



Dr. Matthew McKellar  
March 11, 2018

**Verses Covered**

*Judges 6:7 - 40*

*Hebrews 11:32*

Good morning, Central. It's so good to be back with you. I was here a couple of years ago and I bring you greetings from Southwestern Seminary and I do have to tell you that I have great respect and appreciation for you pastor. As you know, many of you know, I'm sure, maybe all of you, there's only one Chris Osborne and I love him and thank God for his ministry.

If you have a Bible, would you take it and turn with me to the Old Testament book of Judges. Judges chapter 6. While you're turning there, you may recall a cartoon series that ran many years ago. Actually it was created in 1949. And in that cartoon series, there is a coyote by name of Wile E. Coyote and he spends I don't know how many episodes, unsuccessfully I might add, trying to capture the Roadrunner. What's interesting about that cartoon series is seldom are there any words spoken. You just have the "beep-beep" of the Roadrunner and a whole lot of explosions. And if you'll recall, Wile E. Coyote always gets his products from Acme. Did you ever notice that? It's always from Acme. And what I really want to call your attention to, he's always setting explosives. And those explosives, you know, have a fuse. And did you ever notice in the cartoons how long the fuse is? I mean by the, by the, by the time that thing ignites, the Roadrunner's four or five miles down the road. I thought of that when I was looking at Judges 6 and the story of Gideon. I thought of the fact that God is long-suffering. He is long-fused and aren't you glad? In fact, in Exodus chapter 34, verse 6, the Bible says that the Lord is slow to anger. Literally in Hebrew, the Lord is long of nostril. The Hebrew way of saying, "As the heat rises up, it gets cooled off." There's ventilation through that long nostril passageway. Of course, it's an anthropomorphism, a picturing of God in human means, but I think you get the picture. God is long-suffering.

Let me pose a question this morning. What if God's deliverance of you depended on your performance? I think if that were the case, all of us would be in a great deal of trouble. In fact, we would be hopeless. And that's why I'm excited for us this morning to look at the story of Gideon. But as we look at the story of Gideon, I want you to understand that the main character in this story is really not Gideon. The main character of this story is God. And so this morning I

invite you to join me as we look at Judges chapter 6 and as we meet God in the text. And as we discover that there is no one like Him in grace, in long-suffering, and in mercy. Let's pray.

Father thank You for your word. Thank You that You are long-suffering, that You are slow to anger, and that You are abounding in loving-kindness. By Your Spirit, teach us, convict us, challenge us, correct us, comfort us, that we might love You more who first loved us. In Jesus name. Amen.

All of Judges chapter 6 is really a story of God's gracious preparation of His people for deliverance. A lot of the time they don't even know they need deliverance. But God knows they need deliverance. And as you look at Judges chapter 6, I mean this is a puzzling and rather primitive situation. A little background will help. In the book of Judges, we're now a couple of generations beyond the promised land and the repeated theme in Judges is every man did what was right in his own eyes. And if you look in the first part of chapter 6, what does it say? 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. Well in chapter 1 all the way through the middle of chapter 3, we see the failure of yet another generation to take God seriously. And then when we pick it up in chapter 3, verse 7, all the way through chapter 16, we see the long-suffering kindness of God to deliver undeserving people. And so by the time we get to Judges chapter 6, we begin with a cycle, sadly it's a repeated cycle, it continues. It works like this: Israel sins and God judges them through an oppressor. So you have sin then you have servitude and then the people cry out to God for deliverance. They, they supplicate, their supplication and then God delivers them salvation. You have the cycle repeated again and again and again. The people sin, they're subjected to servitude, they cry out to God in supplication, "Oh, God, deliver us!" And God brings salvation.

Now as we come to Judges chapter 6, the particular oppressor at this point is Midian. And the text says that the Midianites harassed and oppressed the people of Israel for seven years. And here's what it looked like. The Midianites, it seems, had discovered the value of camels and they had great supplies and great resources and instead of attacking Israel year around, they had this thing figured out. Every year around harvest time, they just descended with their people and with their, their warring instruments and they just laid waste to Israel and they harvested all of Israel's crops and took from all of Israel's goods and left the land, leaving Israel barren, broken. Now after about seven years of this, you'd get pretty tired. As year eight rolls along, we see that God moves into action. These people are emotionally, they are economically, they are spiritually destitute. Well there comes the question then, "Why is this happening?" Verses 7 through 10 give us the prophetic explanation. The people are crying out to God, they're wanting deliverance, and God sends a prophet, except the message that prophet has, is not exactly what they want to hear. It's a prophetic scolding. Look at it in verses seven, eight, nine, and ten.

<sup>7</sup>When the people of Israel cried out to the Lord on account of the Midianites, <sup>8</sup>the Lord sent a prophet to the people of Israel.

And essentially, what the prophet does is rehearse the grace of God. Now I want you to look at the text. Look at verses eight and nine and notice the repetition of the pronoun I. Notice what God says. I want you people to remember, I brought you, I delivered you, I drove out the enemy,

I gave you, I said to you. Look at those verbs. It is a rehearsal of God's grace. But not only that, there's a repetition of the demand that God had made upon His people. Look at it. Verse 10.

<sup>10</sup>And I said to you, 'I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear, that is reverence, respect, the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.'

Then look at that last phrase.

**But you have not obeyed my voice.**

So notice what God does through his prophet. He interprets the circumstances of Israel. You know, the people of Israel were a lot like us. When we're in a crisis, what do we want? We want immediate relief, don't we? But I want you to notice what God does here. We want escape from our circumstances, God wants us to interpret our circumstances. Why are we in the situation? And God uses His word to expose our inconsistencies and our idolatries. And in a word, God says, "You're in this situation because you haven't listened to me." You know it's a prophetic thing, I've been guilty of it, maybe you've been guilty of it. We find ourselves in a particular pickle, difficulty, and we want to lash out at God and blame God for our circumstances. We need to stop blaming God for the consequences of our self-inflicted disobedience. That's the lesson that Israel needed to learn. We want to escape. God wants us to interpret. And then His word exposes our idols. But now we get to the heart of the text. Look at verses 11 through 24. You have the prophetic explanation and then you have the promise of God's presence. Now here's what's amazing. Hang with me here. Normally what happens in a narrative like this at this point when God says, "You have not obeyed my voice." Normally the next thing that follows is, "Boom!" Judgment. God drops the hammer. But I want you to notice the omission of judgment at this point. Instead of judgment, what do you see God doing? You really see God coaxing a man to be His instrument of deliverance. And we're introduced to Gideon. Now Gideon's an interesting guy. His name literally means, hacker or hewer. How'd you like to have that name. "How are you doing, Hacker?" "Good to see you, Hewer." Hacker, hewer, the word means to cut down. And Gideon is a son of Joash the Abiezrite, a particular clan in the tribe of Manasseh in Israel. Now if you notice in the text, Gideon is cutting down, he's threshing wheat. Notice where he's threshing that wheat. He's threshing wheat in a winepress. I don't know a whole lot about wine presses, but my understanding is it was a dugout area below, below ground level where the grapes were crushed. Well why on earth would Gideon be down there in the wine press? The answer is, he's hiding out from the Midianites. He's thinking, "You know I'm going to beat this wheat out here and maybe, just maybe, the Midianites won't detect me and maybe we'll have a little food for a few days. So Gideon is fearful. He's afraid. And in those circumstances, he is, we might say, touched or addressed by an angel of the Lord. Now would you notice how the angel, God's messenger, greets and speaks to Gideon? Look at what he says:

<sup>12</sup>And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor."

Or O mighty valiant warrior of God. Isn't that interesting. The last thing that Gideon was at this point, was a mighty man of God. In fact, the fact is, according to what we see in scripture, if you had a copy of Gideon's high school year book, he would have been voted most likely not to

succeed. OK. He has a lot of excuses for the Lord. The Lord says, "I want you to be my deliverer." And Gideon is fearful. You might say he is a frightened farmer. He's certainly not a fighting farmer. He's not a Texas Aggie. He is a frightened farmer and he's got all these excuses, "Oh, I'm from the least clan. The smallest group within my tribe. And I'm the youngest son and I'm not your man." And the Lord repeats the promise and what is that promise? "I promise to be with you. I promise to be with you." And you know, even Gideon falls into a little bit of the blame game. "Lord where are You in all this? We heard about all the great things you've done, but again and again and again, now here we are. We've been reduced to hiding out so we can have a little bit of food to eat." But God says, "I'm with you, Gideon. I'm with you." And that promise is repeated.

Now I want you to think about it. Where these people have done everything it seems possible to bring on their own destruction, when they deserved destruction, what does God do? He aims to deliver them. Now look what Gideon does. He wants a, he wants a sign. He wants an indication that God is really with him. And God grants that sign. Now Gideon brings a sacrifice and God ignites that sacrifice. His fire represents His presence and His purifying power. And God is sending a message that He is against the Canaanization of the people of Israel. You see, that's what's going on. They were in the situation because they'd been Canaanized. That is, instead of being a light to the nations around them, they had imbibed, they had taken on the characteristics and the gods of other people. They'd become idolaters and God was judging them. But He wasn't done with them. As the story continues, the fire falls and Gideon is in awe; he is fearful. He's thinking, "Wait a minute. No man sees God and lives." And the Lord assures him and says, "You're not going to die." Gideon is awed and God gives him his Shalom, his peace. Man, don't you see the long-suffering of God with Gideon and with Israel? You know, sometimes we think that intimacy with God is an inalienable right. Our mindset is pretty much, "You know, it's a great deal that God gets to have a relationship with me." But I want you to see how that mindset is completely foreign to holy scripture. Man, Gideon has an encounter with the living God and he is awed by God's power and by God's purity. When's the last time you were awed by God's power and God's purity and God's gracious condescension to you.

Then notice what happens in verses 25 through 32. Wherever there's deliverance, it's preceded by destruction. Now these were idolatrous people. The people of Israel knew better. Thou shalt have no other god before me. Right? But they'd become Baal worshippers. Baal was the fertility god of the Canaanites and his female consort was, is listed here, Asherah, in the text. And it just so happened that Gideon's father, Joash, apparently was the local proprietor in the city of Ophrah, which was the clan dwelling for the Abiezrites and it seems that Joash was the curator of the Baal cult shrine in Ophrah. Because he got, apparently, a backyard full of Baals. And now God says, "Hey, Gideon, I'm with you and I want you to clean house." And if you read the story, what does Gideon do? During the night he tears down the alter to Baal, Asherah and he establishes an alter to the Lord there. But look what happens after that? The townsmen come together the next morning and they are indignant. By the way, let me just mention that Gideon was obedient, but do you know that the text says that he did it by night because he was afraid. Gideon has been promised the presence of God, but he's still fumbling, he's still faltering, he's still frightened. He complies and now the next morning, the people are angry. I want you to notice the irony in this text. Look at what happens in verses 25 through 32. Basically the men of Israel, the men in that city come out and say, "Who did this? Who tore down our idols? We want to find out who he is

and we think it's Gideon and we want to put him to death." Isn't that an irony? The Bible, the word of God, prescribed death for an idolater. And here, these idolaters want to put to death the guy who wants to do away with idolatry. That's how far things had gone. I think you see the parallels to our culture today. Well now it seems that Joash, the text doesn't tell us why or when, but Joash has come to his senses and essentially he defends, not only his son, but he defends Yahweh, and by the way, in this text, the names for God that are used are very instructive. Yahweh, the covenant keeping God, Elohim, God of creation, the God who created everything and the God who makes promises and keeps His covenants, Joash says, "Look if Baal's such a bad boy, let him step up and defend himself."

And then we come to verses 33 through 40. I love this. I want you to see how God stoops to reassure His people who depend on Him. Look at the clothing of Gideon. The Bible says, the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon. Literally, the Spirit clothed himself with Gideon. Man the Lord was with Gideon. And now the people are assembled for conflict and spiritual power is joined to human weakness. And then we have the story of Gideon and the fleece. You remember, Lord let it be wet and dry and then dry and then wet. The ground and the fleece, the piece of wool. Now let me just make clear that Gideon's fleece is not prescriptive for us. It's not the best way to go about discerning the will of God. But I don't want us to throw Gideon under the proverbial bus here and say, "Well Gideon was disobedient. Gideon was this. Listen, Gideon was human. He's a lot like you and he's a lot like me. We know what God wants us to do. We know what His will is. But we know it might cost us and we know it might be difficult. And we know that the way might be studded with land mines. And so we want some reassurance. Well God gives Gideon that reassurance. And then when you look ahead to chapter 7, fascinating isn't it, Gideon has a force of 32,000 men. God says, "That's too many." Reduce it to 10,000. God says, "That's still too many. If you win, you'll try to get all the glory for yourself. I want you to know that I'm with you and I'm the one accomplishing the victory." And you know the rest of the story. Down to 300 men armed with, with, with trumpets and jars and torches and God gives a victory that day to Israel. It's a powerful, powerful, powerful story.

Well that's the story of Gideon and maybe you're sitting there this morning thinking, "Hey, Matthew, that's a real cool story. Thanks for walking us through it. So what? So what?" Remember that question I asked you earlier? What if God's deliverance of you depended on your past performance. Had that been true of ancient Israel, they would have had no future. Were that true of you and me, we would have no futures. But here's the good news from God's word. Hear me. God's deliverance of you depends on your dependence. God's deliverance of you depends upon your dependence. Now let me clarify there. God takes the initiative. Oh, how I love Jesus because He first loved me. But God delivers those who depend on Him. You've heard the statement, "Well God helps those who help themselves." No, He doesn't. God helps those who hit their knees and fall on their faces and say, "God, I'm inadequate, I'm incompetent, I can't handle this, I cast all my care and my hope on You." Still don't believe me? Hebrews 11:32, the roll call of faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him. What do you find in Hebrews 11:32? By faith Gideon, Gideon gained a victory. By faith, by confidence, by dependence on the Lord. Listen, because the Lord is long-suffering toward you, obey his voice now, not later, and trust his adequacy.

I look at this story and I think, “Man we ought to stand in awe of God’s strategy. I’m so glad He does not act on the basis of focus groups and expert expectations. God loves to do things in a way we would never anticipate or expect. That’s what He did with Gideon. That’s what He will do in your life. But I can’t leave this passage without asking myself and asking you, “What Baals need banishment from your backyard?” You want to see God’s power in your life? You want to know God’s deliverance over a besetting sin? You want to see God do above and beyond all that you ever thought or asked? Then come clean with Him and rid yourselves of those idols. The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only Thee. Last time I checked, God is pretty particular and exclusive when it comes to rights of worship. He does not brook or tolerate rivals. He is jealous for you and for your commitment in obedience. Isn’t it interesting how we had this story of Gideon, but the story is really about God. We meet Him all over the text showing kindness to undeserving, rebellious, and even blaming people. Instead of destruction, He’s the deliverer. And that points us to another truth, not, not a truth we want to forget. You see, Gideon was the deliverer here, the tool in the hand of God, but for us, it’s not Gideon, the bumbling, frightened farmer, but it’s the faithful God in flesh, Jesus Christ. He’s your deliverer. And He knows all about your past performance and my past performance. And He says to you, “Quick trying to earn a right relationship with Me, quit trying to be competent enough, quit trying to be adequate enough, and just trust me and just depend on Me.” You know why I know that’s true? Because I look in the pages of this book and I see that God’s agenda is an agenda driven by His resolve to make Himself known. And to show mercy to people utterly, utterly unworthy of it.

Do you notice how in this text God repeatedly stacks His adequacy up against Gideon’s inadequacy? This morning I want you to hear me. God knows that you and I are incompetent. He knows we’re inadequate for the big issues of life. The question is, do we know that? Will we acknowledge that? Paul, in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, writes about having a thorn in the flesh and how he asked the Lord to remove it. And at the end of that he makes this statement. He indicates he’s going to rejoice in his weakness. And he makes this statement, “For when I am weak, then I am strong. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” I heard Alistair Begg address this text and he made this statement. It stuck with me. He said, “If the objective is dependence, then weakness is an advantage.” Isn’t that a great line? If the objective is dependence, if that’s God’s goal, and it is, then our weakness is actually an advantage. And so this morning where you are weak, and we are all weak in some or some areas, area or areas, when we are weak, then we are strong. Here’s the good news. God’s not ashamed to stoop down to reassure us in the midst of our fears, God does not mind humbling Himself, even to the point of the death on a cross. You think He did something great for Gideon? You think He did something great for the people of Israel? That’s nothing compared to what He’s done for you and for me. He’s a deliverer who delivers people who cannot deliver themselves. And you know He gives us reminders of that doesn’t he? Instead of a threshing floor, He’s given us a table. Instead of a fleece, and far better than that, He’s given us the bread and the cup. And instead of victory over regional enemy, He’s given us victory over the forces of evil and death and sin itself. I’m telling you a God like that ought to be worshiped and feared, and cherished, and honored. Because if you depend on Him, you’re a miracle of mercy. Steven Curtis Chapman sang it so beautifully some years ago.

If the truth were known and the light were shown on every hidden part of my heart.  
Most would turn away, shake their heads and say he still has such a long way to go.

If the truth were known they'd see that the only good in me is Jesus, the grace of Jesus.

If the walls could speak of the time I've been weak  
When everybody thought I was strong  
Could I show my face were it not for the grace  
Of the One who's known the truth all along  
If the truth were known, they'd see that the only good in me is Jesus, the grace of Jesus.

I think you know who the hero of the story is. It's the God we meet in the text. It's the God we meet at the cross. It's the God we meet when we say nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Your cross I cling. Would you pray with me?

In a moment we're going to have a time of response. Music will play and staff members will be here at the front. It's your opportunity to respond to God's call on your life. God delights to deliver people who depend on Him. Maybe you're here this morning and you've never trusted Christ and Christ alone. God did great things for Gideon, but He's done even greater things for you. At the worst point of your rebellion and disobedience God did not spare His one and only Son, but offered Him in your place for your sins. Maybe you've recently called on the name of Jesus. You've trusted Him, you need to profess Him publicly, we invite you to come and do that this morning. Or maybe you're here and you've never called on the name of Jesus. This morning right where you sit, from your heart you can say, "Lord, Jesus, I've trusted in myself. I've depended on myself. I've tried to deliver myself, and I've made a mess of it. But I want to turn away from my agenda and my idolatry and my sin. Here's my life, take me and save me." If that's the cry of your heart this morning, if you want to depend on Jesus and trust Him, a staff member would love to talk with you; share with you what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Right now, today, you can trust Him. Others are here and you need a church home, a place where you can grow in your obedience and commitment to Christ. Some here today have special needs, physically, financial, and during this time of response, this may simply be your opportunity to hit your knees either physically or in your heart and to cry out to God and trust Him. Trust Him to reassure and to comfort you in your time of need. Father you are greatly to be praised. We worship You, we thank You for your word. And Father thank You that You deliver people who depend on You. We need Your deliverance. Would you, for Your namesake, deliver people today in these very moments for Your glory. In Jesus name. Amen.