get in. There is a difference between those two things.

The Apostle Paul said, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead,

be ye reconciled to God." He is talking about pastors and preachers. We are here in His stead.

The true preacher represents Christ and is there in Christ's stead. He has been divinely called and divinely sent. Consequently, pastors are required to represent God, His Word, and His interests to His people. They are required to teach His Word and proclaim His demands. They are men just as sent as Moses. You can read Exodus chapter 3, verses 10, 12, and 14. God said, "I have sent you." It would be interesting today to discover how many pastors actually view themselves as commissioned, called, and sent by God. I am afraid the answer would be very few, in all probability.

There is a difference between a man who has been sent and a man who has not been sent. A man who has been sent has a master—the one who sent him. Therefore, he is answerable and accountable to that master. The man who has been sent not only has a master; he has a mission. That is why he was sent. There is something he must do and accomplish.

Thirdly, a man who has been sent has a method for accomplishing that mission in order that he might please his master. He has a mind concentrated solely upon that master, that mission, and that method, in order to please and honor that master. The man who has not been sent has none of these things. He simply flounders around in the sea of administration, endeavoring to please all those whom he thinks might have authority over him or whom he thinks might could help his professional career.

Do you perceive a difference when you read your Bible between John the Baptist and a modern-day preacher? Do you perceive the distance between the Apostle Paul and the average pastor? Do you perceive a difference between Samuel, Peter, Elijah, Elisha, Apollos, and multitudes of others who were sent and called of God, and modern-day preachers? Do you even perceive a difference between Luther, Calvin, and Whitefield and what we have today?

Oh yes. Have we lost anything in this century? Most definitely. What we have lost is the concept that a true preacher is divinely called, divinely sent, and divinely ordained by God. You have many

preachers today who have never been called by God, never been sent by God, and never been ordained by God.

Look back in your Bibles to Judges 6 and verse 14: “And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?”

What is Gideon’s might? Look at the context, at verse 13: “And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then has all this befallen us? Where be all these miracles which our fathers told us of? Saying, did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? And now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.” He has just described reality. Yet the Lord looked upon him and said, “Go in this thy might.” What is his might? Gideon’s might is nothing less than the promised presence of God. In verse 12, when the angel of the Lord appears unto him, he says, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.” When the angel appeared, he gave him this promise of the presence of God.

Moses understood this concept. In Exodus 33, beginning with verse 12, Moses said unto the Lord, “See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.” And he said, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” God said, “Moses, my presence will go with you.”

Then Moses said, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” He was saying, “God, if you’re not going with me, I don’t want to go. I want your presence.”

Have you ever stopped to think how futile it is to try to accomplish the work of God without the God of the work? My wife and I were raised basically in liberal churches. When we got married, we went to a liberal church, and you would have to sit there for thirty minutes. They very seldom spoke over thirty minutes, but I often wondered how a man had to study to say something for thirty minutes while avoiding Scripture, offending anybody, or upsetting

anybody. That has to be a lot of work. Alice can tell you, I study every day and all week long, but I would hate to have to study like that.

The truth is this: if God is not with us, it does not matter what we do or say. The Bible says in Zechariah 4:6, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.” If God is not with us, it is useless and worthless.

In 1819, George Atkins wrote the hymn “Brethren, We Have Met to Worship.” The first stanza says:

“Brethren, we have met to worship and adore the Lord our God. Will you pray with all your power while we try to preach the Word? All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down. Brethren, pray in holy manner. We’ll be showered all around.”

What is he saying? It is useless without God.

God Uses the Weak to Glorify Himself

God is still the God of miracles, deliverance, and salvation. The problems in our lives, our families, our churches, our state, and our nation do not come from the fact that God has lost His power, His position, or His sovereignty. The problem is not with God. The problem is with us.

Look in your Bibles to Isaiah 59, beginning with verse one. As we read this passage, put our country, your own problems, and your own family in perspective: “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

“They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to

evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace."

What did he say? "My hand's not shortened that it can't save. My ear's not heavy that it cannot hear." The problem is not with God's miracle, power, or deliverance; it is with your sins. When you repent, turn, seek, and cry, you will understand His mercy. When God appears in mercy, grace, and blessing, His power and blessing are sufficient. What did He say to Gideon? "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the Midianites." Go in this promised presence of God, and you shall save Israel.

In Judges chapter 6, notice verse 14: "And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites." Skip down to verse 16: "And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee." There is that promised presence. "And thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." God is able to defeat His enemies and deliver His people with one man.

We need to comprehend the simple fact that it does not take a multitude to accomplish the will and purpose of God. It takes one man who is sent by God, commissioned by God, and called by God. God took Gideon. Are you listening? He took three hundred men and defeated the entire Midianite army.

Everywhere I go in this country, I hear people say, "Oh, Brother Weaver, if we could just get everybody together. If the Christians would just pull together." I have news for you folks: you are never, ever going to have a multitude, and you are never, ever going to get Christians together. We are worse than spoiled young'uns. But it does not take a multitude, and it does not take even all the Christians. It takes one or two, or a small number, committed, called, and sent by God, who will not err from their course and will do what God tells them to do.

Gideon took three hundred and destroyed the Midianite army. Our Lord took twelve men and turned the world upside down. But God always begins with one. You have heard that old saying, "God

and one man make a majority." That is really not true. God is a majority Himself. But when He takes that one, He can accomplish whatever He wants to accomplish.

The question is, are you willing to be that one? To be a man of character and understanding, and say, "Here, my Lord, send me. I'm willing. I'll play by Your rules. I'll do what You say, for You are the one true and living God."

Whenever I teach something like this, someone will say, "But Brother Weaver, I don't have a college education. I don't know the Bible. I'm not a scholar. I'm not this. I'm not that." Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1, beginning with verse 26. What does he say?

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: Why has God chosen that which is despised and useless and powerless? Here's why: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. God is pleased to use plain, simple, powerless individuals so that our flesh will not steal his glory. What did he tell Gideon when Gideon had this vast army? You're too many. You will think that you did it. Get rid of them. He cut him down to 300 so that everyone would know the victory was God's. When God uses us folks, we're bound to know the victory has to be God's, because we're nothing in and of ourselves. To Him goes the honor and the glory.

Father, we thank Thee for Jesus Christ, for His grace and mercy. We pray that Thou wouldst make us usable and be pleased to use us. Help us repent—as individuals, families, a church, a state, and a nation. Give us the gift of repentance. Enable us to serve Thee effectively with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Prerequisites to be Used by God - 3

SCRIPTURE READING - Judges 6:11-18 (KJV)

Introduction and Review

In Judges chapter 6, beginning with verse 11:

"And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak, which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?

> “Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house. And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.”

And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

Now, I have been dealing with this brief series, "Prerequisites to be Used of God." In the introduction to this series, I pointed out that God uses men. He does not use committees. He does not use corporations. He uses men. All you need to do is read Hebrews 11, and you will notice that God does indeed use men. He specifically searches for men whose hearts are right toward Him. And He found such a man as Gideon.

So far in this brief series, we have covered three main points. The first one is that Gideon was a man of character. If God is going to use a man, the man must have character. I pointed out some general principles concerning character, then I pointed out specifically some things that were revealed about Gideon.

How that he was a hard worker, he was an honest man, he was wise and innovative, he was not easily discouraged, and he was a man of faith. The second thing I pointed out about Gideon was this, that he was a man of understanding and discernment. He was not a man who sugarcoated things or whitewashed things. He viewed things as they were in reality. He understood the condition of his people and the condition of his nation. And he was ready to confess and acknowledge that it was his sins and the sins of the people that had merited and brought forth the judgment of God upon them. Then I pointed out thirdly that he was a man who was called and sent of God. It was God who initiated the calling. God came to Gideon, God called him, and God sent him. And always when God calls and sends a man, you always have the promised presence of God. And may I point out that one man is always sufficient when God is moving.

Now today we're going to come to the fourth point, and I'm going to take the entire message today just to cover this one point. So we found that Gideon was a man of character. Gideon was a man of discernment. Gideon was a man who was called and sent of God, and today we're going to find out that Gideon was a man of humility.

Gideon's Humble Response

Now look, if you would please, in verse 14: "And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"

Now I want you to note carefully, if you would please, Gideon's response. "And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Gideon was no megalomaniac. Gideon was not out for glory. Gideon not only understood and had a clear understanding about the condition of his nation and the condition of his people. Gideon also had a clear understanding as to who he was.

Now I want you to note in Gideon's answer, Gideon no longer questioned the possibility of Israel's deliverance. He understood if God sent him, that God was quite capable of delivering Israel. Now his only concern is this, he expresses the weakness of himself personally and the weakness of his family as well. He said, "O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Gideon said, in effect, “We are poverty stricken as a family. We’re poor. We don’t have anything. We don’t have any resources. We don’t have any means. Moreover, I am the least in my father’s house.” When he said, “I’m the least in my father’s house,” it could refer to the fact that he was the youngest, but it also could refer to the fact that he considered himself the least gifted in his father’s house. In other words, he could be saying, “I have absolutely nothing to offer.”

Gideon’s response to the Lord saying, “Have not I sent thee?” was simply this: “God, I have no special standing, no special honor, and no special gifts. There is absolutely nothing in my life or in my family that would commend me unto You, and there is nothing that I have that could be used by You.” Essentially, he was saying, “I am a nobody in my person, a nobody in my family’s standing, and a nobody as far as abilities are concerned. How in the world can You use me?”

This was the same attitude that Moses expressed when God called him to deliver Israel out of Egypt. In Exodus 3:11, Moses said unto God, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” Who am I? I have nothing to offer. I’m not anything special.

In chapter 4 and verse 10, Moses said unto the Lord, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” Moses said, “Lord, I’m not even an orator. I don’t have the ability to speak correctly or to speak well.” His basic question was, “How in the world can You use me?”

Humility Defined as a Modest Self-Assessment

Humility, in one sense of the word, is a modest sense of one's own person, worth, and ability. Humility is called in the Bible a lowliness of mind. In Romans chapter 12, verse 3, Paul says, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Paul is addressing every single one who is in the church. No man is to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but rather he is to think soberly—that is, seriously—according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. This means that humility involves a modest sense of one's own worth and one's own abilities.

What would be your response if I told you that next week I was going to put ads and volunteer to sing special songs in local churches? What would be your attitude if you knew that I was volunteering to go around to churches and sing specials? Everyone in this room knows that I can't carry a tune in a bucket. Why in the world would I think that I could sing when I know I can't sing?

If I tried to arrogantly push myself off as some type of musician and some type of singer, would I be thinking soberly concerning myself and my talents? Of course not. I would be thinking more highly of myself than I ought to think. Humility requires that I honestly recognize the abilities God has given me, without pretending to possess abilities that I do not have.

What if I tried to say, "Well, I tell you what, folks, next week I'm going to open up an auto mechanic shop, so you bring all your automobiles to me and I'll take care of them." Well, I hope he can tell you how I can take care of them. I could probably put a stick of dynamite under them and really take care of them, but that's about all, because I'm not a mechanic. To claim otherwise would not be thinking soberly concerning myself and my talents.

Romans chapter 12 and verse 3 tells us that each of us has gifts, but we do not have the same gifts. God tells us that we are not to be puffed up, arrogant, or to think more highly of ourselves than we

ought to think. Rather, we ought to deal soberly and seriously, assessing those gifts that God has given unto us.

In Ephesians chapter 4, this humility is referred to as a lowliness of mind. Paul says, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” How are we to walk? “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” We are to walk in lowliness and in meekness.

You cannot walk in lowliness if you are full of pride, haughtiness, and arrogance. Philippians 2:3 says, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” If we understood this one simple verse, it would save us an awful lot of heartache. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory.

Why do most people get into fights? Each thinks that he is better than the other, that his ideas are better than the other, and that his ways are better than the other’s. If his ideas and ways are not taken, he becomes upset and hurt. Why? Because he thinks he knows more than anyone else, and that his way is better than anyone else’s. Yet God says, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than himself.” How in the world can you and I have a lowliness of mind if we intrude into those areas about which we know absolutely nothing? God tells us, first of all, that humility is a modest assessment of our person and our abilities.

Gideon said, "How can I save Israel? My family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Do you realize that one of the major sins of all of God's people is the sin of pride?

Pride is a root sin. When I say a root sin, you will always find it at the bottom of other sins because it produces a plethora, or a multitude, of other sins. Pride is a root sin. It is always at the bottom of practically everything. That is one of the main reasons God does not use us.

Pride as a Root Sin

You know what the Bible said in Proverbs 8 and verse 13? "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate." If the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, and the first evil that God mentions is pride, how in the world can we properly say that we truly fear the Lord if we are filled with pride? The truth is, we cannot.

Let me show you something about pride that most people have never, ever comprehended. Pride makes faith impossible. Look what our Lord asks in John 5, verse 44. He asks, "How can ye believe?" "Which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"

If I am only interested in being built up in Robert's sight, if I want Robert's approval and Robert's commendation, if I want that more than anything else in the world, how can I believe in God when I am seeking the honor that comes from man and not the honor that comes from God? Our Lord is saying that pride makes real faith impossible.

Let me tell you what pride does produce. Pride produces shame, trouble, and destruction. The Bible says in Proverbs 11 and verse 2, "When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." When pride cometh, then cometh shame. Pride is a root sin. Do you know that pride is behind adultery and fornication?

Stop and think about it. You say, “Brother Weaver, I thought that was lust.” That is true. But why would a man do that? Because he thinks his needs and desires are more important than anything else. That is pride. Pride is behind theft. Why would a man steal? Because he believes that his needs, wants, and desires are more important than anything else. Pride is a root sin.

The Bible says, “When pride comes, then comes shame.” Proverbs 13:10 says, “Only by pride cometh contention.” What does that mean? At the base, foundation, and root of every fight is pride. “When pride comes, then cometh contention.”

You have probably heard Proverbs 16:18 quoted: “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Inevitably,

pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10, “He that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” When you think you have it made, take heed, lest you fall.

God's Opposition to the Proud

The effects and fruit of pride are not its only detriment. Pride not only brings us low, but also brings us an enemy with whom we really do not want to tangle. Turn to Proverbs 6 and consider what God says He hates. “These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him.” They are “a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” What has first place among the things God hates? A proud look—a haughty attitude.

A high and mighty disposition is an abomination to God. Proverbs 16 says, "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished." Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. May I remind you what the word abomination means? Abomination literally means a stench in God's nostrils. Every one that is proud in heart is a stench in God's nostrils.

And God says, "Though hand join in hand," that is, when the wicked get together and say, "Yeah, we're going to overthrow God," or, "Yeah, we're going to fix it where God can't do what He says He's going to do," or, "Yeah, we're going to rebel against God. We'll join hands with that." That's kind of like that slogan, "United we stand." You can be as united against God as you want to be. "Though hand join in hand, the proud shall not go unpunished."

How much does God hate pride? The fruits and effects of pride are not the only problem with pride. Pride will bring us an enemy that we really do not want to tangle with. James 4:6 says, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The Bible says God resisteth the proud, but He giveth grace to the humble.

The same truth appears in 1 Peter 5:5: "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Why should we be clothed with humility? "For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

The word resist literally means to fight against. God fights against the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Dear friend, let me ask you a question: If God merely left us to ourselves, and did nothing to us, and did nothing for us, what would happen?

We would wither and die. All God has to do to destroy us is nothing. How much worse is it then when God appears in arms fighting against a man? God resists, or fights against, or contends with the proud. But He gives more grace to the humble. You see, God will only use humble men. The proud men God fights against, God resists.

You remember old Nebuchadnezzar? He was the proud, arrogant, haughty monarch that God decided he was going to teach a lesson. Nebuchadnezzar thought that the kingdom he had was by his might and power. God said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. For seven years I'm going to drive you out in the woods and you're going to live like an animal. Your fingernails are going to grow like birds' claws. Your hair will grow like birds' feathers until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men and gives it to whomever He will."

Biblical Examples of Humbling the Proud

Daniel says, "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility." But Nebuchadnezzar would not hear. "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken;

The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

"The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws."

At the end of seven years, God gave Nebuchadnezzar back his understanding and restored his kingdom. Look what he confesses in verse 37: “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.” I think he got the message. Living seven years like an animal is quite sufficient to abase somebody.

Luke 14:11 says, “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Do you realize that the real difference between Christianity and the world can be summarized like this? The world says the way up is to exalt yourself and get as high as you can. God says the way up is down. If you abase yourself, God will exalt you.

This is not speaking of merely a humanistic abasing of yourself, or berating yourself for the sake of berating yourself. It speaks of having a biblical attitude. The same truth appears in Luke 18:14, concerning the publican: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

True Humility: Dependence on God

One of the requirements for a pastor, specifically stated in 1 Timothy 3:6, is, “Not a novice,” that is, not merely a young man, but a young, inexperienced individual, “not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” Pride has brought down many pastors, many Christians, and many people.

What did Gideon do? He did not say, “All right, God, You have the right man. Yes, sir. I’ll do it. I can do it. I’ve got the strength.” No. He said, “Lord, how in the world could You use me? My family’s poor and I’m the least in my father’s house. I am nothing. I have nothing special to offer. The only thing that I can give You, Lord, is my son.” That is really where each of us is. The only thing we have that we can give is ourselves.

What is humility? Let me tell you what humility is not. Humility is not walking around with your head down, looking at the ground or the floor. That is not humility; that is poor posture. Just because someone drops his head does not mean that he is humble.

Humility is when we take the place of a child and acknowledge God as our Father. What does a child know in comparison to the Father? Nothing. So we come to God and say, “We’re the child. You’re the Father.” We come to Him and say, “You’re the Lord. We’re the servant. We don’t even know what to do. You tell us what to do. You tell us where to go.” We come to God as the Creator, acknowledging that we are the creature. We come to God as the subject, and He is the King.

Humility is when we recognize that everything we are and everything we have is only by the grace and mercy of God, and that God is all and in all. If you want to know what humility is, here it is. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul the Apostle said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Paul said, “For I am what I am by the grace of God.” Had God not saved and called him, he would still have been the persecuting, blaspheming individual who consented to murder before God had mercy upon him. He was only a Christian by the grace of God. Then he said, “And his grace which was bestowed upon me, which was given to me, was not in vain.”

He also said, “I laboured more abundantly than they all.” He was the hardest worker. “Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” The only reason he was able to do what he did and accomplish

what he accomplished was that the grace of God was working in him, through him, and with him.

How much credit did the Apostle Paul take for his conversion? None. How much credit did he take for everything he had done in the service of Christ? None. He acknowledged that it was all of God. Paul understood what real biblical humility was and is. He said, "God working in me and through me," and he was willing to give all the honor and glory to God.

The Bible says in Isaiah 26:12, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us." If we ever do anything right, holy, godly, or righteous, it is only because God is working in us and through us. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, said, "Humility is a right estimate of oneself." That is what Romans 12:3 teaches.

Humility is not denying the power or gifting you have, but admitting that the gifting is from God and the power comes through you and not from you. First Corinthians 4:7 very clearly teaches this: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

Let us go back to this first question: "Who made you to differ one from another?" All of us have family members who are unsaved. Why is it that God saved you and not the others? Who made you to differ? Was it because you were smarter, more intellectual, or less depraved? Did you use your will better than someone else? No. It was God who made the difference. It was His grace and His mercy.

Now let me ask you another question: "What do you have that you have not received?" Dr. Bowen says, "Well, I have all this medical knowledge." I know he does have a lot of medical knowledge. But who gave him his mind? Who gave him the ability to use his mind? Who gave him the ability to retain what he knows?

God Rewards Humility with His Presence

I have had people tell me, and I am thankful for an honest compliment, "Brother Weaver, you are a good preacher." I thank them for that, but every gift that I have comes from God. If God had

not given it to me, I would not have it. True humility is not denying that you have a gift; it is acknowledging that the gift you have is from God. Had God not given it to you, you would never have had it.

Look in Judges 6, verse 14. This shows how God rewards true humility. He does not reward false or fake humility. “And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?”

“Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” Gideon had properly assessed who he was, including his gifts and abilities. He said, “I have nothing in and of myself.” Here is the reward in verse 16: “And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee.” Since you know who you are, and that you cannot do anything and have nothing in yourself, I will be with you and take care of it.

Now turn to Isaiah 57 and look at verse 15. You are talking about a promise and a blessing: “For thus saith the high and lofty One.”

God Himself is speaking: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place.” And He does. But that is not all in this verse: “With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” Where do you find God’s peculiar presence? Not just in His high and holy place, but particularly with the humble and contrite ones. That is where I dwell. There is where I reveal My presence.

Andrew Murray wrote a wonderful little book on humility. Here is what he says: “Humility is the place of entire dependence on God. It is from the very nature of things the first duty and the highest virtue of man. It is the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of humility, is the root of every sin and evil. Humility is not so much a grace or a virtue along with the others. It is the root of all, because it assumes the right attitude before God and allows God to do all. Humility is simply the sense of entire nothingness which comes when we see how truly God is all and in which we make way for God to be all.” Humility is nothing more than the place of entire dependence upon God.

Have you ever stopped to think about the preaching of the gospel? The success of the gospel of Jesus Christ does not depend on oratory, illustrations, sermon outlines, or any other ability a man may have. It depends upon God Himself. Therefore, a preacher must realize that, regardless of any gift God has given him, he is still nothing.

Moses: An Example of Humbling

What did the Apostle Paul say in 1 Corinthians 3? "One plants, or one sows, one waters," but it is God who giveth the increase. That is the way it is, or that is the way it should be, in every field. I do not care if you are a medical doctor, a veterinarian, a book buyer, an engineer, or a pipe fitter. I do not care who you are. You have got to understand that God has made you what you are, and God has given you everything that you have: every gift and every ability. You see, God uses humble men. What is a humble man? Somebody who knows that God is all and in all.

Now let me tell you, if God is going to use a man and he is not humble, the first thing God will do is humble him. Sometimes humbling hurts. You do not like it too well.

Proverbs 15:33 says, "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility." Before honour is humility. Proverbs 18:12 says it a little differently, but it gives us the same truth: "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility."

Let me give you an illustration and then try to tie everything together. Outside of Jesus Christ, who was the meekest man on earth that the Scripture tells us? I am not referring to Jesus Christ; He is excluded from the question. Who was the meekest man? Moses.

Look in Numbers 12:3. The Bible tells you specifically, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." So the meekest man outside of Christ was Moses. Now look in Acts 7. You know how God was going to use Moses to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt, and Moses knew that God was going to use him. Acts 7:24 says, "And seeing one of them suffer wrong," that is, an Israelite suffered wrong.

He defended him and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them, but they understood not. The next day, when he saw two of his brethren fighting, one of them said, “Art thou going to kill me the way you killed the Egyptian yesterday?” Fear struck his heart. If that man knew, others knew, and it would not be long before his head was on the chopping block. So Moses fled because he had endeavored to deliver Israel himself, in his own strength and in his own way.

Where did he end up? In the desert, not in a palace. That was humbling. He was not leading a nation but tending sheep, and he was working not for a Pharaoh or a king but for his own father-in-law. That was extremely humbling.

His time in the desert was not a short weekend vacation Bible school or a two-week retreat to regroup and rethink. He spent forty years there, learning to commune with God and unlearning everything he had learned in Egypt. He spent forty years realizing that God was everything. When God called Moses at the end of those forty years, he had learned, first, to be content with the lowly shepherd’s task; secondly, his own frailty; thirdly, meekness through the hard life in the wilderness; and, above all, that God was everything, that everything depended upon God, and that God must receive the honor and glory, not man.

Pride says that we have value in ourselves. Humility says we have value only because we are created in the image of God. Pride says we should pursue self-actualization; humility says we should be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Pride says we should determine our own spiritual values; humility says we should seek God and His values as revealed in His word. Pride says glory resides in man; humility says glory resides in God.

Contrast Between Pride and Humility

Where does virtue come from? What is its ultimate source? Pride says man; humility says God. A humble man is willing to do whatever God assigns, in the manner God requires, accomplishes it in the spirit and power of God, and gives all the glory and honor to God. He recognizes the sovereignty and supremacy of God.

The Importance of Humility

In Isaiah 42:8, God said, "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another." A humble man recognizes the sovereignty and supremacy of God.

Everyone knows who Helen Keller was. She said, "I long to accomplish a great and noble task. But it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble." She also said, "The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker." She understood that her station in life was to do humble things as though they were great and noble.

Applications: Humility for National Healing and Averting Judgment

That is an understanding of humility. Humility is the soul of contentment in whatever service of God He allows us to perform for Him. Whether that service is great or small, it matters not.

Let me make a couple of applications. Humility is not only required; it is the first requirement if our nation is to be healed. We may understand its importance because God fights against the proud and gives more grace to the humble, but how important is humility? It is the first requirement for our nation's healing.

Humility and the Immediate Judgment of God

Everyone in here can quote 2 Chronicles 7:14: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves.” Do you understand that we will never pray, never repent, and never seek God’s face unless we humble ourselves? Humility is absolutely necessary if this nation will ever be called back to a righteous foundation. We have to come to the realization that we cannot do it in and of ourselves.

We have no abilities and no power. We must submit ourselves to God, humble ourselves, recognize His sovereignty, His supremacy, and His power, do what He says, and trust Him to heal our land. That is true humility.

Secondly, humility and humility alone will ward off the immediate judgment of God. In 2 Chronicles 12:6, “Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The Lord is righteous.” They had heard they were going to be destroyed. They humbled themselves and said, “The Lord is righteous.” “And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them.”

“But I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.” Why did God not immediately destroy them by the hand of Shishak? He said they had humbled themselves. That warded off the immediate judgment of God.

In verse 11, the king entered into the house of the Lord: “And when the king entered into the house of the Lord, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber. And when he humbled himself,” when the king humbled himself, “the wrath of the Lord turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.” What was it that warded off the immediate judgment of God? It was humility.

In 2 Chronicles 34, beginning with verse 27, God told the king, “Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same.”

They brought the king word again. The king humbled himself, and God said, “Look, I'm going to judge this place, but since you've humbled yourself, I'm not going to do it in your time. You'll come to your grave in peace.” What did humility do? It staved off the immediate judgment of God.

In chapter 32 and verse 26, you have Hezekiah. God had told Hezekiah to set his house in order, that he was going to die and not live. The Bible says, “Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” Because they humbled themselves, God delivered them.

One example may surprise us appears in 1 Kings chapter 21. I have asked on numerous occasions: who is the most wicked king in Israel? The answer is Ahab, the most wicked king in the northern kingdom. He had murdered Naboth and his sons, then gone down into Naboth's garden to claim it for himself. God sent Elijah and said, “Where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, they’re going to lick your own blood.”

In 1 Kings chapter 21, verse 28, “And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house.” As wicked, ungodly, murderous, and reprobate as Ahab was, when he humbled himself, God said, “I will still judge him, but I’m not going to bring all the evil upon his family in his day; I’ll wait until his son gets on the throne.” Why? Because he humbled himself. Humility will ward off the immediate judgment of God.

Humility is the secret of service in serving God. Acts 20:19 says, “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind.” If we are to serve the Lord as the Apostle Paul did, it must be with all humility of mind—free of pride, arrogance, haughtiness, and superiority. We need to know, not merely intellectually but practically, that we are what we are only by the grace of God, and have what we have only by the grace of God. It is one thing to say this; quite another to apply it, live like it, and give God all the glory.

Conclusion: Serving with Humility

When God uses men, He will come to a man of character, discernment, and humility who recognizes that he has nothing in himself and no abilities apart from God, so that God might be all and in all. Let us pray. Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that

You would indeed help us and teach us. Above all, Father, make us humble. Give us, Lord, humility.

It is the foundation of all other graces. It's the root of good, like pride is the root of evil and wickedness. May we walk before Thee in lowliness of mind. May we recognize Your calling, Your gifts, Your graces, Your mercies, and present our bodies unto thee a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto thee, our reasonable service, being not conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds. Help us to serve thee. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Prerequisites to be Used by God - 4

Review of Previous Prerequisites

For those of you who are visiting with us today, let me point out the fact that you are getting the fourth message in a series that I started four weeks ago entitled, Prerequisites to be Used of God. I had preached several months ago on Judges chapter 6 and 7, on the life of Gideon. Then I was simply rereading the passage and saw some other truths that I wanted to bring out. So today we are going to be reading from Judges chapter six, beginning with verse eleven, and I will take a few moments to review before we get started.

And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak, which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?

But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

SCRIPTURE READING - Judges 6:19-27 (KJV)

> And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face.
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> And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him: and so it was, because he

feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.

God uses men. He does not use committees or corporations; He uses men. Read Hebrews chapter 11 for confirmation of this fact. When God uses men, certain prerequisites must be in them. God always searches for men whose hearts are right toward Him. According to 2 Chronicles 16:9, He found such a man in Gideon.

The very first message I brought on the prerequisites that must be in us for God to use us was that Gideon was a man of character. I pointed out numerous things about his character, specifically that he was a hard worker, an honest man, and wise and innovative. He was not easily discouraged, and yet he was also a man of faith. Here was a man who had real, genuine character.

If there is one thing to remember from that first message, it is this: God may use us on credit during the first years of our life. After that, He will use us on character. If we have no character, we might as well forget ever being used of God. God uses men of character.

The second thing is that God uses men of discernment and understanding. In Judges 6, after the angel of the Lord said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour,” I pointed out that the word valor refers not only to strength in a military sense, but also to virtue. That is how we understand Gideon to have been a man of character. When he heard, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour,” Gideon said in verse 13, “Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all these miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

Gideon was not whining, complaining, or murmuring. He was properly and accurately assessing and evaluating the situation in which he and the nation found themselves, and he was telling the truth. God had delivered them into the hands of the Midianites, and they were indeed being oppressed and persecuted.

Here was a man who was not willing to sugarcoat or whitewash. He was literally calling everything as it really, genuinely was. God is going to use men who are men of understanding and discernment.

Gideon was also acknowledging his sin, the sin of his people, and the sin of the nation. The third thing about the man God uses is that he must be a man who is called and sent of God.

The Bible tells us very clearly that the Lord looked upon him, verse 14, and said, “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” If God is to use us, we must be called and sent by God. Whenever God calls and sends a man, He always equips that man, and there is always the promised presence of God.

Gideon was also a man of humility. When the Lord said, “Have not I sent thee?” he said unto him, “Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.” Gideon was saying, “I am nothing. I have nothing. There is nothing that I can offer You except myself.” Here was a man who properly discerned and understood the reality of the situation, and who properly assessed his own gifts. As Romans chapter 12 teaches us, we are to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. God has given us a gift, but we are to properly assess that gift and not think of ourselves in a prideful or arrogant manner.

God not only does not use proud, arrogant, haughty men; He actually fights against them. The Bible says that God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. That is why the Bible says, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

Most people do not know what humility is. Walking around with your head down and looking at the ground is not humility; it is poor posture. Moses was the meekest man on earth. Humility is not being a doormat or letting people wipe their feet all over you. Numbers chapter 12 and verse 3 calls Moses the meekest man on earth.

I read something years ago that showed the misunderstanding people have of meekness. Someone had written on a bathroom wall, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,” a Scripture from Matthew 5. Someone else had written underneath it, “If that’s all right.” That is a bad misunderstanding of humility and meekness.

Do you know what Moses, the meekest man on earth, did? Moses got on his knees and said, “Lord, I pray that a new thing will happen. I pray that the earth will open up and these rebels against you will go down alive into hell.” Now that was meekness. Meekness, humility, and reality go together. Meekness is disciplined strength under God.

Disciplined strength is like the horse. I have a horse that probably weighs 1,400 pounds. He is a humongous horse. Once you put a bridle on him, he is disciplined. I can control 1,400 pounds like that. But without that bit in his mouth, I cannot control anything. When our Lord says, “Take my yoke upon you,” He is saying, “You submit to my discipline.” Meekness means that we know when to move, how to move, and how to act. We always act biblically and scripturally.

Gideon was a man of humility. He was also a man with a sacrificial and worshipful attitude. Look at verses 17 and 19: “And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.”

Sacrificial and Worshipful Attitude

Gideon went in, made ready a kid and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour, put the flesh in a basket and the broth in a pot, brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. This is indeed a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearing of Christ in the Old Testament. Gideon was coming with a sacrificial gift. He had asked for a sign in verse 17: “If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me.”

He now realized that it was the Lord. Originally, he had addressed the angel respectfully as “Lord,” meaning boss or sovereign. Now he acknowledged that it was indeed Christ Himself.

When Gideon asked for a sign, this was not an act of unbelief; it was an act of faith. Consider this simple truth: after seven years of intense persecution, when everything you had had been taken from you and you had been driven to mountains, dens, and caves of the earth, according to Judges 6:1–2, if a stranger simply appeared to you and promised deliverance through you, would you not want to

make sure that the one speaking to you was indeed the Lord? Would you not want to make sure, “This is God, and this is the Word of God”? Gideon asked for a sign in line with biblical truth, seeking it in reference to a meal. “If it is really You who is talking to me, Lord, wait until I prepare a meal and bring it to You.”

We must understand the mentality of the Middle East, especially in Bible times. A meal was eaten only with family and friends and was part of the culture. Even the Arabs, who are Islamic, have a general rule: if they feed you and extend hospitality to you, they must protect you, because they have shared a meal with you.

Here is the biblical concept: if You are truly the Lord and are going to use me, then wait and let me share this meal with You. In biblical times, to share salt and a meal meant entering into a covenant of communion with an individual. Gideon would then know not only that God was promising him deliverance, but that God was indeed restoring fellowship to His people if He would have a meal with him.

Remember that Gideon said, in Judges 6:15, “Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? For behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.” Gideon was a poor man, and his family was poor. Judges 6:3 says, “And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude. For both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.”

Practically everything had been taken away. Gideon truthfully acknowledged that he was a poor man and that his family was poor. Yet, while Gideon and his family were poor, Gideon was certainly not a stingy, selfish, grudging individual. He shared and prepared a sacrificial meal of bread, broth, and meat.

Consider how difficult it was to procure meal, or flour, at that time. What was Gideon doing? He was beating out wheat with a

stick, as poor people did. It was hard, meticulous work. He had been beating out this wheat with a stick, and what Gideon brought our Lord was exceedingly generous. The Bible says in verse 19, “And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour.”

You may not know how much an ephah is, so hold Judges chapter six and look very quickly in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 16, verse 16. Here you read about an omer, which, according to the Bible, was the portion of manna for one person per day: “This is the thing which the Lord hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents.” Each man received an omer. Now look at verse 36: “Now an omer is the tenth part of an ephah.” It takes ten omers to make an ephah. An ephah, basically speaking, according to our unit of measuring, was twenty-two and a half pounds of flour. You can make a lot of biscuits with twenty-two and a half pounds of flour.

So what did Gideon do? He brought an ephah of flour. Moreover, note what else he did in Judges chapter 6, verse 19: “He made ready a kid of the goats.” Undoubtedly, this had to be a tremendously sacrificial meal on Gideon’s behalf, because most of the animals had been confiscated or stolen by the Midianites and the Amalekites. Somehow, Gideon in his prudence had been able to save at least one kid of the goats. Maybe he had more. He did have a bullock; we know that for a fact. But he took twenty-two and a half pounds of flour and a kid of the goats, made a meal, and brought it to the Lord.

One has to wonder: Since Gideon had acknowledged that he and his family were poor, how could he afford to be so generous? How long would it take you, with a stick, to beat out twenty-two and a half pounds of flour if you were beating out heads of wheat? It would take a long time. How could Gideon afford to be so generous? After giving the flour and the kid, undoubtedly he and his family may have had to do without for some time afterward. But he was willing to do this, that the Lord might be honored.

The Nature of True Sacrifice

I have found out, not only biblically but practically speaking, that it is usually poor people who really give sacrificially. It is not usually the rich. I am not saying that rich people never sacrifice, but it is really not much of a sacrifice when you have plenty. When you have practically nothing and you give, that is truly giving sacrificially.

Our Lord observed the same principle in Mark 12:41-44: "And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

Do you see the difference? Here is a man who has a million dollars, and he comes by and casts $50,000 into the plate. What is $50,000 to a millionaire? But here is a widow woman who comes by and casts in two mites—let us say, equal to a penny today. Our Lord said that the widow woman cast in more than all the rich. Why? Because she cast in everything that she had. It was her living.

This concept is enlarged upon in giving under the Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 8:1, as he takes up an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem, he says, "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;"

"How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

Here they were poor, and yet they were giving. They were sacrificial. When the heart is right, it does not really matter how little one has; there will always be a gracious and generous spirit.

Let me give you two illustrations. Years ago, I was preaching in St. Petersburg, Florida. My aunt and uncle were members of the church in which I was preaching, and that week I spent with them. While I was at church one night, a widow lady came up to me and asked me if I would have supper with her the next night. I said I would be happy to, but I did not know, because my aunt was keeping a schedule of where I was supposed to eat.

I went to see my aunt and asked, "Where am I eating tomorrow night?" She said, "You're eating with us. We're having steak and this and that." I told her that a lady had asked me to eat at her house. If there was a conflict, I was not going to say yes. She said, "Oh, please eat at her house. I'll fix you steak for breakfast. Just please eat at her house."

I asked why. She said, "She's a widow woman. She has nothing. She's poor. All the speakers that come here, most of them will never, ever go to her house because they don't want to impose upon her." I turned around, went back, and said, "Ma'am, would you like me to eat with you tomorrow night?"

She said, "Oh, I would." I said, "I'd be pleased to come to your house." She set the time, and I went to her house for supper. Do you know what that little woman fed me? I had one fried egg, a tablespoon of applesauce, and a piece of bread. She didn't even have that. She just ate a little bit of applesauce. Let me tell you, I've never in my life had a meal that I appreciated more than that one. Did I have enough? No. Would I rather have had something else? Yes. But that little woman wanted to give to me and wanted to share what she had. Before I left, I made sure she had some money for groceries. When I went back and talked to that pastor, I made sure he knew that she needed some help. But here was a woman who had nothing, and she was going to feed me while she did without herself.

My wife and I were also invited to go to another city in Florida, where I was to preach. The man who invited me was a multimillionaire. At that particular time in our lives, Alice and I were in dire straits and needed some help. We really did. A pastor friend knew this man well and said, "Oh, Brother Weaver, I know this man. He'll help you. He'll do something for you." I said, "Well, that'll be wonderful if it happens." We went down and were able to stay with

our daughter, who at that time lived in Tampa. Then we went to another little town to preach. I preached that morning and that night. When I came back into the area, my pastor friend asked, "What did the brother do for you?" I said, "He took us out to lunch." He said, "What?" I said, "He took us out to lunch."

He said, "He didn't try to offer to help you in any way?" I said, "No." "He didn't offer to give you a gift?" "No." He was visibly upset. Then I said, "Look, don't be upset. You know what I've discovered in my life? Rich people very seldom help other folks. That doesn't mean they don't, but they very seldom do. I've found that most of my life, the people who have helped me have been poor or what you and I would call moderate. Why rich people are rich is usually because they keep what they have."

They are not willing to sacrifice or to give. Has it ever occurred to you that faithful, consistent giving, no matter the amount, is usually the way the work of God is supported? Very seldom is the work of God supported by one or two large gifts. Gideon was poor, yet he was willing to sacrifice and give what he could to honor the Lord. Gideon offered the Lord bread, broth, and meat.

In Leviticus 7:15–34, you will find that this was what was involved in a peace offering. Gideon was actually fulfilling part of the Mosaic law in offering a peace offering, and the unhewed rock was the altar. God said in Exodus chapter 20 that if you build Him an altar of rock, you cannot lift a tool upon it; if you do, it is defiled.

Gideon's Worship and God's Peace

Gideon put the meat and bread on the rock and poured out the broth unto the Lord. Then the Lord touched it, and instantly fire came up from the rock, and the meal was consumed. What was Gideon's response? The angel of God said unto him, "Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

When Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face.”

In other words, Gideon thought he was going to die. Why would that be his response? Why would he be so awestruck and terrified? Because Gideon had a biblical concept of God's holiness, majesty, and greatness. You and I are so often flippant with God and the things of God because we do not have a proper concept of His awesomeness.

Do you remember Isaiah chapter 6? Isaiah said, “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” When Isaiah saw the Lord in his vision, he cried out in verse 5, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” He understood the greatness, majesty, and holiness of God, and thought that he, too, would die.

Do you remember the Apostle John in Revelation 1 and verse 17? He heard the voice and turned behind him to look. He saw the One standing there with the golden girdle, His face like the sun. What did John say? “I fell at his feet as dead.” He had an understanding of God's holiness, majesty, and greatness.

It would do us well to go back through the Bible and review every attribute of God taught and given to us there. If we do not really know who God is, we cannot properly comprehend or understand His greatness, majesty, and sovereignty.

But look what God did. In verse 23, the Lord said unto him, “Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.” Had Gideon been going to die, God would never have accepted the meal or entered into communion with him. Gideon knew that, but it dawned on him how great, glorious, and majestic God really was. So God spoke in consolation to Gideon: “Fear not, thou shalt not die.”

In all probability, what Gideon sacrificed was a large percentage of that which his family had to live on. This meant that Gideon was now in the position of having to trust the Lord for deliverance. If God did not come through, he and his family might starve. At this point Gideon worshiped. In verse 24, we read, "Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom."

"Unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites." Just as God gave Phinehas, in Numbers 25:12, His covenant of peace, so God gave Gideon a covenant of peace. Gideon built an altar and worshiped. This altar was not for sacrifice, but was a memorial and witness to God's revelation to Gideon. In the Bible, whenever God peculiarly and particularly revealed Himself to someone, that person was peculiarly and particularly worshiped there.

God revealed Himself to Abraham in Genesis 22:14, and Abraham built an altar and called it Jehovah-jireh. God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 17:15, and Moses built an altar and called it Jehovah-nissi. Likewise, Gideon built an altar and called it Jehovah-shalom—that is, "the Lord is our peace." God had promised peace, and Gideon expected Him to give what He had promised; therefore, Gideon bowed and worshiped.

Most Christians, even most preachers, do not know how to worship, what worship is, or what acceptable worship is. Many think that attending a sermon, hearing a preacher, putting a quarter in the offering plate, singing a song or two, and going home constitutes worship. That is the furthest thing from the truth. You could sit in any church building in this nation twenty-four hours a day and never worship God.

Music has a part, and preaching has a part, but you must worship God in spirit and in truth. If you do not, there is no acceptable worship unto God. Gideon worshiped—not only through sacrificial giving, but also through worship itself. As prayer can be made without ceasing, so a worshipful attitude may be constantly maintained. Psalm 50:23 says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." We may praise God daily and hourly, recognizing His greatness and worshiping Him accordingly. Gideon had a sacrificial and worshipful attitude: he was willing to give, and he was willing to worship.

Gideon: A Man of Biblical Action

Biblical Action: Immediate Obedience

The sixth and final thing to share about Gideon is that he was a man of biblical action. Look in verse 25: “And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it.”

I have used the phrase “Gideon was a man of biblical action” to cover a multitude of truths. Gideon was a man of whom much could be said, much like it was said of John the Baptist. You remember when the Pharisees sent men to John the Baptist to ask who he was? In John 1:23, John answered, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.” In other words, straighten things out and bring things into conformity with the Word of God.

Let it be pointed out and duly noted that the same day God spoke to Gideon, that night he moved. I do not know what time of day it was. It could have been morning, dinner time, or afternoon. But that very day God spoke, that same night Gideon moved. He was not wasting any time.

He understood the principle our Lord enunciated in Luke 2:49 when He said, “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” Gideon knew that the Father's business required immediate attention, and he immediately went to work on the Lord's business.

There is an important principle here: the Lord and His work are to have precedence over everything else. Just as the Lord comes first in our lives, His work is to come first in our lives. Gideon stopped what he was doing—threshing wheat—and took care of the Lord's business. If we are going to be men of biblical action, we must obey God, and we must obey God immediately.

Secondly, there were things in Gideon's life and in the life of his family that had to be dealt with. What were they? Look in verse 25.

It came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it. So Gideon's family had an image of Baal and an image of the grove.

Baal is recognized as the false god. Baal means Lord, and Baalism is indeed a statist concept and a statist idolatry. The female counterpart to Baal is Asherah, or the Asherim. Every time you see the word grove in the Bible, with the exception of Genesis 21 and verse 33, it refers to Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of sex. Baal and Asherah were the two main Canaanite deities. When you read the word grove in the Bible, it is not talking about a grove of trees, except in Genesis 21 verse 33. Sixteen times the word grove is used in our Bibles, and each of those sixteen times it is the word Asherah or Asherim, plural.

Usually the Asherah or the Asherim was a wood carving of this false goddess of sex. Deuteronomy 16:21 says, Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the Lord thy God, which thou shalt make thee. This does not simply mean planting maples, pecans, and jasmine trees. The grove being planted is the Asherah, which deals with the sex goddess of Canaan. In 1 Kings 15:13, we see the same reference to this idolatrous image.

Here it is stated again. King Asa removed his mother: “And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it at the brook Kidron.” The grove was the Asherah.

Look in 1 Kings 16:33. Here is Ahab: “And Ahab made a grove; not a planting of trees, but he made an Asherah. And Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.”

Then look in 2 Kings 21:7. Here is Manasseh, the most wicked king of Judah. “And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, that is in the temple, of which the Lord said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever.”

So Manasseh, as wicked as he was, put an image of a wicked Canaanite sex goddess in the temple. God called upon Gideon to make things right, first of all, in his own life and in the life of his family. If Gideon wanted to be used to deliver his people from the Midianites, he had to take down the altar of Baal and tear down the grove, the image of the Canaanite goddess. He had to make things right in his own home first.

God will never use us to rebuke others unless we are willing to be rebuked ourselves. He will never use us to call others to repentance unless we are willing to be called to repentance ourselves. How can we tell other people to set their houses in order if our house is not in order?

May I simply quote 1 Peter 3:7? “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.” If you husbands are not right with your wives, your prayers are hindered. Things are not right in your own home, your own family, or your own life. How can God use you to straighten out someone else when you are not willing to be straightened out yourself? You must make things right in your own family.

Do you realize that one of the qualifications for a pastor and one of the qualifications for a deacon, found in 1 Timothy chapter 3, is that he “ruleth well his own house”?

I do not believe that requirement means every individual in that house must be saved. It would certainly be helpful if they were, but what God is saying is that the house must be under the control of the head of that house. Why is God not requiring every individual in that house to be saved? Because only God can save. There is no pastor, deacon, or anyone else who can save; only God can save.

I can elicit forty professions from each of my children, but unless God saves them, they are not saved, no matter how many professions they make. I must have my house in subjection. I must have them under control. I must be able to rule my house. That is exactly what God is saying to Gideon.

You want Me to use you? Then get things right in your own house first. You have sins that need to be dealt with. You have an altar of Baal and an altar to Asherah. Tear them down. Get rid of them.

Years ago, my wife will probably remember this, my aunt and uncle went to Hawaii and brought us a gift: a wooden carved salt and pepper shaker of the Tiki gods. I thanked my aunt, put it on my table, and looked at it. I thought, "I sure don't want that in my house." I know the Tiki gods are nothing, but I did not even want it in my house. As soon as my aunt had gone, I took the shakers and threw them in the trash. I appreciated the gift, but I did not want any false gods around me.

If God is going to use us, we must have things right in our lives, in our families, and in our houses. Here is a third truth, connected with the first two: when fellowship is restored, reformation has to—and does—begin immediately. God came to Gideon, and that day and night Gideon started moving. It is useless to talk about a relationship with God while we continue in sin, rebellion, and disobedience.

What did our Lord say in Luke 6:46? "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Remember, the word Lord means boss, owner, master, sovereign. The Lord said, Why are you calling me Lord if you are not obeying me? If I am really your boss, sovereign, and master, you will obey me.

When someone talks about a relationship with God while his life is in absolute rebellion, with known sin, wickedness, and disobedience, he is blowing smoke in the breeze. If there is a relationship, and if that relationship is right, there will be reformation immediately. It may not be perfect, total, or complete, but you will begin changing and bringing your life into conformity to the Word of God. It will be a sure, progressive, and biblical change.

Here is the fourth truth: the change produced in our lives will be an announcement and acknowledgment that we are now on God's side. In other words, it will be a public confession of faith. Our Lord said in Matthew 12:30, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

When we bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God, we acknowledge that we are on God's side. Our change from

disobedience to obedience, rebellion to submission, and defiance to humility demonstrates that we have sided with the one true and living God, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

Whoever will serve the Lord must abolish the altar of Baal. Whoever is going to serve God must get rid of all the false gods in his life. The altar of Baal and the altar of Jehovah cannot coexist side by side. If you are going to build the altar to Jehovah, what did Gideon have to do first? He had to tear down the altar of Baal. You cannot have the altar of Jehovah unless you are willing to tear down the altar to Baal.

Putting Away False Gods

Do you remember Isaiah 1, verses 16 and 17? God tells us there that we are to cease to do evil and learn to do good. You cannot learn to do good until you cease to do evil. In Amos 5, verse 15, He says, "Hate the evil, and love the good." You cannot love the good until you hate the evil. Make our change. We have got to understand that we are coming out publicly, that we are on God's side.

God does not approve of syncretism. God will not be worshipped at the altar of syncretism. Syncretism is when you try to merge paganism and Christianity, when you try to have the altar of Baal and the altar of Jehovah side by side. It will not work. It cannot work. They are mutually exclusive. Either Jesus Christ is Lord, or Baal is Lord, but you cannot have both as Lord. If you are going to worship Jesus Christ, you must tear down the altar to Baal. It is just that simple. You are saying, in the war on humanism, "I am coming out on God's side."

It is true that Gideon did what he did by night, but he still did it in obedience to God. Baal may be tolerant, but the one true and living God is not. You know what God said in Isaiah 42, in verse 8? He said, "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." God, the one true and living God, is the most intolerant being you will ever get hooked up with. When Israel came into the land, you know what He told them to do?

You tear down their altars. You destroy them. Why? Because Baal and God cannot coexist together. In this, there can be no halting between two opinions. One of the saddest verses in the Bible is found in 1 Kings 18:21, when Elijah was on Mount Carmel facing the prophets of Baal. He asked, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" If Baal be God, then worship him; if Jehovah be God, then worship him. Do not go around limping, trying to syncretize them and get them together. If Baal is God, worship Baal. But if he is not God, worship Jehovah and kick Baal out. It is that simple.

A fifth truth is also evident in this passage: if we are truly desirous of deliverance, we will be willing to get rid of the false gods in our lives. It is not just Baal, but any and all false gods. In Genesis 35, Jacob is coming back into the land and going back to Bethel. Notice what he says, beginning with verse 1: "And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem."

When Jacob was going back to make sure everything was exactly the way God ordered and ordained, he said, "Put away your false gods." He was talking to everybody who was with him, and they put them away.

The problem is that many people may not have one main false god such as Baal, yet they have many little strange gods around them. God says they need to be gotten rid of. In Joshua 24:23, Joshua tells the people, "Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel." The people answered, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." Put away the strange gods from among you. You will find the same command in 1 Samuel 7, 2 Chronicles 14, and 2

Chronicles 33. Every time, the command is to put away the strange gods.

Acting on God's Authority

We had better put away every false idea, every wrong impression, and every wicked concept that we have concerning the one true and living God, and worship Him as He is fully revealed in the Word of God. Now, if you look back in Judges 6, there is one final truth to emphasize. This is found in several verses in the chapter, including verse 25: "And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him." Over and over, the Lord said unto him, or the Lord said unto Gideon.

When we act upon the Word of God and upon the authority of God, we are bound to succeed and are always bound to have His blessings and His presence. We will never be left holding the bag by obeying God. We will never suffer loss through obedience. When we act in God's authority, in obedience to His Word, we must understand that where His Word is, there He is—in the totality of His person and in the totality of His power. God used Gideon. This ought to be a tremendous encouragement. We are never going to get all the people in this land together, nor are we even going to get all the Christians together. But God has never used a majority anyhow; He has always used a minority. God took Gideon and three hundred men and delivered Israel from the bondage of the Midianites. There are enough people in this room for God to use. We simply have to make ourselves usable and present ourselves. If God uses us, that is wonderful. If He does not, that is wonderful as well.

He chooses whomever He pleases, and He uses whomever He pleases. But if we expect God to use us, we must be men of character, men of discernment, men who are called and sent of God, men of humility, men of sacrificial and worshipful attitudes, and men of biblical action. God will not use any other kind except to their destruction and their condemnation. If we want God to deliver our nation, we must be willing to say, as Isaiah, "Here am I; send me."

The Cost of Being Used by God

We cry many times to be used of God, and we want to be used of God. But when we talk about being used of God, usually in our minds we are considering all the blessings and benefits that God bestows upon us. But remember, in Isaiah 6, when Isaiah said, “Here am I; send me,” the Lord said, “All right, Isaiah, I’m going to send you.” Then it dawned on Isaiah that he might better ask, “How long?” And God answered, “Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.” God was going to use Isaiah and send him, but his ministry was going to be a ministry of condemnation.

They would not listen to him or hear him, and the ultimate end of his ministry was that God would judge the people for their disobedience and rebellion. God gave Isaiah a ministry and used him, but it was a ministry of condemnation and not a ministry of reconciliation. When we say, “Here am I; send me,” it is up to God whether or not He uses us and what kind of ministry He uses us in. But once we say, “Here am I; send me,” we go until we cannot go, until the ministry is over. God can use a small minority to deliver His people. If we are willing to be used by God, He can use us and bring us back to Himself as a people and as a nation.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would help us. Lord, we acknowledge that we need Thee. We acknowledge, Lord, that we want Thee and we want to be used of Thee. It is totally in Your hands whom You use and for whatever purpose You use us. But Lord, use us for Thy honor and Thy glory. We give ourselves unto Thee this day, and ask, Father, that You be worshiped in spirit and in truth, and that Your name would be magnified. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

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