

JERUB-BAAL - JUDGES 6:25-40

STUDIES IN THE JUDGES #6

Louis 14th is remembered as the greatest king in the history of France. His 72 year reign is the longest in modern European history for any nation. Louis the Great, as he preferred to be called, was only 4 years old when he assumed the throne - so he practically couldn't remember a time when he wasn't king. He used to boast, "I am the State" - and his reign demonstrated the fact that he really believed it to be true.

Lost in the many accomplishments of Louis 14th during these golden years of the French monarchy is an idiosyncrasy of his personal life. Louis had a strange phobia. He had a morbid fear of water. In fact, they say that there was only one part of Louis' body that he would ever bathe. Now, happily for Louis, he lived during a time when being dirty was in - or perhaps it was Louis who set the style, who knows? In his biography of Louis the Great, Prince Michael of Greece writes "people were terribly dirty at Versailles. Glittering courtiers and women dripping with jewels spat, vomited, urinated and defecated in the corridors and staircases; it was the fashion of the time. Bathing was infrequent; body odor was pervasive."

It is hard for us to even imagine today a glorious leader of state, one who was robed with all of the pomp and glitter that his vast fortune could afford, one who commanded the utmost respect from other heads of state and who gained immediate audience with them at his request, who never took a bath - that is except for 1 part of his body. And Louis was very careful every morning

to wash this one part of his body. So when he arose in the morning, he would go through the same ritual every day. His army of servants known as the grand lever would bring a basin of water into his room. And then he would take a cloth and wash off the tip of his nose. That's right. The tip of Louis' nose was the only part of his body that he would bathe. His reason? Well, let me give it to you in his own words translated, of course, from French to English. "It is unspeakably bad form to dip a dirty nose into a snuffbox."

As I read this interesting anecdote from the life of Louis 14th some time ago, I could not help but think how this epitome of the French monarchy in a sense represents all of the human race in the eyes of God. For every person is born a sinner in the eyes of God. Paul the Apostle writes, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks after God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. there is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:10-18. Not a pretty picture that Paul paints as God in the perfection of his purity looks down on the human race, is it?

But as human beings, we have always had the tendency to find one little spot, the tip of our nose, that we can try to clean up. And then we try to convince ourselves that we are clean, we are alright, even better than other

people who don't clean up that spot in their lives, and that God surely must have to accept us now. If we are ever to have a right relationship with God, we must begin by seeing ourselves as God sees us. The Bible tells us that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9. To confess our sins is to recognize them and admit them. Cleansing only comes after confession. No person ever entered the gates into the kingdom of God unless he first admitted that he was a sinner before God.

And just as a person must first confess his sins in order to become a member of God's family, so one must also be cleansed from sin in order to have the power of God flow through him in service for the Lord.

During these past Sunday evenings, we have been working our way through the 7th book of the Old Testament, a book we call Judges. We have been seeing that this period in Israel's history has many parallels to the time when we are living today. There was a breakdown in authority during the Judges period. There wasn't a clear recognition of absolute truth. People generally thought that truth was relative and that they could determine what was ultimately right and wrong for themselves. The last verse found in the book sums up the general philosophy of life during this time: JDG 21:25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.

Now this philosophy of life lead to a cycle that happened over and over again in Israeli society. By doing what was right in their own eyes, God's people would fall into sinful patterns. Perhaps their lifestyle would become

immoral or they would start worshiping Dagon the Philistine god of grain so that they could have better crops or they would stop observing the Sabbaths because they wanted to make more money. But whatever the reason, their failure to obey God would cause their society to become weakened. One of their enemies would take advantage of their weakness and begin to oppress them. When the oppression became too much of a burden for them to bear, God's people would cry out to God for deliverance. God would raise up a judge who would deliver them from their oppression. Throughout the lifetime of the judge there would be peace and prosperity. But then the judge would die and the cycle would begin all over again. This happened over and over again for over 300 years.

Last time, we began to look at the 5th judge that is listed in the book; the 4th major judge – a man named Gideon. We specifically looked at Gideon's call to be a judge. We saw several struggles which Gideon faced in recognizing and accepting this call of God to service.

*Gideon felt that God had deserted him. He had to be reminded of the great truth that God is always with us, whether we feel his presence or not.

*Gideon wasn't able to see himself as he could become by God's grace. Gideon only saw himself as he was at the present, with all of his weaknesses and frailties. He needed to have a vision of what he could become by God's grace.

*Gideon was overwhelmed by his own inadequacies and weaknesses. How could he, coming from such an insignificant family, ever hope to be a

judge?

But God dealt with Gideon's struggles and called him to service. But now there was yet another obstacle that had to be overcome. You see, Gideon had been led by God to overcome the obstacle of his own inadequate view of himself and his potential. But now, Gideon had to be cleansed from the obstacle of his sin. For Gideon could not be used by God if he harbored sin in his life.

One of the unusual features of Gideon's story was the fact that God sent a prophet before to prepare the people for this deliverance that He intended.

Notice it with me in Judges 6:7-10.

When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."

Now in the past deliverances, when the people cried out to God for deliverance, the Bible simply says that God raised up a judge to deliver them. But in this case, when the people cried out to God for deliverance, God sent a prophet to remind the people of the great deliverance that God had brought about in bringing them out of the bondage of their slavery in Egypt, and then to remind the people of their sin in worshiping other gods in disobedience to the law of God. Now God sent this prophet for a very important reason. For even

the judge that God had chosen was worshiping other gods. And God knew that there could be no deliverance until there was first a turning away from the sin that was causing the oppression.

You see, there is a great difference between crying out to God and repenting from sin. Many people are willing to cry out to God for deliverance when they find themselves in a helpless situation. The Psalmist says that even hardened, salt-skinned sailors cry out to God for deliverance when the storms of the sea get so great that their lives are endangered. But are people willing to turn away from the sins that caused the oppression in the first place? That is a different question, isn't it?

God had called Gideon to be a judge - we saw this last time. But God could not use him yet. Gideon had gotten himself out of the way so that the power of God could flow through him, but there was still another hindrance that must be removed. That hindrance was sin in the life of Gideon.

Having called Gideon to serve as a judge, God was now ready to initiate him into that service. And I would invite you to notice the order with me as God now thrusts Gideon into his position of being a judge over Israel. For there are many lessons that we can learn from God's dealing with Gideon in our own lives, and our own struggles with harboring sin that robs us of the power of God.

1. God ordered Gideon to tear down the altar to Baal that his family had.

READ vs. 25-27

That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and

cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering."

JDG 6:27 So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

Now this is amazing, isn't it? Here the man who God had chosen to be the next judge, the next deliverer of Israel, had an altar to Baal in his own backyard. This was Gideon's family's altar. And not only did he have an altar to Baal, but he also had an Asherah pole beside it as well. Baal was the god of the storm - a very important deity for a farmer living in the Palestine region where rainfall was so precious. Asherah was the mother of Baal and the goddess of fertility - again a very important deity for a farmer who was raising herds of livestock. But both Baal and Asherah were Phoenician gods who were worshiped by very lude and immoral practices appealing to the lusts of the flesh. And here is an Israelite family, a leader in the area - for many other families in the town were going to protest Gideon's removal of these altars of worship implying that they also were worshiping here at them as well, the next person chosen to be the judge over all Israel - and he had an altar to Baal and an Asherah pole in his backyard.

God says, this has to go before I can bless you and give you my power to lead the children of Israel in victory over the Midianites.

Now Gideon knows in his heart that these altars must be removed. But isn't it interesting that he sneaks out at night to do the job. And the Bible tells

us why he snuck out at night. He was afraid of his own family and of the other men of the town. But to his credit, Gideon takes a stand here - albeit a private stand. And as Gideon suspected, his removal of these altars was not popular.

2. And this brings us to the second step. Gideon then was put in a position where he had to resist the opposition from the Baal worshipers. READ vs. 28-32

JDG 6:28 In the morning when the men of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!

JDG 6:29 They asked each other, "Who did this?"

When they carefully investigated, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it."

JDG 6:30 The men of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."

JDG 6:31 But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." ³² So that day they called Gideon "Jerub-Baal," saying, "Let Baal contend with him," because he broke down Baal's altar.

Now Why did God allow this resistance in Gideon's life at this time? I am sure that Gideon wondered. After all, he was a very timid and hesitant person. And now having obeyed the command of God, Gideon probably wondered why he would have to face this opposition.

But is clear from the overall context that God had at least 2 lessons that he wanted Gideon to learn. First, and foremost, God wanted Gideon to take a

public stand for him. If Gideon were to be a judge who was a public leader, he would have to be willing to take a public stand for the Lord. Private, secretive ventures cloaked in the darkness of the night would not be sufficient. So God allowed Gideon to have a public confrontation with these worshipers of Baal so that he could testify of his repentance publicly. After this meeting, all the people in town knew that Gideon was no longer a worshiper of Baal, but he had rather torn down the altars of Baal and he was now a worshiper of the Lord.

But also, it is clear that God is beginning to strengthen Gideon. In battles, there is always opposition. And if Gideon were to lead the Israelites into battle, he would have to be prepared for opposition. So God gives Gideon first a little opposition - the men of the town. And as Gideon deals with this opposition successfully, he would be strengthened for the greater opposition that would be in the future - the Midianites.

But it is important for us to recognize the fact that God lead Gideon to purify his life - removing the false gods that he had been worshiping - and to take a public stand for the Lord before the next step occurred.

3. For it was only when Gideon had cleansed himself that The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. READ vs. 33-35

JDG 6:33 Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. ³⁵ He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

One of the very important truths that a person must learn about the Lord is the purity, the holiness, the moral perfection of Almighty God. There is only one attribute of God that is repeated 3 times in the Bible for emphasis - that is the holiness of God. Listen to the words of Isaiah the Prophet as he records a vision that he saw of God:

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with 6 wings: with 2 wings they covered their faces, with 2 they covered their feet, and with 2 they were flying. And they were calling to one another, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; they whole earth is full of his glory." Is. 6:1-3.

It is most interesting that when Isaiah saw the Lord, the impression that overwhelmed him was God's holiness, his absolute purity.

*Relationship between purity of life and God's power.

Now all of the attributes of God are important, even indispensable. For God would not be God if just one of his attributes were removed from his being. But as important and comforting as the omnipresence of God is, the Bible never emphasizes it by saying omnipresent, omnipresent, omnipresent is the Lord. And as important and comforting as the justice of God is, the Bible never emphasizes it by saying just, just, just is the Lord. And as important and comforting as even the love of God is, the Bible never emphasizes it by saying love, love, love is the Lord. But the holiness of God is emphasized 3 times. Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord. And not just here in Isaiah 6. Read Revelation

4:8 and you will find a very similar passage in which the holiness of God is reiterated 3 times in a row.

You see, it is God's holiness that necessitates a separation in fellowship between Him and sinful man. God's love was the motivating force in doing what was necessary to break down that separation. But it is his holiness that demands a separation from sin. God simply cannot fellowship with sin.

*that is the reason for the absolute necessity of our confessing our sin and accepting God's forgiveness offered in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved and become a member of God's family. God's heart of love certainly desires every human being to have an eternal home in heaven. Peter says that God is not willing that any should perish. God would love to have everyone in heaven with him. But his holy nature could not tolerate any sin in heaven. So if a person chooses his sin over God, that person necessarily chooses separation from God. There is no other choice because God's holy nature is unchanging and perfect.

*And this is also the reason why God's power cannot flow through the life of the Christian if that Christian is harboring sin in his or her life. The Apostle Paul spoke of sin quenching the fire of the Holy Spirit who indwells us. Just as a bucket of water can quickly douse a raging campfire so that there are no more flames leaping up into the air, but only smoldering embers struggling to burn on, so sin accepted into the Christian's life douses the power of the Holy Spirit and causes that believer to struggle on in the Christian life.

*Now it is interesting to note that it was after Gideon had removed the

altars to Baal that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him for mighty service. It wasn't that God hadn't desired to empower Gideon before this time. It wasn't that God hadn't grieved the pitiful condition of his people before this time. But God, by his nature, just couldn't empower Gideon as long as he was worshiping Baal. As long as Gideon was harboring this sin in his life, he was quenching the power of the spirit. But once that sin was confessed and removed, God was free to empower him to great service.

*Now the obvious question that we must each ask ourselves is this one. Is my life in such a state that God's Spirit can fill and empower me? Or am I harboring some sin that quenches the Spirit's freedom in my life? God desires to have intimate fellowship with each of us. God desires to empower us to live a victorious life for his glory and our wellbeing. But we must choose to remove sin from our lives first. We cannot serve 2 masters. We cannot cling to our sin and have God's power as well. God's holy nature cannot tolerate that. It was as Gideon removed the altar to Baal that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. And so it will be in our lives that as we remove the altars to false gods and give ourselves over to the control of the Holy Spirit that His divine power will flow into our lives.

4. But there is one more struggle that Gideon had. And this is perhaps the most subtle of all. You see, some people feel that once sin is confessed and the decision is made to yield to the Lord, that all problems in life will suddenly cease. That the devil will then throw up his hands and say "Well, I guess I lost that person" and give up. But every Christian who has ever tried to live the

Spirit-controlled life knows that this is not the case. No, instead of giving up, the enemy of our soul doubles his efforts. So it is not happenstance that Gideon now had to resist doubts and fears that invaded his mind. He had been empowered by God. He was going to be victorious, as we will see in coming weeks. Gideon was going to engineer one of the most remarkable military conquests of all time. With just 300 unarmed men, Gideon was going to defeat an army that covered the whole Jezreel valley for miles. I mean they were so many that the bible says of their pack animals that they were numbered as the sand on the seashore. And Gideon led the defeat of them. What power! But he didn't win the battle against the Midianites until he first won the battle against the doubts and fears that he had in his own mind. READ vs. 36-40

JDG 6:36 Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised--³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said."³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew--a bowlful of water.

JDG 6:39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew."⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

Lord, if you really are going to use me, give me a sign. Make the wool be wet while the ground around it is all dry. And when God did that, Gideon still had doubts, didn't he? Lord, give me another sign. Make the wool be dry

while the ground all around it is wet.

Certainly, Gideon's actions here are not presented as a model of great faith. No, great faith is believing God and acting on his promises without a sign. Jesus said to doubting Thomas who demanded a sign, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:29.

But God saw Gideon's heart. He knew that struggles that were going on inside. And God honored that infant faith that Gideon had, helping it to grow and increase into stronger faith.

Now, let me take a moment to put these 4 steps together. You will recall that I brought to your attention at the beginning of the message the 4 steps which God took to initiate Gideon's service for him:

- *commanding Gideon to remove the altar of Baal.

- *Gideon's resisting the opposition to the removal of that altar by his neighbors

- *God giving his own spirit of power to Gideon

- *Gideon's battle with his own fears and doubts

- *Do you see a Pattern here - step of faith, resistance, step of faith, resistance.

This is the general pattern in the life of the person who is going to grow and be used of the Lord. God leads the person to a step of faith. And then that faith is tested. If the test is passed, there is another step of faith that comes along. But always, the faith is tested. If the test is failed, the original step of faith has to be repeated, usually in some other form. A Christian who

consistently gives up during the tests of faith tends to go around in circles in the Christian life without making significant progress forward. But the Christian who perseveres through the tests of faith finds greater empowerment by the Spirit of God.

As we conclude this evening, let me ask you this question: What is your pattern in your Christian life? Is yours a pattern of growth and development of faith? Where are you right now in your Christian life? Are you in the midst of a test of faith? Persevere through it - there will be growth and glory on the other side. Are you in the midst of a new step of faith? Prepare yourself - that faith is going to be tested soon. But that very test will prove that step of faith to be genuine so that further growth can be realized in the future.