

Title: Confronting your own idols  
Text: Judges 6.1-32  
Theme: Godly leadership is being sure of God but unsure of ourselves  
Series: Judges #7  
Prop Stmtnt: Leadership is grounded in a trust in God and a willingness to obey him.

Read Text:

Look at the last phrase of chapter 5. Let me read it for you. And they lived happily ever after. The end. The truth is, that will never, ever be the case until Christ returns. There will always be situations that you fret about. If you have good health, you may not have a good job. If you have a good income, your child may not have good health, or may not have good friends, or a good marriage. There will always be things in your world that are pressing on you which are prime occasions for anxiety. Jeffrey Meyers said, “...*do not be surprised to find yourself in a frustrating situation from which you cannot escape by means of controlling it. Not everything can be fixed! Not everything is a problem to be solved. Some things must be borne, must be suffered and endured. Wisdom does not teach us now to master the world. It does not give us techniques for programming life so that life becomes orderly and predictable.*” But we so desperately want to find a means by which we can master the world and make it do our bidding. That is the lure of idols. They promise you peace, significance, fulfillment, pleasure, health, power or escape.

What do you want to do or tend to do when you are stressed? Eat, drink, smoke, fret, freak out, rant, porn, buy stuff, or run away? What you depend on, when you are stressed, is your god. If you are trusting in anything or anyone other than the God of the Bible, then that god will only add to your stress. The story of OT Israel is sadly the story of idolatry. It is the story of an unfaithful bride. In spite of God revealing himself to her more than any other nation, Israel kept turning to other gods, which were not really gods, and life for Israel was an unbelievable repetition of rebellion, bondage, remorse and rescue. Chapter 5 ends with rescue and chapter 6 begins with rebellion – again.

#### I. **THE Story behind the story.** (1-10)

There is always a story behind the story which is why it is critical for you to be immersed in the Bible. When your thinking is influenced by God’s Word, then you will have more than information, you will have wisdom and discernment. You can gather a lot of information about the world, but God’s Word will teach you to learn why, not just what.

Our text begins with the story behind the story. “*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.*” Circumstantially, Midian might have rallied around a powerful leader who was able to unite the Midianites and draw in the Amalekites and other people into being a force that preyed upon weaker neighbors like Israel who had no standing army, no recognized commander or king. But, the real reason why Midian was so successful is because Israel had done evil and because God is righteous, he has to punish evil.

God doesn't have to say anything, but he does. And he keeps saying it, but God does more than talk, he acts and his actions are consistent with his words. So, God not only tells us, he told Israel (again) through a prophet (v.8) which of course, tells us – again.

Is there anything that you know that you ought to be doing or ought not to be doing that you are ignoring God's voice about? What has to happen to you for you to know that God is serious? You really need to come to terms with this: God tells you the truth upfront and keeps his word while Satan lies to you upfront and breaks his word. God went through a lot of effort to inform Israel and us about what he expects. He is kind to go out of his way to warn us ahead of time about what will happen. Israel is like the driver who is told that there is a state police officer 1 mile up the road on the shoulder handing out tickets to speeders, only to blow past the officer at 90 miles an hour, get pulled over and then start whining about it. God tells you over and over of what is going to happen if you ignore his warnings and once again, Israel does this and turns to idols.

Idolatry will take everything from you and make you a slave. Israel's condition is dire. Every year when it gets close to harvest time, the Midianites and others would come in and cover the land like locusts and would take everything. There is hardly anything that is more distressing than working hard and watching everything that you work for being taken away from you and you cannot do a thing about it. The nation was devastated economically and personally. Midian was loving life. Israel did all of the work and Midian simply came in and took everything. Midian did not have to work at all, after all Israel's raised the crops. The situation is pitiful, yet once again there is no tangible evidence of repentance, just crying over the consequences.

But, something has to give. God is not going to let this go on indefinitely. His name is on the line. He promised to bring salvation to the world through Israel and God is going to see his plan through. God is going to bring a Messiah through Israel. God is going to bring a Savior to the world. Nothing is going to stop God from doing what he promised he would do and at the same time, while God is Sovereign and is going to carry out his plan, he carries out his plan through the free choices of people. We see this clearly in Gideon. Gideon's call to leadership is the most detailed call of all the judges, which is why we are going to be spending several weeks on Gideon. There is a lot here. So, THE story behind the story has a few layers. On the surface, Midian and a few friends are destroying Israel economically. Under that is Israel's idolatry and the consequences of it, and under that is God's Sovereign plan to use Israel to bring the Messiah into the world. There is a lot at stake, when the scene takes us into a small, private and hidden spot.

## II. **You don't see what I see (because you don't know what I know)** (11-24)

Parents and kids are generally in a state of conflict, right? For little kids, getting them to eat is all-out war. For older kids what to wear, when to go to bed, what is allowed, what is not, what my friends are doing, where I can go, what entertainment I can be exposed to, are all opportunities ripe for conflict. Some of you, if not many of you had a tense conversation in the car this morning, and no, no one told on you, it is life. But why? Why is this life? Does it really have to be this way? No, it doesn't, but here is the rub. Kids,

listen to me. Don't be an idiot! Seriously, if you did not need a parent, God would not have given you one. If you did not need adults to love you, teach you, encourage you and direct you, then God would have seen to it, that after you were birthed, that you would just fend for yourself, like a sea turtle who was hatched and comes out of the sand. Let's see if you can make it into the ocean before being eaten. Why do your parents tell you what to wear and what to eat, and dare to impose their rules of how much sleep you need to get? They do so because they see more than you see. They really do know more than you know. The world is so much bigger than you realize and their experience in life informs the way they parent you and they do not always have the time to explain everything to you in the moment. Don't be an idiot! Take advantage of God's grace in your life by giving you parents or adults who know more than you do. That same dynamic is on display here. Gideon only sees his tiny little world. His perspective is only 6 inches in front of his nose. All he knows is that life stinks. Instead of being humble, he is accusatory, and yet God's patience is on display here. Gideon does not know what he doesn't know and God is going to teach him.

The primary method of threshing wheat was to beat the heads of the grain and then throw them into the air, allowing the wind to blow the chaff away while the seeds fell to the ground. However, that was too obvious and too risky because it would simply mean that the Midianites in the area would come and take your stuff. This guy named Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress. The text says that he was beating it, which was way more difficult, but he had no choice. Notice how the author sets this up. The angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah. (Notice: I will probably say Oprah at some point in this sermon, when I mean to say Ophrah.) The angel of the LORD is sitting while Gideon is knocking himself out.

We just read how the people were crying out to God for relief and he sent them a prophet who told them again that they are experiencing the consequences of their rebellion. God does not have to bring them relief, yet once again God moves in response to their misery. Look back at v.10. What does God tell his people? "I am the LORD your God." These other gods are not your God. I am the one who rescued you. I am the one who loves you. I am the one who carried you. I am the one who fed you, protected you, loved you, named you and treasured you. Do you hear him? I am the one who sent my Son for you. I am your Savior, there is no other. Why would you follow another? Look at where it gets you? Verse ten ends on an ominous note. We do not expect any further grace from God and yet, here is God, showing up in the midst of the misery in order to bring about relief.

So, this guy named Gideon (which means "hacker of wood") is all by himself in a winepress trying to thresh out some grain. He appears to be so focused on his work that he does not notice this angel/messenger from God who is sitting under the tree watching him. The angel of the LORD then says something that sounds comical, which by the way, this account is marked by a lot of conversation. The angel of the LORD says, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."

Well, that is definitely NOT how Gideon sees it. There is nothing in his experience that would give him any reason to believe that the Lord is with him or that he is some mighty

man of valor. So, how many of you kids roll your eyes when your parents are trying to talk with you for the thousandth time? Here's Gideon, rolling his eyes. And his response is a rather snarky, "yea right." I'm not buying what you are selling. Look, they told me these stories about God bringing us up out of Egypt and all that, but look at us! Is this it? I don't know about God, because there is nothing in my circumstances right now that give me any reason to believe God. Gideon is an arrogant jerk, but he doesn't know that he is an arrogant jerk. He is arguing with the angel of the LORD, who is also referred to as "the LORD" (v.14, 16, 23) which leads me to believe that this is an appearance of Christ. Gideon does not yet realize who is talking with him and Gideon is being lippy.

There is no acknowledgement of the sin of his people and no acknowledgement of his own sin. In a few verses we find out that Gideon's dad was a prominent man in the region and had built a large shrine to Asherah and Baal on his land that the entire community used for their worship and festivals. Gideon, do you think that this might be part of your problem? He doesn't get it at all does he? Just like us! Gideon grew up worshiping at this altar and his family built the thing and provides for it and protects it. And here Gideon is blaming God for their problems when all that God is doing is keeping his promise that if you abandon Yahweh and go after other idols, your life will be marked by misery. We never see our sin, even when it is blatant, but we sure are quick to find fault with God.

So, how does God respond to this accusation? What does he say to Gideon, as a retort? Nothing! I think this is hilarious. The angel of God acts as if whatever Gideon just said, didn't even happen. He ignores it as if it is not worth responding to, because it isn't. Parents, you understand this as a parent, don't you. Mom's go through the valley of the shadow of death to give birth to a child, spend the first 9 months in a drunken stupor from sleep deprivation, eat Ramen noodles because diapers are so expensive, drive beater cars because you have to pay for braces, and spend 85% of your waking hours driving your kids from practice, to event, to school, to activity, etc., only to have your kid say, "you hate me" when you make them clean their room. Parents you get that when your kid treats you that way, but do you get it when you treat God that way? Is your kneejerk response to say, "God you hate me" when in the moment your life is not all that you want it to be. Beloved, we live in a Genesis 3 world right now. Your life will never, ever be all that you want it to be and we need to thank God for that, because what you want your life to be is way too small. You want life to be about you and God in his grace won't cater to your demands because your view is too small. Gideon would have been happy to not be harassed by the Midianites. But God doesn't want Gideon to go to hell. He wants Gideon to know Him. He wants Gideon to trust him. He wants Gideon to love him because God is worth loving, not use God to get his best life now.

So, God just ignores what Gideon says and simply picks up in verse 14 where he left off in verse 12, as if what Gideon said in verse 13 never happened. "*Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?*" This is classic! Gideon has to be apoplectic. Did you not hear what I said? What might? What on earth are you talking about? Are you out of your mind? Save Israel from Midian? Me and whose army? This is ridiculous! But God will not let him go. I am calling you and I am not taking "no" for answer because I am going to accomplish my plan and you are going to choose to be

part of it. Gideon tries to argue again in v.15, but the LORD is insistent. “*I will be with you and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.*” So, let’s go. I know that you don’t see what I see because you don’t know what I know. You do not know who you are or what you can do until you know who God is and what he can do. It is not about your strength, or what you can do when you believe in yourself, it is about who God is and how he works through people who believe in him. Godly leadership is not about believing in ourselves, but believing in God. Being unsure of ourselves, we are sure about God. But Gideon is not yet sure about God, so he is not about to risk his life at this point but, obviously God awakens a curiosity. So Gideon asks for a sign and then pleads with him to stay until he has a chance to bring him an offering, which is in reality a meal that Gideon prepares.

Now, hold the phone. Look at v.19. Read v.19 and notice the detailed steps in here. Do you notice how the author carefully takes us step by step by step through the process that Gideon went through in order to make this meal? It’s not like he called Jimmie John’s. This is the opposite of freaky fast. This is painfully slow. I understand what preparing a young goat means. I was in Haiti and my hosts wanted to have goat for dinner that night, so I went with them to the local market and they picked out the goat. The farmer took the goat behind the sheet and after deftly utilizing his tools, that goat went home with us in a bag. That took time. Verse 19 describes a long process that probably took several hours. And here is God, who no doubt has a few things on his mind and probably a few other things “on his plate” sitting under a tree waiting on Gideon to make a meal that God isn’t even going to eat. But, Gideon asked for a sign and while God is not obligated to answer, he does, and so God waits and waits and waits. That is amazing patience. Gideon brings out the meal, and is told to put it on the rock and pour the broth over it at which point, the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of his staff and caused fire to come out of the rock, which consumed the food and the angel of the LORD vanished.

Look at v.22. “THEN Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD.” And of course, now Gideon is rightfully terrified. He is terrified because Baal doesn’t do this. Baal can’t. He isn’t real. He is terrified because he just came face to face with power that he cannot control nor understand. Again, idolatry is nothing more than our attempts at controlling our world, but we cannot control our world because we are not in charge. We are creation and God is Creator. God assures Gideon that he is not going to die. And notice what Gideon does, he builds an altar and he names it. “The LORD is Peace.” What just happened? Gideon has just had his world view get a little bigger. He now sees a little more than he used to see because he knows a little more about God than he used to know, but that knowledge about God and this experience with God is not the goal. Our knowledge of God and experience with God is designed to drive our dependency upon God and our obedience to God. That night, (v.28) God gives Gideon his first assignment.

### III. **Tear down your own idols.** (28-32)

This is exactly what Jesus said in Matthew 7.1-5. You can’t fight against the enemies of God out there, until you confront the enemies of God in your own life. Tear down your own idols. Show no mercy to your idols! The ultimate indignity is performed when

Gideon not only topples the Asherah, but uses the chopped up wood as the fuel for the fire upon which he offers the bull as a sacrifice to Yahweh that destroyed Baal. If you trust in Baal, then Gideon's obedience to God just offended you as much as possible. God will tolerate no competition, because no other god can compare. God is not going to let you get away with idolatry in your own life, no matter how gifted or talented you may be. He doesn't need you. He will use you and loves to use you, but you have confront your own idols. Again, what is an idol? An idol is anything I look to, other than God for my happiness, identity and security. An idol is that which I willing to sin in order to get it or will sin if I don't get it. Baal and Asherah promised prosperity and pleasure. If you sacrifice to me, you will get the life you want. Some of you worship your career, degrees, investments, children, or health because you think that if you have them then you will have happiness, identity or security. They cannot save you. They cannot rescue you. They cannot give you eternal life. If you are going to help others see the problems in their lives, you need to address the idols in yours.

Gideon, take down your dads idols. Gideon did not need supernatural power to take down the Baal and Asherah. He would need a miracle to defeat the Midianites. He did not need a miracle to take down Baal. He just needed to obey. But, his willingness to obey in this difficult but necessary step set the stage for the next.

Gideon's biggest challenge was not the Midianites, but standing up to his dad, his family and his community. The problem was not the Midianites as the beginning of the chapter made clear. Gideon and 10 servants used a bull or two and toppled the obviously large idols, and then Gideon – the hacker, hacked up Asherah and used the wood to sacrifice the bull on to Yahweh. There was no turning back now. When you confront the idols in your life, you usually expose the idols in someone elses, and they are usually not very happy about it. And in this case, his own people were willing to kill him because he destroyed their idols. This is what Israel had become. But Gideon's courage obviously awakened something in his dad who sounds as if he might have actually been impressed with his son's courage and plants his own flag next to his boy. You try to kill my boy; I'll kill you. If Baal is all that – let Baal fight for himself.

The challenge that Gideon's father gave to Baal, would be repeated against Christ over 1,000 years later. If you are all that you say you are, save yourself. Fight for yourself! Prophecy, who hit you?! The difference is clear. Baal couldn't save anyone else because he couldn't save himself. Christ saves everyone who comes to him because he chose not to save himself, but instead died in our place and waited for the Father to raise him from the dead. Why would you entrust your happiness to anyone or anything other than Christ?