

All We Are Meant To Be

by Ron R. Ritchie

Recently my wife and I and another couple were in a restaurant in Half Moon Bay called "Original Johnnies." It is a place where fishermen, farmers, and politicians go, so a lot of conversation goes on there. We sat at a table that had five seats, one of those tables where only the "in" group is allowed to sit, so I almost had to ask to sit there. (Because I have been going there for seven years I am finally allowed to sit in the "inner circle.") An old gentleman who did not have to check with anybody walked in and sat right down with us. He overheard us talking about Jesus Christ. about the fact that God has designed us to live so that he will express his life through us. Without asking for permission, he broke into our conversation and said, "You know, I'm 78 years old. I've been around the world twice. I've been in World War I and I just hung around and waited for World War II. I've talked to people from all walks of life, and I've discovered that we are all looking for something, but we ain't found it yet." "Now," he continued. "it's not in religion. I've tried all that. In fact, the people who have come closest to what everyone is looking for are the hippies; at least they reached out and touched one another." Then he went back to drinking his coffee.

I don't think I will ever forget that old man. The whole world is looking for something, but "we ain't found it yet." What they are looking for is meaning: "Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?" Within your own heart you have cried out many times, "What does it all mean? Who am I? What am I supposed to be? Does life really have meaning? Is there purpose and design to it, or have I been fooled?"

Reading through the life of a man named Gideon, in Judges 6, we can discover some of the answers to the questions, What is it that we were meant to be? and What did God have in mind when he chose us? Let me give you a little background. First Corinthians 10 has several verses that talk about some Old Testament stories that, according to Paul, were given to us as examples of how to walk in righteousness. We are going to see some of that in our study on Gideon this morning. Second, Israel was chosen by God to be a witness for his mercy, love, and compassion, so that all the nations of the world would come to the light.

Through Moses they were led out of the slavery of Egypt. Then they were brought into the wilderness to learn many valuable lessons about God, about themselves, and about the human heart. After Moses died, Joshua brought them into the long--promised land. They defeated 31 kings, and they entered a period of twenty-five years of rest. But God has no grandchildren; we are all sons and daughters of the first generation. And so, "There arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel . . . So they forsook the Lord and served Baal . . ."

The Book of Judges is a tragic story of men and women who were constantly rationalizing their life styles; they were always trying to figure out how to get the edge on life, how to get the edge on their neighbors. and how to get the edge on their finances. But, having forsaken the Lord, they ended up in murder and adultery, in sexual immorality and homosexuality; they became a nation of thieves. In fact, Judges says that during the 330 years from 1380 to 1050, ". . . there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Here is a book that teaches us how easily man's heart is ready to wander away from God and depend upon himself. Through the lives of these judges we will discover our own lives; we will discover who we are.

Now the book is made up of a group of stories, seven cycles, that run like this: Israel would do evil in the sight of God, so God would send them into captivity. Then they would cry out to God, he would hear their cry and send them a savior, a deliverer or judge, and Israel would enter a time of rest. (In my last message, "An Impossible Situation," God used Deborah and Barak, and a flash flood, to defeat Jabin, the king of Canaan, and his nine hundred iron chariots. Israel then entered a forty--year period of rest. Now we come to a new generation, and a fifth cycle of disobedience and deliverance.

Slaves Because Of Sin (Judges 6: 1-10)

Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. And the power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the Lord. Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord on account of Midian, that the Lord sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out from the house of slavery. And I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, and I said to you, "I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed me. "

Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They did three things: First, they forsook the Lord (Judges 2:10); second, they went after the Baals, the Canaanite deities, the stone and wooden images (Judges 2:11); and third, they intermarried with the Canaanites (Judges 3:6-7). By forsaking the Lord they created a false adequacy; by serving the Baals they created a false religion that had no power; and by intermarrying they hoped for military alliances, thereby creating a false security. So, after forty years of rest, the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian.

The Midianites were traveling traders who were constantly in trouble with their neighbors. When Moses came through the wilderness and wanted to go up to Jericho, he had to go through what is now modern Jordan, through the land of the king of Moab. But there he met the Midianites and the Moabites. They gathered together against Moses and the Israelites and called down curses on them by a false prophet they hired named Balaam. But Moses attacked them and killed all of them, except for the women and children, who were captured, so the Midianites, who should have been wiped out, continue to harass and strive against Israel.

Then they had another enemy, the Amalekites, descendants of Esau. These were God-defying people who hated everything about Yahweh and about Israel. When the Israelites were going through the desert, the Amalekites came in behind them and All rights reserved picked off all the weak ones. Finally, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Moses and his men, and they were able to win a battle against them. But the Amalekites just kept picking at them by guerrilla warfare, and, frustrated, Israel went after them in their own strength and were defeated.

Later, in the time of the Book of Judges, the Amalekites join with the king of Moab and hold the Israelites in captivity. They are an enemy they cannot get rid of. Not only is Israel held in captivity for seven years, but they are held captive by the very people they were supposed to have annihilated, according to Moses and Joshua. But they did not do it; they would not put these two enemies out of their lives, according to God's command, and so the Lord just let these enemies keep showing up.

That is what happens to us, isn't it? We all have enemies in our lives that the Lord says to put to death. He says to put that habit, that relationship, that philosophy to death or you will be destroyed. And what do we do? We say it's not that at all; it's a loving, caring, relationship. But the Lord tells us that that caring relationship will hold us in captivity for years. You can see that these stories are to relate to our very life, right down to today.

So where are the Israelites who were to be kings in the land, who were to bring life and salvation to the nations? They were living like animals, in caves, hiding and afraid. They were hiding because each time they turned around the Midianites, Amalekites and the sons of the east (a bunch of vagabonds who joined in, knowing a good thing when they saw one), would come and harass them. These enemies were so numerous they could not be counted, we are told; they were like locusts. (In fact, later we are told that there were 135,000 of them.) The Israelites would work all spring, begin raising their new sheep, oxen and donkeys,

thinking maybe this year they would make it. But it wasn't to be. Some lookout on a hill would shout, "Oh, oh! Here they come. Back to the caves!" So here are the kings--living in caves in the ground.

Sometimes I lie awake at night, caught in a cave of depression, or a cave of despair, or a cave of misunderstanding, asking, "Where is this abundant life that you promised me, Lord? I feel so empty, so wasted, so attacked. What's going on? Lord, give me back meaning. Teach me what and who I'm supposed to be. Teach me all I was meant to be."

But God loves us so much he is willing to keep sending prophets into our lives_ unknown prophets, they just walk in. I went to dinner last night with one of them. Boy, did he prophesy and tell me who God was! I didn't like it. I just wanted a thing between God and me. I didn't want this messenger, because he would know what cave I was in. But the first thing he said was, "Why are you in a cave?" "Because I want to be there," I said. (You can get used to caves after a while. Move in some furniture, fix it up. get a little color TV.) "Are you miserable in your cave?" asked the prophet. "Yes." "Why don't you come out?" "I don't want to." I hope you are laughing with me. I would hate to think I'm alone.

So Israel cried to the Lord on account of Midian. And the Lord sent a prophet who said, "Before you get a deliverer, I need to review some truth for you. The Lord, the God of Israel, is the one who brought you out of Egypt. He is the one who got you out of slavery, who dispossessed your enemies, who gave you land you never worked for and farms you never plowed. But you have not obeyed him." There is a basic principle here: We were never meant to be slaves to sin. We are meant to be servants of Jesus Christ, walking in obedience before him.

Now, after reviewing the truth for his people, the Lord prepares his deliverer. But his deliverer does not know he is a deliverer because he is doing what all the other Israelites are doing_ hiding.

The Lord Prepares His Deliverer (Judges 6:1' -18)

Then the angel of the Lord came and oat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as trio son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior." Then Gideon said to him, "Oh my lord, if the Lord lo with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." And the Lord looked at him and said "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" And he said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." But the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man." So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who speakest with me. Please do not depart from here, until I come back to Thee, and bring out my offering and lay it before Thee." And He said, "I will remain until you return."

The "angel of the Lord" appears. As we see from other scripture, this angel appears to be the preincarnate Christ in human form. He comes up to Gideon, this Jewish son of God, who is beating out wheat in a wine press; he is doing a good thing in the wrong place, and he is there for the seventh year in a row. Suddenly he hears this voice saying, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior." Can't you see Gideon lift up his head and say, "You must have the wrong wine press! I'm Gideon. I'm no valiant warrior; I'm not courageous. My activities ought to show you that. Are you sure you're in the right place?" But then, realizing that they were talking about the Lord, Gideon says to the angel, "By the way, where is the Lord? Has he abandoned us?" Don't we do that with God? The Lord tells us we have been unfaithful, we have not obeyed him, and the first shot we get at him we blame him. We ask him why he has abandoned us.

Then Gideon reviews for the angel of the Lord what God has done. Wasn't that nice of him? He didn't listen to the prophet at all. So the Lord says, "I want to give you a test: Go in your own strength and deliver Israel from the Midianites." But Gideon said, "Hold it. I know who I am, but do you? I am of the tribe of Manasseh.

You know it's not a very good tribe. My family is the least in Manasseh, and I'm the youngest in my father's house." Remember Moses at the burning bush? "Who me? You don't understand. I_I_I stutter." But the Lord says, "I know. I make people who stutter. That is my business. Your business is to obey me." The same thing is happening here, but fortunately, Gideon passes the test. He says very clearly that he can't do it," but the Lord says to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man." It is the whole principle of "I in you and you in me."

There is a beautiful principle here: We were never meant to live our lives hopelessly, for ourselves. We are meant to die to ourselves so that Christ can live his life in and through us. That is how we get meaning out of life. We are meant to have Christ live through us, as Lord and Savior. Then our life takes on beautiful meaning.

But Gideon asks for a sign, for something that would prove that God was with him. God is about to do that.

The Lord Encourages His Deliverer (Judges 6:19-27)

Then Gideon went in and prepared a kid and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak, and presented them. And the angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.' And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the Lord, he said, 'Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.' And the Lord said to him, 'Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.' Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it The Lord Is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

God in his grace encourages his deliverer and accommodates him by giving him a supernatural sign. The angel told Gideon to put the meat and the bread on a rock and pour the broth over them. Then the angel touched the soaked offerings with his staff and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the offerings. (This same sign will happen again later in the history of Israel with Elijah and the Baal priests.)

Now when this happens, Gideon recognizes that it is indeed the Lord, and he knows that anyone who sees God face to face will lose his life. But the Lord says, "No, you're not going to die because you and I are at peace." And Gideon named that place, The Lord is Peace. The principle here is: We were never meant to fear for our lives before the living God. We are meant to live in peace with the Lord who is our peace. An interesting thing happens in verses 25 through 32. God has been working with Gideon, building him up and encouraging him, and Gideon has been asking, Lord, are you sure you're with me? But now God asks Gideon, Are you sure you are with me? Gideon asks for a sign, so God asks for a commitment. Gideon wanted to know if God was with him; God wants to know if Gideon is with him.

The Lord Tests His Deliverer (Judges 6:25-32)

Now the same night it came about that the Lord said to him, 'Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.' Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord has spoken to him; and it came about, because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, that he did it by night. When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built. And they said to one another, 'Who did this thing?' And when they searched about and inquired, they said, 'Gideon the son of Joash did this thing.' Then the men of the city said to Joash, 'Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it.' But Joash said to all who stood against him,

"Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar." Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against Him," because he had torn down his altar.

God told Gideon that the first thing he wanted done before he delivered Israel was that he wanted him to clean house, to get rid of the things that were destroying him. That were keeping him in the caves for seven years. These, of course, were the Baals and the Asherah, the Canaanite male and female deities.

He told Gideon to tear down the altars and the groves of trees (where they had infant sacrifice and ritual prostitution, where they sat in fear, trying to appease these unknown gods). Gideon wanted him to stop all this worship of demons and to show him was nothing to fear from stone and wooden idols. He told him to slaughter a seven-year-old bull (which would represent the years of Israel's captivity) and, taking the wood from the Asherah, to build a fire to sacrifice the bull for a burnt offering. The burnt offering, which followed the sin and guilt offering, represented a total commitment of a man's life to God. And Gideon did as the Lord told him.

The next morning when the men of the town learned that Gideon had destroyed the altars, they said, "Let us kill Gideon because of what he has done." Now Gideon could not possibly have figured out what his father's reaction was, but I'm sure he hid himself. Wouldn't you have, if you tore down the only god you had known for seven years? But his father said, "Baal will take care of my son. He will be a heap of ashes soon, so don't get in an uproar. Baal will take care of his own battles, and if you think he won't, what do you think Asherah will do to Gideon?" So they waited and waited for this heap of ashes called Gideon, but it never arrived.

I have a friend who just came to know Jesus. He came to my house one night to talk about the Lord, and, because he is a very emotional man and I did not want him to feel pressured, I told him to go home and decide on his own that Jesus Christ would be Lord of his life. "Whatever you do, come back on Wednesday for supper," I told him. So he came back and said, "I went home, just like you said, and about 3 a.m. I finally said, 'OK, Jesus, I want you to be Lord of my life and I am going to pray to you: But I couldn't pray,'" he said, "because he kept saying to me, 'I don't want to hear your prayer until you clean up this room, because in this room is everything that is destroying you.'" His house was filled with pornography, films, magazines, pictures, books, so he gathered it all up and put it in a suitcase, tied it up and planned to get rid of it the next day. He went back to bed and prayed, "OK, Lord, now I would like you to become my Lord and Savior." Now it is not going to be easy for him, but he has housecleaned; he has got rid of the Baals and the Asherah. God can use him. The principle here is: We have never been meant to fearfully bow down to the prince of this world, but we are meant to willingly yield to the King of the Universe.

The Deliverer Tests The Lord (Judges 6:33-40)

Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel. So the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. And he sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them. Then Gideon said to God, "If Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken." And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece and let there be dew on all the ground." And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground. Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod;

Because Gideon did what God asked, God was now able to use him to his honor and glory. By being

available, the Spirit of God comes upon him and he gathers an army. But Gideon had never fought a war before, especially the way God fights wars. The army didn't have any weapons to fight the 135,000 Midianites, so Gideon asked God for another sign. He told God, "I just happen to have a piece of wool here. If I throw it on the ground and go to sleep and the next morning the fleece is soaking wet but the ground is dry, I will know that was you, that you are alive and working with us." Now you have to do a lot of thinking to come up with something like that, don't you? I would have said something like, "All right, Lord, if you are really Lord then find me a place where I can get gas any time I want." So next morning Gideon is so encouraged by his wet fleece that he runs and shows it to his army. But they are still doubtful. So Gideon comes back the next night and he says, "Lord, please don't get angry with me. Tonight let the fleece remain dry, and let there be dew on the ground." And God honored Gideon's request because he loved him, because he understood his fear.

We all get caught throwing out the fleece, don't we? But that locks God into only two choices, dry fleece or wet fleece. When I was a young Christian I was always giving God two choices, I wanted either a red or a blue Volkswagen. But God said, "I want to give you a Porsche." I asked God for a job and I gave him just two choices, but he could have given me all kinds of choices. He does not want us to lock him in.

We all have incredible enemies around us. We are not sure what is going on, but we are trying to trust the Lord, and we are trying to live by faith. It is not easy, but God promises to bless us constantly as we walk with him. Now the principle here is: We were never meant to depend on ourselves to overcome possible circumstances. We are meant to trust in the power of the Spirit of God to rule over impossible circumstances.

Let me review the principles again for you:

1.

We were never meant to be slaves to sin. We are meant to be servants of Jesus Christ, servants who, by faith, walk in obedience before him.

2.

We were never meant to live our lives, hopelessly, for ourselves. We are meant to die to ourselves so that Christ can live his life in and through us.

3.

We were never meant to fear for our lives before the living God. We are meant to live in peace with the Lord who is our peace.

4.

We were never meant to fearfully bow down to the prince of this world. We are meant to willingly yield to the King of the universe.

5.

We were never meant to depend on ourselves to overcome impossible circumstances. We are meant to trust in the power of the Spirit of God to rule over impossible situations.

That is what we are meant to be, men and women living for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is no other worthwhile way to live. Everything else is death and destruction; everything else is a cave existence. We were designed to be servants, with the King of Kings ruling in our hearts, telling the whole world about Jesus Christ. Let us spend this week telling the world about Jesus who has changed our lives.

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