

Judges 6:11-7:23; Ex. 32:1-6; The Fearful Judge does not Finish Well I. The Fearful Leader II. The Faithful Leader III. The Forgetful Leader

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how hard is it to finish well? I have been told by runners that the hardest part of a marathon is the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. You need to pace yourself in order to finish well. I'm sure most of us have seen the grade schooler who sprints at the beginning of the race, who is forced to walk due to cramp or side ache. Well, today we are going to find that Gideon- who starts as the fearful judge, does not finish well. Our narrative opens in ch. 6 with great oppression. Israel is dispossessed in their own land. They are hiding in caves, cowering in fear, and barely eking out an existence. The man who would become judge is found threshing grain in a winepress- trying to hide what little was left from the bands of raiders that was consuming everything. But by the time we come to end of Gideon's life we notice quite a change- and not all for the better. Gideon ends us acting more like the kings of the nations around them than a godly leader. There are even similarities between our passage and Ex. 32- where both Aaron and Gideon receive gold from the people with the purpose of making an idolatrous object. This seizing of power leads the people into a grievous sin. So today we see that the Lord uses this fearful judge to prove His patience and power in Israel.

### **I. The Fearful Leader**

We start by considering how Gideon begins as the fearful leader. Throughout ch. 6 and 7 we find quite the interaction between Gideon and the LORD. As I said before, each judge rises a little less- becoming a little less of a godly example. Even though Barak was timid and impotent- Gideon comes nowhere near Barak's courage- and he is much less pious than Deborah was. Yet again and again, God constantly calms his fears. If we learn anything here, we learn of God's patience with His people! He gives repeated verification- to prove His word- as Gideon needed signs to see before he will believe and act. Gideon is quite the doubting Thomas! In contrast to this, Jesus said in John 20- blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe! We are called to live by faith and not by sight- when we hear we are to receive His word as true and believe

it! So in 6:12 Gideon is called to serve- and even assured of victory. Gideon is renamed- a mighty man of valor! But Gideon response- how can I? I am weak- I question my ability which is in fact a question of God's power- just like Moses and Barak before him. So Gideon asks for a sign in 6:17- give me a visible sign to prove you are who you say you are and that your word is true. The LORD obliges- and fire comes from the rock and Gideon's offering is received. Added to this, the LORD gives him another word of peace in 6:23 to calm his fears. Gideon obeys- but in secret as he is still afraid of his family in 6:27. Next comes the commission to lead Israel- which Gideon has a hard time believing. If you will truly use me- and save by my hand- give me another sign he says in 6:36. Again, the LORD calms the fears of Gideon with this two-fold sign of the fleece- once wet and the next time dry. God accommodates the fears of this timid man. Giving him another assurance of victory in 7:7- I will save you and give Midian into your hands. Still afraid Gideon- the LORD asks? Go down and listen to the dreams of the Midianite soldiers in 7:10. Do you now finally believe? Will you now be strong and courageous- you mighty man of valor? What we find in these 2 chapters is a repeated request for signs, assurance and proof. The repeated request of Gideon is not a sign of lionhearted faith! In other words, we are not called to put out the fleece in order to determine God's will! These tests come from a lack of faith- they arise from fear! Wanting signs- or a special added word from the LORD- proves a lack of confidence and contentment with what God has said! We have in the Scriptures all that need to know for our salvation- everything to guide us in Christian life. Jesus has been given to us as the last and the perfect revelation from God. To ask for more signs- to put out the fleece if you will- is to look for signs and wonders- further proof that God is who He said He is and His word is sufficient as He said it is! So in this first point, we see God's patience! He is so longsuffering- dealing with this fearful leader according to his needs- building his weak and fragile faith. Praise God for His patience that He has with His people! Believe and do not doubt- do not put the LORD your God to the test! Blessed are those who believe without seeing! The fact is, God has already given us signs to deal with our weak faith- only we call these signs sacraments!

## II. The Faithful Leader

Now that His fears are alleviated, Gideon proves himself to be a faithful leader. He is called a man of faith in Heb. 11. The LORD uses him to turn back the tide of oppression. The source of Gideon's power is the same as that of Moses and Joshua- God says- I am with you! His first act in 6:27 is to destroy a city altar dedicated to Baal. He obeys- although at night- but yet he obeys. Next according to his call to gather, deploy and then decrease the size of his army in 7:8. Again, Gideon fearfully obeys. And the LORD uses him to win a great victory. And yet- this truly is a victory by the LORD'S hand. Gideon stands back and watches the LORD save His people- since the Midianites really self-destruct. The enemy turns on themselves- taking their own lives as they themselves are filled with fear. The oppressive army is defeated by the LORD- and God again secures a God glorifying victory! The Battle truly belongs to the LORD! A huge army is decimated by a miraculous means- bringing to mind Rev. 20:9 where the fire of the LORD goes out and consumes the enemies that had surrounded the camp of the saints. We think also of how wonderful it is that our Savior and King Jesus was so willing to do what was asked of Him. When called and commissioned, Jesus said. Here I am- I have come, I will go. As Heb. 10:7 puts it, behold I have come to do your will. For these judges, obedience was only after hesitation. But Jesus came and obeyed without question. Perfect from beginning to end- saying not my will, but your will be done! Praise God that Jesus is the perfect leader- the author, perfecter and finisher of our faith! Because from this point on, things take an ugly turn in Gideon's life. Gideon seems to be motivated more by revenge and pride as we enter chapter 8. It was when Gideon was the weakest that he proved to be the strongest! When He had to rely on the LORD completely, that was when his life was one of faith!

## III. The Forgetful Leader (Read 8:22-28)

Having read the end of Gideon's life, we see that he did not finish well. Like Solomon who will come some years later, Gideon started his mission with promise but ended it with a sigh! In v. 22, Gideon is offered a

monarchy. Be our king- you have saved us now you should rule over us. But his response is puzzling. He seems to say- no- I will not. The LORD God will rule over you. This sounds so pious and true- remember that this was the problem in Israel. There was no king and everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. The LORD should have been their king- this was to be a Theocracy! However, how does Gideon's life change after this option of kingship is given? Well, he starts to act like a king. It may be that Gideon only feigned rejection- or he was only being polite in declining the offer. But note how his life starts to resemble the kings of the nations! It starts with a monument and a name- Gideon takes the spoil or the prize of war from the people in v. 24. As Aaron took the earrings back in Ex. 32, so Gideon takes this prize and makes what becomes an idolatrous object with them. He also takes the pendants and garments – along with the ornaments of gold which had belonged to the kings of Midian. He starts to amass gold and wears the royal robes of the heathen kings. From this gold he also makes an ephod- which was normally only worn by priests. With this Ephod, Gideon would become a channel through which God spoke. Not only is the presence of the LORD missing in Gideon's life in ch. 8- he is starting to look and even act like a heathen king. He gathers a haram in 8:30- marrying many wives and having concubines. Even wedding a Canaanite woman as he intermarries with gentiles. He goes so far as to name his own son- Abi-Melech which means- my father is the king. So the words of Gideon sound hollow when you consider his later life. Although he starts lowly and humble, he ends his life proud and exalted. Going from the least in Israel to the man who would be king. His actions in making an ephod and having a rebellious son ends up bringing back the very idolatry that led to their oppression in the first place. So ends the life of Gideon.

To conclude, as you can see it is hard to end well. To finish the race with honor. Let us learn not to forsake the God of our youth. Although Gideon is listed in Heb. 11 to be a man of faith- let us take to heart the opening of Heb. 12. Run with endurance, and consider Him who endured to the end. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus so that you do not grow weary and lose heart. The Lord uses this fearful judge to prove His patience and power in Israel- and to remind us to look not to Gideon- but to Jesus as the only one who can fully save!