

# **Gideon**

## **The Man Who Moved a Mountain**

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Moses led the people of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. After his death, Joshua became their leader and took them into the Promised Land. But what happened after both of these men had died? The people of Israel turned away from the Lord and began worshipping the gods in the land where they had settled. Things did not go well. They were oppressed by a variety of enemies, because the Lord's protection had been withdrawn when they turned their backs on him. However, in response to their cries for deliverance, God forgave them. He rose up a group of people known as judges. They were called judges because they helped to arbitrate disputes that arose among the people, but they were also military leaders who helped the Israelites to regain their freedom. Like Moses and Joshua, the Israelites believed that these judges were chosen by God. Under their leadership the Israelites renewed their allegiance unto the Lord and were willing to live by his laws and ordinances. But their commitment only lasted as long as the lifespan of these judges. After each one of them died, they fell back into their old ways. Once again they faced oppression and cried out for deliverance and once again God forgave them and appointed a new judge to lead them. Beginning this Sunday and continuing for the next two Sundays we will be taking a look at three of these judges. This morning we begin with a man named Gideon.

The story of his life is recorded for us in the book of Judges in the Old Testament, beginning with the first verse in Chapter 6 and ending all the way over in Chapter 8, verse 35. It is the story about a man who rose from obscurity to become a national hero. More importantly, it is the story of a man of faith, the kind of faith that can move a mountain, or in this instance, a mountain of Midianite marauders who had devastated the countryside. So let's begin by taking a look at his life as revealed in the Scriptures. We'll discover a man who gradually came to the place where he was willing to put his wholehearted trust in the Lord and when the chips were down, did not hesitate to risk all in obedience to what the Lord had told him to do.

The Calling: An angelic visitor at the wine press in the valley—Judges 6:1-24

The Confrontation: The midnight destruction of a pagan sanctuary—Judges 6:25-32

The Fleece: The affirmation of the sheared wool and the dew—Judges 6:33-40

The Winnowing: The reduction of a huge army to a force of merely 300—Judges 7:1-8

The Dream: The confirmation conversation in the enemy camp—Judges 7:9-15

The Victory: The destruction of the Midianites and their allies—Judges 7:16-25

With his victory over the Midianites, Gideon was now a respected leader among his people. No one doubted that he had been chosen by God to be a judge, a ruler of the people. In fact, they were willing to make him their king, a move which he wisely rejected. All in all he was a good man, but he wasn't perfect. An inappropriate relationship and the construction and veneration of a richly ornamented ephod, a vestment which was reserved for the priesthood of Israel, blemished his otherwise sterling reputation. But what endures as an example for us to follow is his faith. Let's take a look at his faith this morning and see how it applies to our lives, in our own day and time.

First of all, Gideon didn't possess a great deal of faith. He didn't have much faith in himself and he wasn't too sure about God. When confronted by the angel of the Lord at the wine press, he said, "I'm the least of my father's sons and my father belongs to the least of the clans in the tribe of Manasseh. And besides, I've heard about all of the great things that the Lord did for our ancestors when he brought them up out of the land of Egypt, but where is he now? He has abandoned us into the hands of the Midianites." Now you tell me, do you think Gideon was a man of great and wondrous faith? No, he was just the opposite. He possessed almost none at all, either in himself or in the Lord, but notice what the angel said to him, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel." In other words, it was not the amount of faith that Gideon possessed, but the fact that he had at least some and the Lord knew that that would be enough to defeat the Midianites.

That is what Jesus was talking about when he told his disciples, "If you have faith, even as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20). Jesus was responding to the disappointment of His disciples. They had tried to heal a boy who suffered from seizures and had failed. They wanted to know why. So He told them, "Doing God's work, like healing a sick boy, requires faith, but not a great deal of it, just a little bit, even as small an amount as the size of a mustard seed. And when you possess that kind of faith you can move a mountain." I've always wondered where this conversation took place. Some think that it was at the foot of Mount Hermon, which by the way is the biggest and tallest mountain in Israel. In other words, sometimes all it takes to do the impossible is a little faith.

And just in case you're wondering if there is any proof of that in the physical world in which we live, let me share this example with you. Have any of you ever seen a nuclear

submarine? Living in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, I had the opportunity to see a number of them, especially the smaller attack submarines. Do you know how much nuclear fuel it takes to run one of these attack submarines on a typical six month deployment? I was told that it takes an amount which is about the size of a stick of juicy fruit chewing gum. That's not much, especially when you consider the fact that the nuclear fuel on that sub not only provides propulsion, but also generates all of the energy necessary for the entire life support system of the vessel.

So a whole lot can come from a little bit. That was true with regards to Gideon's faith and that is certainly true for you and me. I wish I was a man of great and abiding faith. In fact, faith is one of the spiritual gifts that Paul identifies in his first letter to the Corinthians. I've met a number of people who possessed that gift and they are wonderful, godly individuals. But to be perfectly honest, a humongous supply of faith is not one of my strong points and the same may be true for you. We struggle with regards to our own self-confidence at times and yes, we sometimes have our doubts about God. Where is He? Why has He let this happen to us, or on a grander scale, why has He let this happen to our nation? Like Gideon, we find ourselves hiding in a valley, trying to harvest a little bit of grain at a winepress, depressed, a little frightened and definitely worried about the future. If you find yourself in that situation, take heart. With even a mustard seed of faith, you can move a mountain, no matter what kind of mountain it may be. For when we place our trust in the Lord, even what little bit we might possess, all things are possible. Or as Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

But here's a word of warning! When we place our trust in the Lord, we need to proceed with caution. I've heard a number of stories about people whose misplaced faith got them into all kinds of trouble. In some instances they have even lost their lives. While I can tell you all kinds of stories about people who let their misguided faith run away with them, I'd rather tell you one that is a bit more lighthearted. A rather scatterbrained young man who was always coming up with rather grandiose ideas about himself, dropped by the pastor's office one day. He told the pastor, "The other evening I looked up in the sky and saw two golden letters, "P" and "C." I think that means that I am supposed to go and preach Christ." Knowing that this excitable young man was unsuited for the ministry, the pastor responded, "I'm not sure in your case that these two letters mean 'preach Christ.' Rather, I think they mean that you should go home to your father, who is a farmer and 'plant corn.'"

If nothing else, the story of Gideon reminds us that he possessed a cautious faith. When the angel appeared and spoke to him, Gideon asked for a sign to make sure that this individual really was from the Lord. And later when he summoned the Israelites for battle, he once again checked things out with the Lord using a fleece, not once but twice. The first time the fleece was supposed to be wet and the ground around it dry

and then just to make sure it was not a fluke of nature, he did it again, but in reverse order, a dry fleece and wet ground around it. And then, lastly, there was the dream. This time the Lord reassured him of victory by sending him down into the Midianite camp so that he could overhear the dream of one of the enemy soldiers foretelling their imminent defeat. Gideon knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was doing exactly what the Lord wanted him to do.

Like Gideon, we too need to possess a cautious faith, especially when we're considering a decision that could have serious consequences for ourselves and others and it's more than just checking out the circumstances surrounding that decision. Everything may be lining up just right, but that doesn't mean that we have the green light to proceed. We need to investigate what God's Word, the Bible, has to say. God will never ask us to violate His written word. We also need to check things out with godly individuals who are really in touch with the Lord. Sometimes these folks can provide insights that we would never have thought about on our own. Proverbs 12:15 states, "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice." Finally, we need to listen to that inner voice, the Holy Spirit. In John 14: 26, Jesus promises, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." On more than one occasion someone has said to me, "I just knew down deep, that I was making a bad decision and I went right ahead and did it anyway. I failed to listen to counsel of the Holy Spirit and that was a big mistake." We may not be visited by angels, or have the reassurance of wondrous phenomena, but the fact of the matter is we have spiritual resources that were simply not available to Gideon. We have the Bible, godly advisers and the Holy Spirit to help guide us. We need to use and rely upon them so that our faith is not just a flighty exercise in futility, but a successful reliance upon the leadership of the Lord.

Before closing, there is one more thing that I need to share with you. Remember the Disney TV show years ago about Davey Crockett? Remember what he said over and over again, sort of his motto in life, "Be sure you're right and then go ahead." Well, Gideon was that kind of man. Once he was sure of what the Lord was asking him to do, he didn't waste any time. After visiting the camp of the Midianites and overhearing the soldier's dream, he and his three hundred men immediately attacked the Midianites. They put their faith to work. Otherwise everything that the Lord had commanded them to do would have been for naught.

The same is true for you and me, whether we're talking about our own personal faith, or something that involves an entire church family, we must put our faith to work. Otherwise we're just wasting our time. This truth was eloquently expressed by an old Scottish ferryman years ago. He would row passengers across a loch in Scotland. One of those passengers noticed that he had carved the word, "faith" on one oar and the

word, “works” on the other. Curious he asked why. The Scotsman replied, “I’ll show thee.” Using the oar named “faith” by itself, the little rowboat spun around in circles. He then switched to the other oar named “works” and did the same thing. Once again the rowboat spun in circles. Then pulling with both oars equally and at the same time, the oarsman straightened up the little rowboat and rowed it across the water to the distant shore. Speaking to his passenger he said, “You see, that is the way it is in the Christian life. Dead works without faith are useless and faith without works is dead also, getting you nowhere, but faith and works pulling together make for safety, progress and blessing.”

That’s what Gideon discovered a long, long time ago. A little faith can go a long ways, it can even move mountains, just so long as it is firmly rooted in what the Lord wants us to do and just so long as we are courageous enough to actually act upon it. The same is true for you and me. So take that mustard seed of faith and put it to work.