

JUDGES SESSION #10

In our last session, one of the subjects we addressed was God's guidance. We saw that "fleece-setting" is not the way to find God's will for our lives.

But how DO we make wise, godly decisions which will keep us on track with God's will?

- let me share **four summary principles** from a book I would recommend, especially if you are concerned about this issue: "*Decision Making and the Will of God*" by Garry Friesen (this book is included in my Bibliography; these summarized principles are from page 48)

1. In those areas **specifically addressed** by the Bible, the revealed commands and principles of God (His moral will) are to be obeyed.
2. In those areas where the Bible gives **no command or principle** (non-moral decisions), the believer is free and responsible to choose his own course of action. Any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God.
3. In nonmoral decisions, the objective of the Christian is to make **wise decisions** on the basis of spiritual expediency (usefulness).
4. In all decisions, the believer should humbly **submit**, in advance, to the outworking of **God's sovereign will** as it touches each decision.

- we don't need to get uptight about 'finding God's will for our life' as if this were a tiny target which we can easily miss

- His will encompasses an area of freedom within which a number of different decisions will be according to His will

- after all, God is much more concerned about who we **are** (and 'becoming') than about what we *do* or where we *work* – God's focus is the development of our character not our job resumé

- as we learn God's principles through the study of His Word, and apply them to our daily lives through obedience to Him, we will live in His will – and as we lean on Him He will enable us to make **wise decisions** in those areas not specifically addressed in the Bible

- Isaiah 30:21 says,

Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,

"This *is* the way, walk in it,"

Whenever you turn to the right hand

Or whenever you turn to the left.

- Pastor Charles Price points out that the voice is **behind** us because God is actively guiding us; when we "make a wrong move or wander off course, the Spirit of God will – in some way – pull us back on track."

- furthermore, God doesn't just give us a map, He gives us a **guide**

- when you travel to a strange city for the first time, which is better: a map or a personal guide? ...a guide is of course much better, someone who knows their way around, how the train system works, where the best food can be found, etc!

- John 16:13 (Message) – "when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is."

- and one more verse for your encouragement – Psa. 32:8 (LB) - "I will instruct you (says the Lord) and guide you along the best pathway for your life; I will advise you and watch your progress."

E. REASSURANCE FOR SERVICE

OK, back to Gideon once more. God graciously gives nervous Gideon yet another assurance that all will be well. We pick up the story in...

Judg 7:9-14

⁹ It happened on the same night that the Lord said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. ¹⁰ But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, ¹¹ and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who *were* in the camp. ¹² Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.

¹³ And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: *To my surprise*, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed."

¹⁴ Then his companion answered and said, "This *is* nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp."

- this dream by a Midianite, which Gideon overhears, is now the 4th sign from God!
- note two great contrasts here:
 - (a) how greatly **Gideon needed to be encouraged** -- we see Gideon's WEAKNESS
 - Gideon is **not very quick** at learning lessons or developing a stronger faith
 - he has faith but it is a cautious hesitant faith that needs to grow
 - and as we saw in the incident of the fleece, God doesn't beat him into the ground because of such a hesitant faith, He **encourages** Gideon
 - as Isaiah put it: "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the dimly burning flame. **He will encourage the fainthearted**, those tempted to despair." (Isa 42:3 Living Bible)
 - we are usually not much better than Gideon; we too need God to repeat some of the same lessons often in our lives before we really get the picture and respond as we should!
 - (b) and secondly, also notice how **patient God** was with him
 - we see God's GREATNESS
 - once again the **focus** is more on Israel's **Great God** than on any good qualities of the individual judge
- God is great because He takes the initiative to come to Gideon and **speak** to him once again in his time of need
 - David Jackman said, "The movement from **fear** to **faith** always begins with a fresh **hearing of God's Word**."
 - ...that's one of the reasons why it is so important that we maintain regular devotional times of reading the Bible and praying, and don't miss church services – a "fresh hearing of God's Word" is essential to move us from our fears to a firmer faith
- and God's greatness is seen in the fact that He has already been **at work among the Midianites**, lowering their morale, making them nervous, creating fear of Gideon and of Gideon's God

- God can even give a Midianite soldier a specific dream, and then bring Gideon right up behind that man's tent (out of the thousands of tents in the army camp!) at just the precise moment when he has woken up and starts to tell his frightening dream to his fellow soldier
- this is going to be God's battle and God's victory; Gideon just needs to be available and obedient
- vs. 15
 - And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand."
- God's greatness finally dawns on Gideon ...and his faith springs to full life
 - and "he worshipped God" – it is always the expression of turning away from ourselves with all our weaknesses, sins & pride, and focusing on the One who alone is absolutely powerful & holy
 - ...as someone said, "the man who kneels to God can stand up to anything"
- it will be true for Gideon, as we see now in the **success God gives him** in the battle against the Midianites

F. **SUCCESS** IN SERVICE

Judg 7:16-21

Then he divided the three hundred men *into* three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: ¹⁸ When I blow the trumpet, I and all who *are* with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, '*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!*'"

¹⁹ So Gideon and the hundred men who *were* with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that *were* in their hands. ²⁰ Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers – they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing – and they cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" ²¹ And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled.

- these were perhaps the strangest weapons in the history of warfare!
- ...but these elements tell us important truths about victorious service

1. **Trumpets**

- a "trumpet" in Scripture often pictures a message of judgment from God
- for example:

Ezek 33:6 & 7

But if the watchman sees the sword [judgment] coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'

⁷"So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them [blow the trumpet] for Me.

- our service to God should involve the **PROCLAMATION** of His message, a message which involves *warning* about judgment as well as the blessing of salvation

2. **Jars**

- these were plain ordinary clay pots; fragile, chip-able...but very important in the total strategy here

- these pots could certainly represent **PEOPLE**

- God chooses to use people! ...ordinary, fragile clay jars

- after slicing down Gideon's army so drastically, what is amazing is that God needed ANY of them to conquer the Midianites!

- but He did; He kept 300, and used them to defeat 135,000 Midianites

- note the **characteristics** of the **jars**:

a) **available**

...availability is a much more important factor than *ability*

- Gideon may have been just a farmer, the least in his family, the lowest in his tribe; but his weakness made it possible for God's strength to be seen; his availability was far more important than his ability ...and the same is true of us too

b) **empty**

...in other words, these jars were prepared and that preparation involved emptying

- to be used by God, we *people* must be prepared – 'emptied' of our own self-importance, emptied of dependence on ourselves; only then can God fill us and use us

c) **broken** for greatest usefulness

- cf. Psa. 51:17 "The sacrifices of God are a **broken** spirit, a **broken** and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise."

- it is very significant, and instructive, that the jars **HID** the light until they were **BROKEN**

...maybe you have discovered, as I have, that His light doesn't shine out well from our lives until **SELF** has been broken: "not my will but **Thine** be done"

- vs. 20 tells us that Gideon's little band of men, at the crucial moment, shouted, "The sword of the **LORD and of Gideon**"

- and again we see that the battle was **COOPERATIVE effort**: God & Gideon's men working together for victory

3. the 3rd odd "weapon" was **Lights**

- what a graphic picture of **Christian witness**!

Phil 2:15-16 "You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of people who are crooked and stubborn. **Shine out** among them like beacon lights, holding out to them the Word of Life." (LB)

2 Cor 4:6-7 "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the *light* of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

But we have this treasure in *jars of clay* [was Paul thinking here of Gideon's story?] to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." (NIV)

- the emphasis has been on Gideon, as leader; but note also the important role of the 300 ... these were men who had not personally experienced all that Gideon had seen in his interaction with the Lord, but each one of them faithfully & courageously "held his position" (vs. 21)
- Gideon, as God's appointed "yasha" (deliverer), with his 300 men using these 3 'weapons' provide a powerful picture of the **Gospel** proclaimed to a sleeping world and shattering their complacency
- for the Midianites it was a message of **judgment** and the result was their **destruction** as they started killing themselves off! ...evil is self-destructive, a theme which will be seen even more clearly in chapter 9
- centuries later, the prophet Isaiah referred to this great **victory over Midian** in one of the most famous passages in the OT: (Isa. 9:2,4,6)

The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.

(vs 4 NLT) For you will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,
just as you did when you destroyed the **army of Midian**.

(vs. 6 - the famous one) For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

- Gideon – with his wonderful victory – is only a tiny picture of the victory God intends to bring through His Son, the **Child** born in Bethlehem, the **Great Deliverer**!