

When we are used by God in His service we must always remember that there are two sides to usefulness – Our side and God's side!

If we forget this, then the odds stacked against us will be too much for us. Note that God changed those odds in Gideon's example from around 4:1 (135,000 Midianites facing 32,000 Israelites) to odds of around 400:1, when he reduced Gideon's army to only 300 men!

1. What is the expectation on “our side” of our usefulness?

We are to be found:-

(i) Obeying

6v14 GO / 6v25 TAKE / 6v26 BUILD / 7v3 PROCLAIM / 7v9 ARISE / 7v9 GO DOWN
“We need the obedience of a son and the submission of a servant” (Calvin)

(ii) Trusting

The whole point of the reduction in the number of the soldiers of Israel is to demonstrate the unquestioning trust that Gideon now had in God for the outcome – no matter what the odds may be!

(iii) Venturing

Faith and trust are “doing” things! Gideon ventures when he blows the trumpet / gathers the troops / positions his men / gives his orders / breaks his pitcher / cries out in the darkness / advances down the hillside / wins the battle.

The question is – what are we DOING for God? Are we venturing for Him?

2. What do we expect to see on “God’s side” of our usefulness?

We see:-

(i) God’s call

The example of Gideon makes it very plain that HE has not called himself! But equally plain is it that GOD has called / prepared / tested him for this moment.

(ii) God’s patience

We could also say, God's forbearance, care, and kindness to Gideon – it is all evident throughout the whole of his story. In our case, we must remember that God knows the material he is working with – us! How patient He is.

One striking thing in the example of Gideon – which is not there in other heroes of faith – is the events of v 10 – 15 where we see the “encouragements of providence”. We must ever be thankful for such things when God gives them to us.

(iii) God’s Glory

Even before the battle commences, this matter is paramount in the eyes of God (v2) and even the effect of God's encouragements of providence causes Gideon to worship (v15). God must have all the glory in every aspect of all of our service for Him.

The battle was truly the Lord's – although the sword was in the hand of Gideon! The whole of the Midianite camp was in disarray – Read Psalm 2 v 1 – 6, it says it all.

Gideon

A man of faith

Prepared Tested Used

In the history of God's people in the Old Testament, the period of “The Judges” lasts from the death of Joshua in 1383BC until Saul becomes King in Israel in 1051BC.

The title “Judge” is a Hebrew word for one who not only pronounces sentence but also governs people. They were men (and women in some cases) raised up by God to lead the people back to God, from times of spiritual decline and national troubles.

In Nehemiah 9 v 26/27 they are referred to as “deliverers” (NKJV) or “saviours” (AV).

The days of the Judges were times when often the nation did that which was “right in their own eyes” (see Judges 17 v 6). Chapters 17 – 21 set at the end of the Book of Judges are really an appendage illustrating the worst excesses of the times.

The cycle of decline and return is summarised in Judges 2 v 11 – 19.

The title of the well known commentary by Leon Wood, “*The Distressing Days of the Judges*” is accurate in its description but we must note that the years of “obedience to God and consequent blessing outnumber the years of decline by about 3:1.

The account of the life and actions of Gideon covers 47 years from 1204BC to 1157 BC. He served as a Judge for 40 years. (Compare Jud 6 v 1 with Jud 8 v 28)

God's instrument, used to chastise His backsliding people in the days of Gideon, was the nomadic, warlike tribe of the Midianites who were in confederacy with other nations hostile to Israel. They were gradually making inroads across the eastern borders of the land. Regular raids on flocks and harvests were threatening to become an all-out invasion. The strength of the Midianite tactics was their swift incursions facilitated by their camel mounted warriors. Their fame for war on camelback became legendary!

According to the writer to the Hebrews (Heb 11 v 32), Gideon is a “hero of faith” (although the writer has run out of time to develop this assertion!) When we study the life of Gideon, we should therefore find much to help us in our life of faith. Gideon was used by God in his day, and age and every Christian is called not only to HOLINESS but to USEFULNESS in the days in which we live. Not every lesson is contained here but there are many things to help us to see how God ensures that we can be useful for Him.

1. A man of faith PREPARED



Judges 6 v 1 - 24

The example of Gideon shows us three things that God uses to prepare us for usefulness.

1. The days in which we live

By God's providence, we are born, grow up, are converted and serve God in the time and place that He has ordained. Such times may be difficult & challenging ó as they were for Gideon ó our times should challenge our faith.

In the days of Gideon three phrases in the narrative stand out:-

- (i) ðthe hand of Midian prevailedö -difficult days to be a Christian!
- (ii) ðIsrael was greatly impoverishedö - not quite the ðpromised landö!
- (iii) ðYou have not obeyed my voiceö - spiritually impoverished days!

The key thing is to ensure that our days do not ðsqueeze us into their mouldö (a modern rendering of Rom 12 v 1) but they should shape our response.

2. The Preaching of the Word of God

The cry of Gideon (and surely of all the people of his day) was, ðWhy has all this happened to us?ö (Jud 6 v 13). People need to know the answer to why the world is in the mess it is in today. How does God do that ó he sends a preacher! (Jud 6 v 8). We should be avid hearers of Biblical preaching ó this is how God prepares us to be useful.

Good preaching should stir believers to readiness to serve God. (Think how the preaching of C T Studd stirred a generation of Missionaries or how Dr Martin Lloyd Jones stirred a generation of evangelical preachers through his Friday evening studies in the Epistles).

3. Our "personal encounters" with the Lord

Judges 6 v 11 ó 24 tell us of the remarkable encounter that Gideon had with the ðAngel of the Lordö. This was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in pre incarnate form ó a ðTheophanyö appearance. At first Gideon does not realise this ó eg in v13 his response is the Hebrew word ðlordö addressed to a man but by v15 his response is ðLordö which is a form of the same word but used in great reverence when addressed to God!

As we meet with the Lord Jesus daily in His Word, He will challenge us to, ðfollow Meö and to be His disciples ó to be useful in His service.

2. A man of faith TESTED



Judges 6 v 25 ó 40

"...your faith being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire..." 1 Peter 1 v 7 (NKJV). "Faith untried may be true faith, but it is sure to be little faith... Faith never prospers so well as when all things are against her." (C H Spurgeon)

1. Some marks that show that we are capable of being tested for usefulness

- (i) We are conscientious about our current tasks - see Gideon in v 11
- (ii) We are conscious of our own weakness - see Gideon in v 15

- (iii) We are concerned for the honour of God (& for the welfare of His people) - see Gideon in v 13 / 24
- (iv) We should be careful to know God's will - see Gideon in v 17 + 36 - 40

Faith is not recklessness ó As the hymn so rightly puts it: "*We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling and needing more each day thy grace to know*".

2. In Gideon we are shown an example of faith being tested

Some very useful pointers are laid out for us in v 25 ó 32 where we see:-

- (i) There was a clear warrant for what he did
- *the word of God!*
- (ii) Faith is often tested among those we know and live among
- *before we are ever used in some greater task!*
- (iii) His faith was alive ó he was suspected straight away!
- *we must conclude that they immediately knew it was Gideon!*
- (iv) It could have cost him dearly but he was faithful in the test
- *we must leave the outcome to God – He clearly over rules here!*
- (v) He became known and respected because of this test of faith.
- *by v32 he is well known and by v34/35 with the aid of God's Holy Spirit he is able to rally a great army of 32,000 men – compare v13 & v15!!*

3. Assurance is Given for Tested Faith

Many Christians misinterpret the whole matter of ðthe fleeceö in v 36 ó 40. We must remember that Gideon was not seeking guidance - he had already blown a trumpet, gathered his army and was ðbattle readyö. What Gideon was seeking was reassurance (and who can blame him!!) He had never been a leader of men in this way before, never wielded a sword, and never fought a battle. He had 32,000 men but the enemy had 135,000 (see 8 v 10) - and they had their camels !

His approach to God is reverent, careful and thoughtful - he wants to be sure. The cause of God and the welfare of the whole nation rests with him! When we are faced with such odds and such a great task in our life of faith we too can surely ask our Heavenly Father for reassurance. When Gideon is called to take on the battle he can then be certain ó this is the sword of the Lord and of Gideon!

3. A man of faith USED



Judges 7

According to Patricia St John, the famous children's author, Richard Hudson Pope was, "*One of the wisest, most skilful, and most effective and widely used children's evangelists of modern times*". When we read his life story however he tells us how God prepared him for that work , ðHe put me in a London office to push a pen for seven years. It showed me what men were like; it showed me how wicked I was myself and how prone to fall into sin. Those years were years of temptation and sometimes failure". Many other difficult years of testing followed before he took up his great work with children.

Every Christian should have a longing to be useful for God but must also recognise that He is constantly preparing and testing us for service in the future ó as well as using us today! We must be faithful in small things if one day we are to be called to ðbig thingsö!