

Re-Cycling Judges, Gideon: “It’s complicated”
Text: Judges 6:1-16a
7-29-18



Teaching Notes...

The book of Judges is a record of a people learning to function from a sense of identity which is to be uniquely characterized by the fact that *“God was with them”*.

I believe that if our identity as Christians matters, then so does distinctiveness---not distinctiveness which results in arrogance or segregation, but for the sake of recognition.

But, it’s hard to live uniquely.

It has proven difficult for us, as God’s people, to maintain our distinctiveness without becoming distanced and self-righteous or cynical and uncaring.

It is not, primarily, about the *“religious right’s”* leverage in seating the desired political candidate, or ensuring the passage of proper legislation, or funding significant educational incentives, but about a people’s capacity to embody the vision, values, and ethic of the Kingdom in ways which make it both distinguishable and desirable. In inter-dependent friendships, in a distinct work-ethic, in marriages that are increasingly reflecting the stubborn commitment of covenant love. It portrays to the world that the Gospel is true.

Our deep-heart journey seems to begin when our desires collide with our reality. When who we desire to be/become meets with who we are, presently.

Many of our favorite biblical characters are dysfunctional. I think it’s what makes their story worth reading. In fact, I think in some sub-conscious way, we gravitate toward them because often, by comparison, our lives look pretty good.

These kinds of stories typically involve some sort of ‘crisis’ (not necessarily a tragedy, but an awakening) that interrupts the status-quo. If that season of crisis is prolonged, we tend toward resignation. Our fear is not *“what will happen”*, but that *“nothing will happen”*. We’re stuck.

Gideon is *“stuck”*. When we are introduced to him, he is threshing wheat in a wine-press. Normally, you do it in the open air so that the chaff can be taken by the wind. In this instance, he is our story’s hero, hiding in a wine pit.

Here's the phrase that captivated me...

"If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?" (6:13)

The tension comes not from the assumption of God's absence, but the conviction his presence.

He was there... but remained silent. He saw it and remained unmoved.

"Where were you when my parents were divorcing?"

"Why didn't you prevent the illness?"

Gideon's father is an idolater. Gideon is being informed and formed by a narrative in which life is self-directed and self-explanatory. The gods are to be leveraged to meet our needs. It is hard-wired into us all. The human flesh wants to believe it is capable. It is sufficient. It is informed. It never has to say, "I don't know", or, "I can't".

Such a narrative creates an atmosphere of anxiety and fear. It is trusting the wrong things, which results in insecurity.

It has developed within him a faulty narrative of inadequacy and lack. *"My family is the weakest and I am the stray!" (6:15)* Every experience, every conflict, seemed to reinforce this identity and deepen the sense of apathy.

The Story of God offers us glimpses of who we were meant to be and the kind of life that we were meant to experience, and honestly confronts all those attachments and pursuits which obstruct our realization of such a life.

God must, first, confront the story that Gideon is telling himself. He must then interrupt that story and invite Gideon into another 'agreement'... where Gideon determines to respond as if what God is saying is really true.

God is always saying to us, through a number of declarations and metaphors, *"Here's who you are. Here's who I see you becoming. Now grow into this!"*

"Sanctify them by your word; your word is truth..." John 17 (renew; set apart as purposeful and unique)

"Dearly loved children... that is what we are!" 1 John 3

"Christ came at just the right time for us... when we were utterly helpless..."

Romans 5

Secured in *"inseparable love"*. Romans 8:35

The disorder (evil) that we experience is always the abuse of love and the abuse of love is directly linked to misdirect desire.

Love would be meaningless if it didn't provide an option. We would never hear the words most central to our true identity: "I choose you!"

Life would be strewn with evil if we're not commanded to love.

The pain that we experience (isolation, abuse, abandonment, betrayal, etc.) introduces us to ourselves and the inevitable “shame” that it produces.

Shame has many components: uncontrollable exposure (fear that you might discover something about me that will prevent me from belonging with you); feelings of worthlessness. Inadequacy. Our soul gets the message hundreds of times a day.

We come into agreement with the narrative, believing that the crisis gets “sole naming rights”. Every new encounter seems to reinforce our faulty narrative.

Our desire to be loved and develop a relationship with our Creator-God is far more central to who we are than our brokenness, but it's easier to be identified by all that's wrong with us rather than embracing God's gracious offer to make us right.

We lack discrimination when it comes to our endorsements. We give consent to a lot of beliefs about God, about life, about ourselves, that simply are not true.

Something deep within us says, “You'll never be able to satisfy him”, or, “You'll never be the father that those kids need”, or, “You're nothing without this promotion!”

When we consent to those things, we give them **authority---** **“meaningful grounds for action”**. It actually creates our reality and establishes the boundaries within which we function.

“Which would you say you feel more: shame or love? Which would you say God feels more toward you: delight or disdain? Who told you that?” (Genesis 3)

Sovereignty means that God has every resource at his disposal to ensure your wholeness, except your “yes”.

Sovereignty does not seem to be depicted as the notion that everything that happens is already pre-determined by some cosmic force (the Greeks called it “fate”), but is simply the conviction that there will never be a circumstance in my life, whether self-inflicted or unexplainable, which God cannot “reclaim” (restore) and use to accomplish something of greater value.

You never have to worry about “deleting” those embarrassing stories of your own brokenness or attempt to re-arrange the really painful episodes in a way that makes them more palatable. We call it grace and grace is never simply about your ‘redeeming’ qualities, but your ‘redeemable’ qualities.

Maybe a better question than, “Where are you, God?” is, “Where am I?”

“What does my current posture and approach to life indicate about what I believe to be true of God or what I expect from life?”

God longs to transform our heartache to compassion. He desires to transform our anger and indifference into passionate appeals for justice.

It’s a different kind of hope that has not avoided tragedy and senseless suffering, but that has encountered it, endured it, and not simply survived, but has transformed it and been transformed by it.

I don’t think we appreciate the pain until we are able to share it with another and watch it contribute to their transformation. Only then do we quietly whisper, “Thank you.”