

“THE MIGHTY MAN OF VALOR”

THE CHURCH’S STORY OF GOD’S AMAZING GRACE

JUDGES 6:1-27

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Is God’s amazing grace still amazing to you? Do you remember the LORD and his great salvation benefits that he has bestowed upon you? The Psalm we read this morning, Psalm 103 reminds us to never forget the Lord’s benefits: salvation, redemption from sin, forgiveness of sins, in summary, all of God’s blessings to us as His people.

One main purpose of the story of Gideon is that God’s people would be reminded of His amazing, great, astounding, remarkable and unbelievable grace! And that in light of that grace they might serve the LORD God who has redeemed them!

The story of Gideon should be very familiar to all of us. Not just familiar in content (that is, that we might know the details of the story). The story of Gideon should be familiar in our own experiences as the people of God. The story of Gideon is *our story* as the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6ff).

God loves us NOT because of our faith, or our belief in God, or our preparation for service to God, or for anything we have done *for God*. God loves us because he loves us in Christ Jesus!

God meets us where we are and tells us what he is committed to us *becoming* in Jesus Christ. We do not seek peace with God; it is God that seeks peace with us (cf. Romans 3:9-23). God graciously makes us his children and makes us more than overcomers-conquerors in Jesus Christ.

God is “Immanuel”, the God who is *still* with us!

After reading the first five chapters of *The Book of Judges* one might yawn a bit when they read chapter 6, verse 1:

ESV Judges 6:1 The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.

Hadn’t the Israelite Church “been there and done that” spiritually already numerous times before? Would they ever learn their lessons before God? Would they ever come to serve and worship God as He deserves? The people had learned the ‘Song of Deborah’ that glorified and praised God for his grace and goodness.

Yet when we begin chapter 6 we realize the abrupt contrast between singing God’s praises and doing evil in the sight of the Lord! The process of the Canaanization of Israel would continue unabated. Rather than the nations becoming “holy like Israel”, Israel was

becoming “unholy like the nations”. We are reminded again about being sober, watchful and careful by God’s grace to avoid a fall into sinful living and behavior against God.

Because of Israel’s continued covenant unfaithfulness, God gave them this time into the hand of Midian. Talk about not living and acting like the people you’re called to be! The Israelites were not living blessed by God in the Promised Land as they could have enjoyed by faith. Rather, the text tells us specifically that they were living cursed in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds rather than enjoying the land flowing with milk and honey (6:2).

The people of Israel were greatly oppressed! With the help of the Amalekites the Midianites would come and attack Israel and destroy their harvest and the produce of the land. The enemies of God sought to attack Israel’s livelihood: their food and grain.

The Midianites were a semi-nomadic people who were distant relatives of the Israelites, being descended from Abraham by his second wife Keturah. The Midianites were involved with Jacob’s other sons in the sale of Joseph into Egyptian slavery (Gen. 25:2-4; 37:25-36; NAC, pg. 251). We should be reminded that Moses married into the tribe of Midian (Exodus 2:15-22) and his relatives were welcome in the early days of the Exodus journey (Exodus 18).

By the time of the wilderness wanderings of Israel recorded in Numbers 25 and 31 Midian had become trouble to the Israelites. The Amalekites who were the descendants of Esau, were Israel’s first enemy actually to take up arms against her and war against her; Moses told the people of Israel specifically:

“Remember what Amalek did...Blot out the remembrance of Amalek” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

So severe were the attacks of the Midianites and Amalekites that the land was devastated and laid waste- -nothing to eat and enjoy for man or beast to eat; and so Israel was brought low and experienced the covenant curses of God in the land for disobedience because of these uncircumcised people acting as buzzards (6:4-6; cf. Deuteronomy 26-30). The Hebrew in verse 6 teaches that Israel was impoverished or literally Israel “became small” because of the calamities on the land and their starvation. The Midianites were God’s instruments of bring curses to Israel for covenant disobedience specifically in the manner that Moses warned them:

ESV Deuteronomy 28:28-33: The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind,²⁹ and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways.¹ And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you.³⁰ You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall ravish her. You shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit.³¹ Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat any of it. Your donkey shall be seized before your face, but shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, but there shall be no one to help you.³² Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for

them all day long, but you shall be helpless. ³³ **A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually...**

For seven long years the people of God experienced the oppressive repercussions of Deuteronomy 28 (6:1); these pagan Midianites would come and pillage the land, stealing oxen, sheep, cattle (your instruments or tools of labor) and then would take every bit of your food. Seven long years of hunger, replanting, and then more pillaging from the enemy. The onslaught from Midian against food and supplies was continuous; chapter 6, verse 3 says:

“For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them.”- 6:3

And the attacks were by so many people that they were like a terrible locust plague on the land (6:5- like the Exodus locusts on Egypt, but now an eschatological reversal where Israel is being chastised); these “locusts” would lay waste the land as they came in. This was the judgment of God, chastisement upon the children for the “evil” they did in God’s sight; Israel was living like suffering animals in caves rather than enjoying the blessings of God in the Promised Land!

Here is how the Westminster Confession of Faith speaks of God’s presence in our salvation especially in times of chastisement for those who are adopted as His children. God’s chastisement is summarized biblically and helpfully in the ***Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 12, section 1:***

WCF 12.1 All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption:(1) by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God;(2) have His name put upon them,(3) receive the Spirit of adoption;(4) have access to the throne of grace with boldness;(5) are enabled to cry, Abba, Father;(6) are pitied,(7) protected,(8) provided for,(9) and chastened by Him as by a Father;(10) yet never cast off,(11) but sealed to the day of redemption,(12) and inherit the promises,(13) as heirs of everlasting salvation.(14) (1)Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:4,5. (2)Rom. 8:17; John 1:12. (3)Jer. 14:9; 2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 3:12. (4)Rom. 8:15. (5)Eph. 3:12; Rom. 5:2. (6)Gal. 4:6. (7)Ps. 103:13. (8)Prov. 14:26. (9)Matt. 6:30,32; 1 Pet. 5:7. (10)Heb. 12:6. (11)Lam. 3:31. (12)Eph. 4:30. (13)Heb. 6:12.(14)1 Pet. 1:3,4; Heb. 1:14.

What else could we want or desire other than God, the Living and True God, to be with us and watch over us, protect us, love us and lead us? Even when God’s people are unfaithful, God remains faithful and will not forsake His own people. If you have anything or anyone who makes this seem unimportant, then you might have a specific idol in need of smashing and you might need to repent before God for your sins because your love is aimed in a direction other than the God who loves you.

Then Israel (as many times before) called upon the Name of the LORD for help (6:6-7). You would think that God would “get wise” to them and cease to show mercy to the Israelites. If God were merely a human being like us, then he would have already forsaken his people.

But for His Name's sake, and because of His covenant oath-promises, God continued to show faithfulness to His people so that they might know, worship and serve Him. In fact, God sent a prophet to the people of Israel to remind them of His covenant word to them, and the fact that God had promised them that they should fear no evil:

ESV Judges 6:8-10: the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage. ⁹ And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ And I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice."

Now we must put ourselves into the sandals of the Israelites who were hungry. They were hungry—physically- -their tummies were empty- -**and God sent a prophet?** “Let’s put our priorities in place and get a deliverer first, then we can worry about what God says,” the people might have said. The people could have said to the prophet, “We sure appreciate you reminding us of God’s covenant promises and his past acts of goodness toward Israel, but would you get us some food- -*we’re starving!*”

As Professor Davis says humorously: “[Sending a prophet when the people needed food] would be like a stranded motorist calling a garage for assistance and the garage sending a philosopher instead of a mechanic” (*Judges: Such a Great Salvation*, pg. 92). To flesh this out, this prophet showing up while their tummies are empty would be like you being stranded and broken down at the side of the road on a dark night, you call AAA to come and help you to get your car started, and I show up to teach you the Bible!

Yet God shows in this action, in this response to Israel’s prayer or crying out to him that what the people need most was the Word of God. The Word of God that is spiritual food should precede the physical food for the people. The people of God needed to learn to again seek first the Kingdom of God knowing that all other things will be added to them- -including the food they desperately needed.

God wanted to show the Israelites that they needed to understand just *why* they were starving.

“...You have not obeyed my voice” – 6:10b

The people of God needed to repent of their failure to listen and obey God’s Word (cf. 2:17ff); the people of God needed to repent of their stubbornness before God and His Word; the people of God needed to remember *this time* clearly what God had said and done in His Word for them, so that they might not experience this terrible plight again! They needed to learn to hear God’s word and believe it so that they might live full and blessed lives because of God’s grace toward them!

A prophet who spoke the word of God to the people reminded them of God’s faithfulness in the Exodus event. The prophet could have also reminded the people of how God had

rescued and delivered and redeemed them every time that they had committed apostasy against the LORD and the LORD raised up their enemies to oppress and enslave them.

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage. ⁹ And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ And I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice." –Judges 6:8b-10

Here is another example of how God wants the people to understand the salvation story of the Exodus! The past was to inform Israel of their present!

All of the enslavements from foreign oppressors are “mini-Egypt” and “mini-Pharaohs” as we have learned. God continued to bless the people through deliverance of “mini-Moses” who would deliver the people. ***The people were to learn that they were part of God’s salvation-story- -and to live like redeemed, saved folk!***

God sends His Word in the people’s time of need; the people think one thing is necessary, while God knows that only His Word can interpret- -as well as deliver those who believe! God still acts this way; God’s Word places us on trial before Him. The Word of God is a double-edged sword that should cut deeply in our hearts and lives revealing our doubt, unbelief, and sinful idolatry:

ESV Hebrews 4:12-13: For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

I think it is always easier for the people of God to pray to God to get them out of trouble or a situation that they are in, without first trying to seek God’s Word for wisdom as to why they might be in that circumstance in the first place.

We might ask God: “Please remove my depression” or “Please remove my ongoing fall into certain sinful practices” or “Please remove my lack of submission and how it constantly gets me into trouble” but many times we are unwilling to seek God’s Word for how to be more like God. The Word of God is the Spirit’s instrument to get to the root of the problem in all of us: pride, self-centeredness, glory-worship, etc.

Oftentimes, God does not bring immediate relief from our pain; rather, he teaches and instructs and preaches through His Word revealing the deeper heart matter of what is wrong with us. God always answers our prayers according to His sovereign wisdom and perfect timing, but he desires for us to know and understand His Word.

The BIG PROBLEM for Israel was not the Midianites- -the BIG PROBLEM was Israel’s problem! Israel was their own BIG PROBLEM! Israel was not listening and obeying God’s Word! This had to be addressed first!

Thus he sent a prophet to Israel before feeding them then, and today he sends preachers, counselors, loving family members, friends and brothers and sisters in the Church to help us better understand God through His Word.

As Professor D. R. Davis writes helpfully: “Like Israel, we may want escape from our circumstances while God wants us to interpret our circumstances. Sometimes we may need understanding more than relief; sometimes God must give us insight before he dare grant safety. Understanding God’s way of holiness is more important than absence of pain. We may want out of a bind, whereas God wants us to see our idolatry. God means to instruct us, not pacify us” (*Judges: Such a Great Salvation*, pg. 92).

Now there is another appearance of the Angel of YHWH, signifying to the reader that this is another significant event – but He is there because it will become a *gracious event* (6:11). This is again a revelation of God’s grace; rather than immediate judgment upon Israel because they have not obeyed God’s voice, he sends the Angel of the LORD to yet deliver the people again!

This is truly a revelation of the God who redeemed Israel from Egypt and clearly made Himself known to Moses (In Exodus 23 and 34 the “Angel of the LORD” is YHWH’s alter ego, Block, NAC, pg. 259). This Messenger or embodiment of God’s person and character is a revelation of the God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in covenantal steadfast love and faithfulness:

Exodus 34:5-7: *The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, ¹ forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*

And now we are introduced to God’s appointed means of delivering and saving his people- ***Gideon is the man of God's own choosing this time.***

When we are introduced to Gideon, he is beating out wheat in the winepress to preserve and save it from the wrath and destruction of the Midianite buzzards. During a time such as this, farmers like Gideon were not free to winnow their wheat in the open air (particularly on hilltops), where the breeze catches it and separates chaff from grain (Wilcock, pg. 78). Because of these uncertain times, farmers are not threshing on hilltops because Midian marauders would see them and come and take their grain supply.

Gideon is threshing or beating out the wheat in the wine press, a hollow place in the ground. When the Angel of YHWH appeared to him, he reminds Gideon of the Gospel of God’s unfailing, steadfast covenant love; he said:

“The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.”

How can this be true? Gideon is not revealing (has not revealed!) any valor or courage or bravery. He is hiding in a winepress hole in order that he might have something to eat; he is not taking a stand against the enemy. This is important to note here. What Gideon was doing, who he was at this point in his life was not in reality who he would become.

In fact, because of God's faithfulness to him, Gideon could be called even at that point in his life a "man of valor" because of the plans that God had for him and the faithfulness that God would commit himself to showing him. God's grace is shown as one commentator put it: "God acknowledges Gideon before Gideon acknowledges God!"

Gideon is weak; he is become through this call of the Angel of YHWH a representative of Israel. Israel had been "brought low" (6:6) and God would deliver her and raise her up through a representative who would have seemed to the world as weak, insignificant and outnumbered (see chapter 7). Gideon was like Israel as her representative judge-deliverer: a weak and frightened vessel who would by God's grace come to realize that with God the people are strong and courageous and should not fear (cf. Joshua 1:9).

But Gideon wants to know why the difficult times have come upon the People of Israel. He wants to know how all this evil of the Midianites and Amalekites could be possible if God were indeed with the people. Gideon has been properly catechized and taught the ways of the LORD before him because he asks why has the LORD not shown himself in a like manner and in his estimation forsaken His people.

^{ESV} Isaiah 59:1-2: Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; ² but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Gideon, by God's grace, was a catechized child who remembered the Exodus from Egypt, but for the present it seemed in his estimation that the people of Israel were no better off now than under Pharaoh's oppression and rule (6:13). Gideon is an example of those who believe what God can do, and what he has done in the past, those who have memorized the creed, but who do not find it very practical or helpful given their current life condition (cf. Block, NAC, pg. 260).

At this point, without answering Gideon's question, the Angel of YHWH sovereignly calls and ordains Gideon to be like Moses and deliver the people. The Angel of the LORD makes a distinction between the visible Church in general in Israel and those specifically the LORD is with such as Gideon, distinguishing among the visible Church those who believe and those who do not.

The Angel of YHWH (or "the LORD" meanings that the Angel of the LORD is equal in power and glory with God as the Second Person of the Trinity as we learned earlier) said: ***"Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Israel; do not I send you? (6:14).***

This "might of yours" should be understood as the power that God will grant him through the "clothing" or endowment of His Spirit (6:34); God's power will be with Gideon and

make him powerful and Gideon's faith will grow. In fact, Gideon's faith is remembered as an example of true faith in Hebrews 11 (although this does not mean that he struggled with doubt sometimes as we will see):

ESV Hebrews 11:32-34: And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Yet, while Gideon may believe in God's grace and power to His people in the past, he is not quite ready to accept the fact that God might call someone like himself of weak and lowly stature to be a representative warrior on God's behalf; he asked God in essence: **"How can little 'ol me ever defeat the powerful hand of Midian?"** I reckon at this point, Gideon had forgotten the story of Moses before him who also questioned God's wisdom in calling him to redeem Israel from Egypt.

Here in this passage we see more clearly what I mentioned in our second sermon from *Judges* that when Israel would sin against the LORD he would send them "back to Egypt" as it were to experience "mini-slaverys" as under Pharaoh, only to experience "mini-Exoduses" through the judges acting as "mini-Moses". The author of *Judges* wants us to realize that Gideon is like Moses- -and perhaps the deliverer who was to come who would be the ultimate deliverer like Moses was before:

ESV Deuteronomy 18:15-18: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers- it is to him you shall listen-¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken.¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Here Gideon is revealed in the text as one who responds in his call like Moses before him; perhaps he is to be the prophet that will ultimately deliver Israel and bring her into the full experience of the Peace-Shalom of God in the land. **"Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."** You may remember when the Angel of YHWH appeared to Moses at the burning bush:

ESV Exodus 3:11-12: But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

God replied to Gideon despite his questions and doubt: **"I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."** This is also very similar to what God promised Moses when he was called to serve him and redeem Israel:

¹² *He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."*

God was as covenantally committed to Gideon as he was to Moses; if God can take a weak man like Moses and make him a great leader-savior, then he can take “little ‘ol Gideon” and do the same for him. God does not want people to have confidence in themselves (as we will focus on in the next sermon):

ESV Judges 7:2 The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'

God is not glorified when his people think that it is some inherent strength, or power within themselves that causes their success; God wants humility before him, and by His grace, he will make those who seem weak and insignificant in the eyes of the world, extremely strong and powerful in Him!

Both Moses and Gideon (and David after them) are examples of men who God calls who were not necessarily the first choice of the people. Yet God takes the weak things of the world, and the foolish and despised things, even the things that are not considered at all to bring glory to His Name (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

All that God’s people ever need, especially God’s leaders who are called to lead Israel or the visible Church, is faith that God is always with them and does not forsake them; although circumstances may seem that God has left them. Here we are reminded that those are mere circumstances that come in our lives and we dare not interpret our lives and our situation by them. We must interpret our situation by God’s Word, and the fact ultimately that God has promised to be with his people.

Remember what God told Joshua after Moses’ death when his leadership task seemed impossible:

ESV Joshua 1:5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

“*I will be with you*” (6:16) has always been God’s covenant promise to His believing people (yes they will experience chastisement from God, and suffer consequences sometimes for their sins) but God will not forsake them! Remember God’s covenant words to others in redemptive-history:

ESV Genesis 28:15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

ESV Deuteronomy 20:1 "When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

ESV Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,¹ I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

ESV Isaiah 41:8 But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; ⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; ¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Is there any greater promise that God can give us? ***"I AM with you!" "I AM Immanuel, the God who is with us!"***

When we're young we experience fear and we want our father and/or mother to hold our hands and help us through- -and they are "with us". We need help in times of trouble and our true friends are there "with us". We are given spouses who love us and they live our lives "with us" in good times and in bad! God, the Eternal God, the Faithful and Loving and Merciful and All-Powerful, and Ever-seeing God promises to be "WITH US".

We are to be confident and courageous knowing that Nothing can ever overcome us, defeat us, conquer us- -if God be for us, ***who can be against us?!*** (Romans 8:28-39). Our God has NOT given us the spirit of fear- -but of Sonship (as children, Rom. 8:15ff).

God promises to never leave us nor forsake us, and like Gideon, we say: "Have you got anything else more than your word...a tangible, concrete sign perhaps?!"

Just like Moses before him, Gideon asks for a sign... (Judges 6:17; cf. Exodus 4:1ff). In essence, Gideon wants assurance; he is asking "But, how can I be sure that you will indeed be with me?" Gideon wants to know "How can I be sure you're Immanuel!?"

Gideon's first means of assuring himself seems to be based on what Gideon thought was the best way of gaining assurance- -bringing an offering to the Messenger of YHWH.

Gideon brought an offering to the LORD and it was accepted as a pleasing sacrifice to Him (6:18-21). The consumed offering was enough to display God's power to assure Gideon that He would be with him; the consuming of the offering was God's accommodation to Gideon that affirmed what he had already said in His Word.

But perhaps this accommodation is too much for Gideon to handle! With the display of God's power comes also the reminder of who God is in all His glory- -and to be reminded of who we are as sinners in his presence! When the fire of the Angel of YHWH consumed the offering and he vanished from Gideon's sight, he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had seen God face to face (6:22). And this brought great fear to Gideon- -as it should have!

We modern people (or postmoderns) can be really familiar and disrespectful in God's presence; we must take care to heed the fact that God is wholly other from us; he is God and he is holy, holy, holy which we are not by nature. It would do us good to have a theology of God where God is not merely another "nice guy" who we can manage; we dare not try to make God one like ourselves.

God is holy and he requires holiness of all his creatures; in God's holy presence no sinner is safe. When Isaiah caught a glimpse of the thrice holy God, he cried "I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips who lives among a people of unclean lips and mine eyes have seen God the King (paraphrase of Isaiah 6). To see God and to realize that one is still alive after having a glimpse of him is to seek to worship him and revere him and serve him because of His grace and mercy that has been extended, rather than his great and severe wrath!

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!

Even though Gideon glimpsed the thrice holy God of Israel and even talked with him face to face, the LORD did not destroy Him in His wrath, but rather extended peace-shalom to him by His grace (2:23-24; cf. Exodus 33:20).

"The LORD said to him, 'Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die'" (Judges 6:23).

Three things God promises Gideon: 1) Peace-Shalom with God; 2) Do not fear punishment in God's presence because of the bestowal of his grace; and 3) You shall not die. Are these not God's promises to **all** who repent and believe God's Gospel Good news?!

This is the place of worship that became **THE LORD IS PEACE** (6:24). As we learned in our earlier sermon on chapter 3, if Israel was to dwell at peace in God's land, they would first have to find peace with God.

Peace with God, or Peace-Shalom is a peace that is more than mere rest from enemies, or threats from without (although it includes this). Peace with God is full reconciliation with God. Peace with God is being received by God as a child; being received by God with all the benefits and inheritance of one of God's beloved children. Peace with God means understanding that there is no condemnation for those who believe, that no matter how difficult our lives seem in this world, we are loved by God and He will be with us as our strength, and will never forsake us or utterly cast us off.

Peace with God is through death and substitutionary atonement by another in our place!

Peace with God us ultimately brought through the Person and Work of Christ although Old Covenant believers like Gideon experienced this peace with God, although not as the height and depth revealed later in the New Covenant through the ministry of Jesus. The Apostle Paul described this Peace-Shalom with God in Romans 5:1-11:

ESV Romans 5:1-11: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we¹ have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith¹ into this grace in which we stand, and we² rejoice³ in hope of the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been

given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Peace with God means that there has been reconciliation with God; the relationship that was damaged because of sin has been fixed if you will; the relationship with God has been healed and we have received reconciliation, that is forgiveness, the full inheritance of God's people, the honor of being called children of God.

And because we are reconciled and have received Shalom-Peace with God, we are God's beloved children and are to love and serve him with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves as we walk by faith in His love and mercy. This means, there is no room for divided hearts and idolatry.

Before battle, before the destruction of the Midianites and the delivery-redemption-salvation of Israel, God had to be placed first and worshipped (first by Gideon, then by believing Israel).

As part of Gideon's call to deliver Israel, before Israel was to be delivered from bondage and slavery, God must be worshipped rightly first. So, the LORD appeared to Gideon that night to have him act as representative of the people to tear down the altar of Baal and reestablish the worship of the LORD (which we consider in our next sermon on Judges).

Shalom-Peace with God means resisting the sins that so easily beset us and entangle us and trip us up (Heb. 12:1-2), and keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our Faith, who reconciled us to God permanently and eternally. With this peace comes the power to resist idolatry and so the idols have to be smashed as our heart reveals them. We must war against the idols that seek our love and favor.

This is what Gideon learned after he received Shalom-peace with God at that point in redemptive-history. There was no room in Israel (or for that matter in the whole world) for an altar to YHWH (v. 24) and Baal (v. 26). Both cannot COEXIST as the bumper sticker suggests.

An altar of Shalom-Peace to God because of His grace leaves no room for any other altar! And so there is continuous work to be done in smashing competing altars to other gods other than the One, True and Living God!

After Gideon was a recipient of God's fatherly favor and had Shalom-Peace with God, he worshipped the True and Living God as God had commanded and directed him (6:25-26). In fact, he was to use the wood from the former idols to fuel the fire of God's altar (6:26).

The wood that was formerly used for the worship of idols was now brought into the service of God; the energies that had been expended upon pleasing and appeasing the devil's counterfeit idols were now to be energies expended upon worshipping and pleasing God not to earn his love or favor, but in response to it!

Gideon was not to merely rightly worship God but to also remove from the land all that hindered the True Worship of God. This is our duty still as Christians within the visible Church and one aspect of being 'Reformed'. As Reformed folks we are "Reformed but always reforming" and this means continually learning from Scripture how more precisely to worship and serve God as he commands us. Being Reformed means to learn more about how we can smash the idols within us, those we find in our churches, and those in the land that need destroying.

And this is done through Gospel proclamation; it is the gospel that by God's Spirit reaches deep to men's hearts, redeeming them from sin and bondage to death and the devil, and giving them Shalom-Peace with God so that they might live as children.

It is the Gospel that changes men and women and teaches them to love and serve God alone; but it is a process that is continued throughout each Christians' life. Each Christian must be Spirit-filled and dependent upon God's Word and Spirit to reveal their hearts and to disclose idols and potential idols that need smashing in their own lives.

And like Gideon, the idol smashing might be a fearful task, and the idol smashing may hurt a bit and have great relational consequences. In fact, the idol smashing must begin at home which was the assignment of God to Gideon: start with rearranging the priorities of Israel in your own home!

Gideon was commanded by God NOT to be a brave kind of Martin Luther going out valiantly as a Great Warrior Knight of God into the Church to heal all of the other people's idols! No, first, his priority and mission started at home; the Bible teaches:

ESV Judges 6:27-28: So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night. ²⁸ When the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built.

If God is to be rightly worshipped, then first all of the altars must be torn down and the worship that is given to idols, must be repented of and God rightly worshipped in their place. This must begin in each home; each home must be aware of, and intent upon smashing idols that so easily entangle and attempt to commit each child of God to bondage.

As Jesus said in the New Testament (Matthew 6:24): ***"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money [or Baal or whatever other idol]."***

The point here is that God must be worshipped and served exclusively.

As the people of God, exclusive worship of YHWH may come with a price. We may be shunned, or laughed out, or persecuted, or even killed for our exclusive faith in and trust of the only True and Living God. In an age that is increasingly relativistic, where more and more gods are worshipped along with the God of Christianity, it may become harder and harder to say as Jesus said exclusively:

“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus came to break down ever affection and idolatrous worship of any other god other than YHWH. As Christians we must stand for this kind of exclusive worship of God. We must be wise, discerning and careful to make clear that God is the only True God and all others than claim this title must be destroyed and their altars removed.

This calls for careful worship in God’s Church. This calls the Church to wisdom and caution in one’s worship of the True and Living God. We must be careful that it is not a vague sort of “god” or “heavenly being” or “good lord” that we serve, but that we serve more specifically the only God who is the God and Father of the LORD Jesus Christ. Those who reject Christ, reject the True and Living God; there can be no compromises.

The Church must smash all would-be gods and idols, and learn to worship and serve God alone. If we were to rearrange our priorities as the people of God, once again hear the Word of God as He teaches and instructs us, and if we were to believe daily that God will never leave us nor forsake us, and we were to worship God as He has commanded us to worship Him and in no other way- -then we might just see and experience true deliverance in Jesus Christ!

We might see many delivered by God’s grace if we were to experience this kind of rearranging of values or priorities, thus we would have a real modern reformation according to God’s Word.

Christians, those who are called by God’s Name, must by faith realize that they are no longer slaves to idols and sins; they must realize that they have been raised with Christ, seated safely with him in the heavenly places, and when he appears, they will appear with him and be like him!

Christians: God will make you too a “mighty person of valor” to worship and serve God alone by His grace!

This is the hope of Christians! We should not fear our enemies, physical or spiritual, but be faithful to God for all that he has taught us, and all he has done for us in Christ Jesus!

Conclusion

People of God, the story of Gideon should be very familiar to all of us. Not just familiar in content (that is, knowing the story). The story of Gideon should be familiar in our experiences (as we will look at further next week).

God loves us NOT because of our faith, or our belief in God, or our preparation for service to God, or for anything we have done. God loves us because he loves us!

God meets us where we are and tell us what he is committed to us becoming in Jesus Christ.

We do not seek peace with God, it is God that seeks peace with us (cf. Romans 3:9-23). God makes us his children and makes us more than overcomers-conquerors in Jesus Christ!

When Gideon was undeserving and unfaithful as an idolatry, when Gideon was enemies of God and living an unfaithful God, God in His grace brought reconciliation in Jesus Christ:

ESV Romans 5:6-11: For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

For those like Gideon who are weak, for those who are ungodly, for those who are unrighteous and not worth redeeming, for those who are sinners- -know that God has shown that he is Immanuel, the God who is with us in Jesus Christ.

God is with us to take us from being weak, ungodly, unrighteous sinners, and dying for our sins, justifying us by His blood, and saving us from the wrath of God. While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled by Christ's live- -let us rejoice in the LORD who is our Shalom-Peace and who is Immanuel, the God who is with us!

Thanks be to God for His Christ! Thanks be to God for His Word!

CRB

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Scripture Lesson

^{ESV} Deuteronomy 20:1 "When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

^{ESV} Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,¹ I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

^{ESV} Isaiah 41:8-10: But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend;⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off";¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

^{ESV} Deuteronomy 28:28-33: The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind,²⁹ and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways.¹ And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you.³⁰ You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall ravish her. You shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit.³¹ Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat any of it. Your donkey shall be seized before your face, but shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, but there shall be no one to help you.³² Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long, but you shall be helpless.³³ A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually...

^{ESV} Matthew 6:24-34: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.^{1 25} "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

^{ESV} Romans 5:1-11: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we¹ have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.² Through him we have also obtained access by faith¹ into this grace in which we stand, and we² rejoice³ in hope of the glory of God.³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.