



Judges 6:25-32

When High Places come down
Strongholds are broken and relationships restored

In any lasting and loving relationship there comes a decisive moment where positive action is required to restore peace once it has been lost.

No relationship can go well if only one side is faithful, it requires both parties to make a life-long commitment to love and to serve one another to live in peace and unity.

Let's read and study Judges 6:25-32 and see what the Holy Spirit would say to us this morning about our personal relationship with the God who created us in His image and likeness.

Judges 6:25-32

²⁵ That same night the Lord said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering."

²⁷ So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

²⁸ In the morning when the people of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!

²⁹ They asked each other, "Who did this?"

When they carefully investigated, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it."

³⁰ The people of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."

³¹ But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." ³² So because Gideon broke down Baal's altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal that day, saying, "Let Baal contend with him."

As we study the life of Gideon we see how the relationship between the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and His chosen people Israel, is not going well...again! Their love for, and service to their creator and provider grew cold, as they turned their hearts toward worthless idols and worshipped the pagan gods Baal and Asherah.

The Lord God had brought His people into a land in which He wanted to bless them and to be in an intimate relationship with them, a relationship of His peace, protection and provision, instead they turned away to worship idols.

From the overall book we learn that whenever a Judge over Israel lived, the nation knew God's peace, protection and prosperity but whenever the Judge died the people wandered from their first love and began to adulterate their pure worship with rituals to pagan gods.

This time, the Lord allowed the Midianites to steal their crops, kill their animals and destroy their peace for 7 long years.

The protection they once knew was withheld and the Midianites brought Israel to its knees. In desperation it caused them to cry out to Yahweh for mercy.

Why would God's chosen people fall away like this?

- Perhaps they took God's unconditional love for granted and that His peace, protection and provision would never be withheld from them, however they behaved?
- Perhaps they lost faith, when things didn't go as *they* wanted?
- Perhaps they thought by adding pagan gods to their beliefs, their prosperity and blessings would increase?
- Perhaps they thought all gods were the same as Yahweh and each one could lead them to salvation and eternal life?

How mistaken they were in the understanding of God's sovereign position and unique character. **Psalm 18:31** says: *For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?*

Whatever their reason for falling away, the sovereign Lord had to do something to save them from the lies and deception they had believed. His love for them was so great that He couldn't allow them to be held captive under the stronghold of their enemies.

This was not the first time Israel had strayed from their first love and God had to remind them of His great love for them.

Deuteronomy 32:15-18

¹⁵ *Jeshurun* (meaning the upright one: Israel) *grew fat and kicked; filled with food, they became heavy and sleek. They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Saviour.*

¹⁶ *They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols.*

¹⁷ *They sacrificed to false gods, which are not God— gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your ancestors did not fear.*

¹⁸ *You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.*

God in His great love and compassion for His chosen people, fully knowing and understanding their weakness and cyclical pattern of worship, had again to act in Gideon's day; just as He did 2,000 years ago in stepping down into creation to become a man and live the perfect life that we should live and die the death that we deserve and to rise on the 3rd day to bring new life and hope i.e. strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

God says throughout His word that He will never leave us nor forsake us. If you have received Jesus in your heart you are blessed to be in a relationship with a God who is faithful and will not give up on you; Jesus said that none that the Father gives to Him will be lost.

Back to our study: This time when Israel wandered He sent a prophet to speak to them, which they ignored. He then sent an angel to Gideon with the purpose of commissioning him to save Israel from the Midianites and God was with him.

Last week we saw how Gideon's personal relationship was restored to the Lord and how he responded with a generous grain offering, which was dramatically consumed upon the rock!

This week we see how Gideon was commanded to do something quite dramatic. Something which went against the beliefs and traditions of his family (especially his father) against his neighbours and the people of the land in which he lived. He was called to take a stand against the generation of his time.

I would like to highlight three verses to encourage from our study:

1. Verse 25 *...take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old.* The bull was offered was 7 years old. Curious how the bull chosen was born at the time the Midianites began their rampage against Israel. Also curious that seven is considered the number of completion in the bible.
2. Verse 26 *...then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height.* The Lord asks for a proper altar to be built on high ground. Last week we looked at our life being a type of altar on which we offered ourselves upon the rock, which is higher than you and I.

This week I would like to add to it that our living sacrifice is also offered in obedience to His commands, as a heartfelt response to His great love and faithfulness to us.

3. Verse 31 *...are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him?...If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.*

Notice the dramatic change in the relationship of Gideon's father to his son?

Has the obedience to God by his son witnessed to him and others?

Has the Lord changed the heart of Joash, to see where the true power and authority is?

SUMMARY:

God commanded Gideon to take positive action that would open the eyes of those who were being deceived. Gideon not only tore down their idols (belief system) but in doing so, released them from the stronghold that held them captive!

In our passage last week and again today, the time had come for God to act and He chose Gideon to save those He loved and to bring them back to believing in the one true God.

Gideon led by example to bring God's people back to worshipping the Lord of all creation and not to worship creation itself - not to make carved images of the natural realm and bow down to them but to look to Creator of the sun, moon and stars and everything under them.

The Lord asked him to build a proper altar on the top of this height (perhaps the rock on which his first offering was consumed) and to look up – up to the mountain, as that is where his help came from.

"Corrie" ten Boom a Dutch watchmaker who wrote "The Hiding Place" who together with her family helped many Jews escape the Holocaust during World War II, said this:

"If you want to be depressed – look within; if you want to be distracted – look around, if you want to be defeated - look behind but if you want to be delivered, look up". That's good counsel for us today and in line with how Gideon felt as he came out of the hole he and the nation of Israel were in – both literally and metaphorically!

The sovereign LORD who has all power and authority over creation, deserves our total devotion and will not allow us to remain living under deception and in error; He will speak to us and will do whatever is necessary to keep us in this beautiful and intimate relationship with Him and just like Gideon, we would do well to look up whenever we find ourselves in a hole!

The word of God this morning reminds us of who He is, what He has done to save His people in the past and what He will do to keep us safe for all eternity.

Exodus 20: 1-4

And God spoke all these words:

² *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

³ *"You shall have no other gods besides me.*

⁴ *"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...*

God wants to be Lord over your life, every part of your life. He does not want you to be deceived by demons nor to serve worthless idols that cannot see, hear or walk – they are deceptive, divisive and destructive; they will become a stronghold over your life and keep you captive if you continue to believe in them.

There is a stern warning in the final book of the bible about those who reject His invitation to come to Him.

Revelation 9:20

The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk.

We recognise how man's fallen nature has the tendency to fall away and serve worthless idols.

The challenge for us this week is to accept God at His word and remain faithful to Him, as He does to each one of us.

Let me finish by saying the most precious relationship we have is with our Lord, God, King and Saviour, every other relationship however important, is offered and surrendered to Him in faith.

We also recognise that those who belong to the Lord have an enemy that prowls around like a lion, whose work is to keep them captive and bound up by his lies.

However, Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor. He was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners

The Lord Jesus said that we will know the truth and the truth will set us free.

So I encourage you to look up and know the truth; know the author and finisher of your faith and let the truth of God's word tear down the strongholds in your life – whatever they may be.

And if you have strayed from Him and your heart has gone after worthless idols, then come back to your first love and be restored to the abundant life God promises for you in Christ Jesus.

Amen