Ancient Paths Series
Message 9 of 17: “Learning to Trust God in Times of Uncertainty”
Judges 6, 7

Read: Judges 6:11-18

INTRODUCTION

Illustration: While traveling through Alabama many years ago, I stopped to eat at a country diner. I don’t remember the name of the town or what I had to eat that evening. But when I went to pay for my meal I do remember the sign on the wall behind the cashier. The sign read: In God we trust. All others pay cash!

One of my favorite scriptures is Proverbs 3:5,6:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.

Trust is essential in building strong relationships. And this is especially true in our relationship with GOD.

FAITH and TRUST go hand in hand. Can we truly say we have FAITH in GOD if we don’t TRUST Him to provide for us in times of need........protect us in times of fear........ and empower us in times of weakness, doubt and uncertainty? FAITH and TRUST in God are inseparable.

Tonight we will see this great truth revealed in the life of a man named GIDEON.
The Period of the Judges

The Book of Judges is about failure, failure and more failure. It is a monotonous message of depravity.

After conquering the fortified city of JERICHO through the miraculous power of God, the Israelites were instructed to move farther into the Promised Land and drive out all the inhabitants.

Well the Israelites disobeyed God. They didn’t just fail to drive the inhabitants out of the land, they intermarried with these foreigners and as a result started worshipping their heathen gods.

And so throughout the Book of Judges we see the Israelites go through this repetitive cycle:

* They would REBEL against GOD.

* God would send JUDGMENT upon them.

* They would REPENT and go back to GOD for a time

* And then they would REBEL and start the cycle over again.

And this happen time after time after time.

It was during this 350-400 year period in Israel’s history that GOD raised up JUDGES. Now when we think of a JUDGE we think of a man or woman wearing a black robe presiding over a Court of Law with a gavel in hand.

The JUDGES in the Old Testament carried SWORDS, not GAVELS. They wore ARMOR not long black robes. They presided over a BATTLEFIELD, not a Court Room.
During periods of REBELLION, God would allow the Israelites to be taken over by neighboring enemies. And for a period of time God would allow these enemies to oppress the Israelites until they came to their senses and realized they needed to repent and go back to God. It was then GOD would raise up a JUDGE to deliver the Israelites from their oppressor.

As we come now to JUDGES chapter 6, the Israelites have been through almost 7 years of terrible oppression at the hands of the MIDIANITES. Now who were the Midianites?

The best way to describe the Midianites is they were camel riding terrorists from the region southeast of the land of Canaan. This is the region where the Persian Gulf War was fought back in the early ‘90’s.

The Midianites were descended from Abraham’s fourth son, MIDIAN, who was birthed by Katurah, the woman Abraham married after the death of Sarah.

Verses 1-4 tell us these Midianites terrorized the Israelites so much that the Israelites lived in caves and mountain clefts and strongholds (which is fortified towns).

One other noteworthy point about the Midianites was the size of their army. Verse 5 describes them as being so numerous they were like a swarm of locusts. (some translations say “grass-hoppers.”)

It is this band of Midianite terrorists that must now be overthrown in order to restore peace in the land of Canaan.

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As we dig a deeper into Judges chapters 6 and 7 we are going to see how Gideon moved from doubt and uncertainty to complete TRUST in GOD.

First of all, let’s see how........

I. Gideon Tested God

Scripture: Judges 6:14-18

1. More often than not, when God called people into service, they resisted Him by coming up with all kinds of excuses.

   *That’s what MOSES did when God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

   *That’s what JONAH did when God called him to be a missionary to NINEVAH.

   *That’s what SOLOMON did when God first called him to be a KING.

2. And that is what GIDEON did when the angel of the Lord told him God wanted him to lead the Israelites in the overthrow of the Midianites.

   vs. 15 “But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

Gideon saw himself as the “least qualified guy on earth” to lead the Israelites against the MIDIANITES.
3. Realizing his excuses weren’t working, GIDEON now wants to “test” this ANGEL to see if He is really a messenger from God. This first test involved FIRE.

VERSES 17-24

4. Well Gideon is now sure of who this MESSENGER is, but he’s still not sure about HIS MISSION.

5. Operating on the weakest level of FAITH and TRUST, Gideon TESTS God a second time. This test involved FLEECE.

VERSES 36-38

6. Still lacking FAITH and TRUST that GOD is going to use him to save ISRAEL from the Midianites, Gideon TESTS God a third time. This test also involved the FLEECE.

VERSES 39-40

7. Have you ever TESTED GOD? Have you ever “put out the fleece” and asked God to give you a SIGN to let you know if He was going to give you that job you had been praying for? Or to let you know HE approves of a certain decision you have made? Or to point you in the direction He wants you to go?

ILLUSTRATION: Reminds me of the guy who looked up and saw the letters “P.C.” written in the sky. The next Sunday he told everyone at Church he was going to become a minister because he saw the letters “P.C.” in the sky and He just knew GOD had given him a SIGN that he was to go PREACH CHRIST.
A LOCAL CROP DUSTER who just happened to be a member of the Church said, “Harry, you ding-a-ling. I wrote those letters with my AIRPLANE to tell the FARMERS its time to PLANT CORN.”

8. Is it wrong to test God? Is it wrong to ask for signs? You notice God didn’t condemn Gideon for asking for a sign. But it was obvious Gideon was operating at the very lowest level of FAITH and TRUST.

Likewise when you and I ask GOD to give us signs, we too, are operating at the very lowest level of FAITH and TRUST.

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Well let’s move on to JUDGES CHAPTER SEVEN where we see........

II. Gideon Trusts in God

1. We have already learned in chapter six that the MIDIANITE ARMY was so big they were like a swarm of locusts or grasshoppers.

2. Conventional military strategy would call for Israel to gather an army of equal or greater size than the Midianites to secure victory.

But as we have already seen in the overthrow of JERICHO, God’s ways are not our ways.

READ: JUDGES 7:1-3
3. I'm sure when Gideon saw 32,000 Israelites report for duty, he was thrilled. But what Gideon saw as an asset, God saw as a liability.

God said, (vs. 2) “You have too many men (REPEAT) for ME to deliver Midian into their hands.

4. Keep in mind the Israelites already had a “PRIDE” problem. Their PRIDE was what got them in this mess with the Midianites in the first place. Their PRIDE told them they didn’t need GOD.

If Gideon now leads them into battle with 32,000 men and they defeat the Midianites, that would just make their PRIDE get bigger. That would just bolster their erroneous thinking that they didn’t need GOD.

5. GOD wants this VICTORY to be so incredible, so miraculous, that the Israelites couldn’t possibly say, “Look what WE did” but rather “Look what GOD did!”

6. So God now commands Gideon to go through the FIRST of a TWO PHASE “weeding out” process of his army.

The first phase had to be some what comical.

GIDEON says, “Anyone who is afraid to fight can go home.” Before Gideon even finishes his sentence, 22,000 men high tail it out of there. You can just imagine Gideon standing there like a “deer in headlights” wandering, “What have I just done?”
7. Gideon’s army has been reduced from 32,000 to 10,000 just like that! (snap!)

Gideon’s probably thinking, “Ok, 10,000 isn’t quite as good as 32,000, but perhaps we can still win.

8. But look at verse 4  *But the Lord said to Gideon, “There are still too many men.”*

9. God now instructs Gideon to take the men down to the water to begin PHASE 2 of the “weeding out” process.

When the men get down to the water, they are thirsty, so they did what came natural………..they took a drink.

9,700 of the men lapped up water like a dog…….. 300 knelt down on their knee and cupped the water with their hand to their mouth.

10. Some have suggested the manner in which they drank distinguished the good soldiers from the bad soldiers. That those who put their faces in the water and lapped like a dog were displaying a lack of alertness which would make them very vulnerable to enemy attack. While those who knelt on their knees and cupped the water to their mouths were displaying a mental alertness and preparedness.

11. But keep in mind this battle is not about the might and strength of Israel’s soldiers, but about the might and strength of GOD

12. After starting with 32,000 men, Gideon’s army has now been reduced to 300. GIDEON HAS NOW PUT HIS FAITH AND TRUST IN GOD.
Gideon Tested God  
Gideon Trusts in God

Thirdly......

III. Gideon Triumphs With God

1. To bolster Gideon’s faith, God instructs Gideon to go down to the outpost of the Midianite camp that night.

   As Gideon crosses over the ridge and gets his first glimpse of the Midianite camp he sees a formidable sight.

   **verses 10-12**

2. Being within earshot of the Midianite camp, Gideon and his servant, Purah, over hear one of the enemy telling a friend about this dream he had.

   In this man’s dream he saw a large barley loaf tumbling into the Midianite camp and striking a tent with such force it was destroyed.

   Leaning forward to listen closely to the other man’s response, imagine Gideon’s surprise when he heard the man say, “*This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.*”

   THESE WORDS CAME STRAIGHT FROM THE ENEMY’S MOUTH.
3. GIDEON was so empowered by this dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God right there at the edge of the enemy’s camp.

4. Then GIDEON returned to his own camp and woke up his 300 soldiers to let them know “Tonight is the night! Let’s get ready for battle!”

Gideon divides his 300 men into three companies. But rather than arming them with swords and spears, he arms them with empty jars with torches inside.

5. Can you imagine what was going through the minds of those half awake soldiers when they realized they were getting ready to go into battle with 135,000 Midianites armed only with clay jars and torches?

Think of the questions those guys must have been asking Gideon.

“Do you want us to whack ‘em over the head with the jars?”

“You want us to set ‘em on fire?”

6. Let’s pick up the record in VERSES 17-22

7. Here we see the BRILLIANT INFINITE WISDOM OF GOD on display.

I mean put yourself in that Midianite camp for a moment. You’re sound asleep. All the sudden you are awakened by the sound of blaring trumpets and crashing clay jars. Through sleepy eyes you see the torches and believe you are totally surrounded by the enemy. Now because it is pitch dark, you don’t realize its just 300 men. For all you know it could be 300,000 men.
8. Panic and terror break out all across the Midianite camp and they just start swinging swords not realizing they aren’t killing the enemy, they are killing each other!

9. WHO BUT ALMIGHTY GOD COULD COME UP WITH A PLAN AS BRILLIANT AS THIS!

10. BECAUSE GOD WAS ON THEIR SIDE, GIDEON AND HIS THREE HUNDRED FIGHTING MEN TRIUMPHED THAT NIGHT.

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

What can you and I learn from this Ancient account of Gideon?

    Just like Gideon was afraid to attack the enemy, I believe at times we all have issues in our lives we are afraid to confront.

Sometimes we are afraid to confront certain health issues because we fear we’ll get some bad news from the doctor.

Sometimes we are afraid to confront an addiction because our pride tells us we control the addiction rather than the addiction controls us.

Sometimes we’re afraid to confront a family member or friend who has an addiction or a self-destructive habit because we fear they will hate us or they will alienate themselves from us.

Sometimes we’re afraid to confront certain jobs or responsibilities because we FEAR we will FAIL.

And the list just goes on and on........
If God could give Gideon and a band of 300 men a victory over an army of 135,000 Midianites, don’t you have enough FAITH and TRUST in GOD to believe He could give you the victory over your enemy?

ASK HIM!

JUST ASK HIM!

GOD PLUS YOU ALWAYS EQUALS A MAJORITY NO MATTER HOW BIG YOUR ENEMY MAY BE!