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Judges 6:1-24 "What God Can Do with an Ordinary Person"*

Proposition: In Judges 6:1-24 we see the account of Gideon's call, an account involving two scenes. By looking at Gideon we'll learn about God and what God can do with ordinary people like us.

I. Scene #1: We see the unfaithfulness of God's people (1-10).

- A. God's people did evil (1a).
- B. God's people suffered (1b-5).
- C. God's people cried for help (6).
- D. God's people learned what the problem was (7-10).

II. Scene #2: We see the faithfulness of God (11-24).

- A. God chose Gideon (11-16).
 - 1. It wasn't because of his courage (11-12).
 - 2. It wasn't because of his convictions (13).
 - 3. It wasn't because of his connections (14-15).
 - 4. It was because of his God (16).
- B. God gave confirmation to Gideon (17-24).
 - 1. He gave him a taste of His presence (17-19).
 - 2. He gave him a taste of His power (20-22).
 - 3. He gave him a taste of His peace (23-24).

Implications: We learn some vital lessons...

- 1. God's sovereignty overrides man's wickedness.
- 2. No matter how bad things are, when there is God there is hope.
- 3. God specializes in taking people from where they are to where they should be.
- 4. God can use ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes.

We're living in a day when numbers equals success. The *big* church is believed to be the *blessed* church. What's more, we're told that if you want to do something important for God, you need lots of people. Certainly, *one* person can't make a difference, can he?

What should you do when you're facing a huge obstacle, when you're outnumbered by a powerful foe? Some say, "Get more people. Outman your opponent. Mobilize. Strategize. That's the way to get things done."

But that's not what God did in the thirteenth century B.C., not according to an often forgotten account tucked away in Judges. I have in mind *Gideon*.

When Gideon got ready to take on the huge Midianite army, do you remember what God told Gideon in Judges 7? In essence He said, "You've got too many people, Gideon. If you want to win this battle, you need to send some people home. Then you'll be ready to see what *I* can do!"

To put it bluntly, God's not into numbers like we are. Yes, He's interested in people. And yes, He promised to build His Church, but His ways are not our ways.

Quite honestly, church "growth" can become a "god" to us. In Gideon's case, God whittled down the troops from 32,000 to 300, so that the situation was not only *bleak*, but *impossible*.

Why did God do that? Because God loves impossible situations, for then when He works no one else can share His glory. You see, when a situation is impossible, then we're ready to see God work--for God is a specialist at doing the impossible.

How does God do the impossible? In lots of ways, for sure, but one approach He loves to take is to use *ordinary people*.

Such was the case with Gideon. Today we're beginning a biographical series on the life of Gideon, one which I've entitled, "Gideon: The Original 'Ordinary' Guy."

Have you ever wondered, "Can God really use *me* for His honor? Can He use me to make a difference at school or at work? After all, I'm just one ordinary person."

The fact is, God used Gideon, and He used him in a remarkable way at a desperate time in Israel's history.

But why Gideon? Did God use him because he was talented? No. Powerful and influential? No. Wealthy? No, that wasn't it either.

What was true of Gideon? Actually, he was a lot like most of us. He was *very ordinary*.

I want to let you in on a little secret at the outset of this series. The story of Gideon isn't really about Gideon. That's not why it's in the Bible. It's about *God*. God chose an ordinary guy to be the tool He would use to display His extraordinary power.

Here's where we're heading today. In Judges 6:1-24 we see the account of Gideon's call, an account involving two scenes. By looking at Gideon we'll learn about God and what God can do with ordinary people like us.

I. Scene #1: We see the unfaithfulness of God's people (1-10).

In fact, unfaithfulness is a predominant theme throughout the book of Judges. Judges is all about what happens when you don't keep covenant. The book is disjointed. It presents Israel's history as being disjointed. To read the book of Judges is like taking a roller coaster ride. It's up and down and up and down.

Once God's people entered the Promised Land they began to enjoy God's blessings--they were up. But then they forget God and experienced His judgment--they were down. So they cried out to Him and He sent them deliverers, or *judges*--and they were up again. For awhile. Until they forgot Him, and the cycle repeated itself.

What's intriguing is to notice the kind of people God used to bring deliverance in the period of the Judges. For the most part, the judges we read about in the book would be the *least expected* people to bring deliverance.

For instance, we meet Ehud in chapter 3, a shrewd left handed man who carried his knife on his right thigh. Hardly a credential for a man you'd vote most likely to succeed!

Then came Shamgar, a man who used an oxgoad to kill 600 and rescue Israel. The surprises continue in chapters 4-5 when God used a woman, Deborah, sitting under a palm tree to deliver His people. Then came

Jephthah, an illegitimate son, a bandit in fact--not exactly "deliverer" material from the human perspective.

And who could forget Samson, the good looking hulk of a man who enters the story in chapter 13? Samson had everything going for him, but blew it, deceived by a woman. And in the end, God used him in his state of weakness to accomplish more than in his days of strength.

The book of Judges is packed full of surprises like that. Over and over we see the unexpected occur, and we watch as God used the most unlikely characters to accomplish His plan.

And then there's Gideon. In Judges 6-8, God chose to use a very ordinary person named Gideon for a very extraordinary task. Gideon, too, came on the scene during a time when God's people were unfaithful to God's covenant.

We find the setting for the story of Gideon in the first ten verses of Judges 6. There we see repeated four familiar phases. Phase #1...

A. God's people did evil (1a). The story begins, "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD." Remember, Judges is a book of cycles. God blessed His people, and then the people forgot and disobeyed God. So God judged His people to get their attention, until the people cried for help. Then He sent deliverers (or "judges") to rescue them, and they'd serve Him for awhile until the judge died. And then the cycle would repeat itself.

Which is exactly what happened according to the first word of chapter 6. *Again* the Israelites did evil. It wasn't the first time, nor would it be the last. According to the last verse of chapter 5 the Israelites had just enjoyed a forty year period of peace and blessing. But they took the blessing--and the Giver of the blessing--for granted.

Again God's people did evil. Then, as now, people were slow to learn. So what happened? First, God's people did evil. Phase #2...

B. God's people suffered (1b-5). How? Verse 1, "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites."

Another key theme in Judges is God's sovereignty. Why did the Midianites dominate the Israelites? Verse 1 says it's because God "gave" [KJV uses the term "delivered"] His people into their hands. Again, nothing occurs on the planet outside of God's control, even suffering.

Just how bad was the suffering? Very bad as verses 2-5 explain:

"Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. 3 Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. 4 They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. 5 They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it."

We reap what we sow.

Remember something. Why did God choose to enter into a special covenant relationship with the Israelites in the first place? Israel was supposed to be a *showcase*. God had intended for the world to learn about Him by looking at Israel.

What kind of reputation was Israel giving God at this point? Not a very good one. They're so weak they're

living in caves! They couldn't even defend themselves against thieves who took their crops. So year after year the Midianites and other pagan nations robbed them of their produce.

What happens when God's people are unfaithful? God chastens them. Why? Because He's harsh? No, because He's passionate about His reputation. Then phase #3...

C. God's people cried for help (6). "Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help."

Was this real repentance, or were the people just tired of the consequences of disobedience? There is a difference. I get the feeling that the Israelites called on God only as a last resort. Whichever the case, God heard the cry of His people and demonstrated mercy. How? He sent them a prophet, and as a result, phase #4 occurred.

D. God's people learned what the problem was (7-10). "When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, 8 he sent them a prophet, who said, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 9 I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. 10 I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me.'"

We're not even given the name of the prophet here. His name isn't important. What he said is. "Thus saith the Lord!" he said. "I saved you from Egypt. I drove out the nations and gave you the Promised Land. I told you, 'Don't worship pagan gods.' But you haven't listened to Me. You haven't obeyed My voice."

That's how we get in trouble, too, isn't it? We fail to give heed to God's Word. We turn from God and forget Him. We become *unfaithful*.

Is there hope for people who've been unfaithful to God? Indeed, there is. Is it based on our merit? Do we have to earn back His favor? No. God's favor can't be earned, but rather it must be received.

Which brings us to scene #2. In stark contrast to the unfaithfulness of God's people in scene #1, we see...

II. Scene #2: We see the faithfulness of God (11-24).

This is an amazing truth, beloved. The faithful God is in the business of restoring His unfaithful people. He's committed to restoring them because His reputation is at stake.

How does He do it? Ultimately, He sent *the* Deliverer, Jesus Christ. But in Judges He gave a foretaste of His ultimate work. How? He raised up *deliverers* (with a small "d"), "judges" like Othniel, Ehud, and Samson. These individuals remind us that God is faithful to His covenant.

Who did God choose to use in Judges 6? We meet the deliverer in verse 11...

A. God chose Gideon (11-16). Listen to verses 11-12, "The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. 12 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.'"

The angel of the Lord came to Gideon. Several times in the Old Testament, God visited His people in this fashion, in what theologians call a "theophany." Here God took the form of a man, and sat down under an oak tree. He had come to enlist Gideon for service.

Gideon was God's man. Gideon would be the man of the hour. Just who was Gideon? He was the son of Joash, an Abiezrite from the tribe of Manasseh. I'm struck by the fact that Gideon didn't volunteer. God drafted him!

But why? Why did God choose Gideon? I'd like to suggest four factors indicated by the text. The first three are *not* why God chose Gideon...

1. *It wasn't because of his courage (11-12).* In fact, I don't see Gideon as being an especially courageous man. Here's why I say that.

What was Gideon doing when the angel of the Lord approached him? He was threshing wheat. Where? In a *winepress*. And why was he threshing wheat in a winepress? The text says, "To keep it from the Midianites."

That's interesting. That incident tells us something about Gideon. Wheat was usually threshed in an open floor, certainly not in a winepress. So why is Gideon threshing wheat in the hidden confines of a winepress? Maybe it shows Gideon was resourceful and expedient--he's making the best out of a bad situation.

More likely, it was *fear*. I don't think God chose Gideon because of his courage.

In fact, I see some humor in the opening words the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior [Hebrew *gibbor hayil*]." The KJV renders the phrase, "Mighty man of valor." Keil and Delitzsch translates it, "brave hero."

Do you see the irony? If Gideon *is* a mighty warrior or a brave hero, then what's he doing hiding for his life in a winepress? He sure doesn't look like a warrior! And He doesn't see himself as a warrior either, as will be apparent by his response.

Yet when God sees us, He sees not only what we *are*, but what we can *become* by His mighty power! No, Gideon wasn't a mighty warrior, not yet, but he would be.

God's Church is full of people who think, "I could never serve the Lord. I don't have what it takes." Beloved, if you know Jesus Christ, you are an heir of God (Eph 1:18), a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), a member of God's household (Eph 2:19), and you are entitled to the same power that God used to raise Christ from the dead (Eph 1:19). So how can we ever say, "I just don't have what it takes to serve the Lord."?

Fellow Christian, do you want to be used of God? You can be. How? Don't look within. Look up. It's not because we are so *usable* that God uses us. It's because He is so powerful! In fact, we are in big trouble the moment we forget how weak we are.

Why did God choose Gideon? It wasn't because of his courage.

2. *It wasn't because of his convictions (13).* Notice the first words out of Gideon's mouth. "But sir," Gideon replied.

A mighty warrior? Gideon isn't convinced. I don't get the sense that Gideon's been preparing himself for this day with the conviction that, "If I prepare myself, the day will come when God will use me."

Rather than conviction, Gideon responds with questions (13). "'But sir,' Gideon replied, 'if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, `Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.'"

Gideon is uncertain and full of questions. "Lord, if you're really with me as you say, then why have all these

bad things been happening to us. And where are all Your miracles like our forefathers saw back in the glory days? You're with us? It seems like you've abandoned us."

That's hardly the response of a man whose heart is full of conviction!

3. *It wasn't because of his connections (14-15)*. The dialogue continues in verse 14, "The LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?'"

Here's Gideon's call. "Go, Gideon. You're my man. I'm going to use *you* to save Israel. And don't wait for *more* strength, Gideon. Go in the strength you have. I'm sending you."

Too often we think, "If only I had a better voice, then I'd serve God." Or, "If only I had more experience, then I'd really serve Him." We would do well to heed God's words to Gideon, "Go in the strength you have. Just use what you have and obey Me."

How did Gideon respond? Verse 15, "'But Lord,' Gideon asked, 'how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.'"

What's his objection now? I'm not qualified, Lord. I don't have the right connections! Why not? Gideon mentions what he perceives as two problems. One, my clan is the weakest. According to Joshua 17:2 and 1 Chronicles 7:18, Abiezer was a clan in the tribe of Manasseh. Apparently, it was a small clan, at least from Gideon's perspective.

And then Gideon raised a second problem. "I'm the least in my family." I'm a nobody from a nobody clan, Lord. I think you've got your wires crossed. How can you use me to rescue Israel? I don't have any connections or influence."

You see, the world says if you're in trouble, find a leader who has courage, convictions, and connections, and then he'll make things happen. But God's ways are not our ways. Now there's nothing inherently wrong with courage, convictions, and even connections in their place.

But God loves to work through the "unqualified," the unlikely, the weak. He loves to use people of whom the world would say, "No way!" And why? Because then He gets all the glory for the outcome.

Why did God choose Gideon? It wasn't because of his courage, convictions, or connections, all of which he lacked. It was because of one thing He didn't lack...

4. *It was because of his God (16)*. "The LORD answered, 'I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.'"

There's God's answer for all of Gideon's objections. *I will be with you*. When God is with you, you're on the winning team. Always.

And by the way, notice the divine-human cooperative here. God says, "I will be with you, and you will strike down the Midianites." Knowing that God is with us doesn't lead to passivity. We don't sit back and watch. Gideon would have a job to do. He would need to use his brain, his sweat, his leadership skills.

But in the end, it wasn't Gideon that won the battle. It was God. That's what Gideon had going for him. That's what qualified Gideon for the task. Not his courage, not his convictions, not his contacts, but his God.

Is it any different for us? My friend, you can have courage, convictions, and contacts, but if you don't have God, you'll never do anything of eternal significance. Never.

Isn't that why Jesus came? Not to round up the qualified, but to rescue the unqualified. When we admit we are sinners and place our faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on the Cross, God places us on His team, fit for service!

We see the faithfulness of God demonstrated in a second way in Gideon's life. First God chose Gideon. Secondly...

B. God gave confirmation to Gideon (17-24). Gideon speaks in verse 17, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me." It's not surprising that Gideon struggled with the message the Lord just gave him. Would you struggle if you were Gideon? He'd just been told he was supposed to go and save Israel from the powerful Midianites.

God is so patient. Gideon asked for a sign, and in response God confirmed Gideon's call by giving him a taste of three things.

1. *He gave him a taste of His presence (17-19).* Why did Gideon ask for a sign? He mentions a specific reason. He wants verification that it's really the Lord who's talking. "Gideon replied, 'If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me (17).'"

Was this really the Lord, or was Gideon merely deceiving himself. He needed reassurance. How would he get it? He proposed this idea (18), "Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you."

How did God respond to Gideon's proposal? "And the LORD said, 'I will wait until you return.'" God assured Gideon of His presence--He wouldn't leave.

And so (19), "Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak."

This was quite an offering! It probably took Gideon hours to kill, dress, and cook the goat. And the "ephah" of flour alone weighed between 34 and 45 pounds. Remember this was a time of scarcity for the Israelites. This was a costly offering.

What's Gideon doing? He's bringing God an "offering." The Hebrew word Gideon uses (*mincha*) was often used of the freewill offering in Israel's sacrificial system. It was also used of the tribute brought to a king.

Maybe Gideon remembered how Abraham offered a meal to the Lord (Gen 18:5-8). Maybe He simply didn't want the Lord to end His visit. And in His grace, God confirmed Gideon's call by giving him a taste of His presence.

What happened next? God confirmed Gideon's call in a second way.

2. *He gave him a taste of His power (20-22).* Here's how: "The angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.' And Gideon did so. 21 With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared."

Talk about a demonstration of power! What kind of impact did it have on Gideon? Verse 22, "When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, 'Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!'"

Do you see what the Lord's doing with Gideon? He's removing his doubts. He's preparing him for service.

He's helping him see what happens when an ordinary person encounters the Living God. To confirm his call, God gave Gideon a taste of His presence, His power, and thirdly...

3. *He gave him a taste of His peace (23-24).* Gideon thought he was going to die, having just tasted the Lord's presence and power. But he didn't. What happened?

Verse 23, "But the LORD said to him, 'Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.'" Apparently, right after the angel of the Lord left, the Lord spoke in an audible voice to his servant: It's okay Gideon. Shalom (peace) be upon you. You're not going to die, so don't be afraid.

That was just what Gideon needed to hear. His response? Verse 24, "So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it [Jehovah Shalom] The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites."

Gideon built an altar. Why? An altar is a place where two activities occur. First, it's a place of *sacrifice*. An altar reminds us that we must come to God on *His* terms, not ours. And since He's holy, sacrifice is required. That's why God sacrificed His Son, Jesus--the Lamb of God--to die on the Cross. An altar is a place of sacrifice.

It's also a place of *worship*. The appropriate response to the presence of God is *worship*. Those who've experienced the presence of God will worship God by saying, "God, I gladly give you what you deserve--*my life*. Take my life, and let it be pleasing Lord to Thee."

In effect, that's what Gideon did when he built the altar he called, "Jehovah Shalom." He was responding to the call and confirmation of God. He was saying, "Here I am Lord, insignificant though I be. Use me as you see fit."

And that's exactly what God did as we'll begin to see next time. But first, let's talk about some implications.

Implications: We learn some vital lessons... I'll mention four...

1. *God's sovereignty overrides man's wickedness.* Did the Israelites do evil in Judges 6? Were they unfaithful to God's covenant? Yes. But did their unfaithfulness thwart the plan of God? Did it catch God off guard?

For that matter, does ours? Does our unfaithfulness frustrate God and His purposes? The answer is, *no*. God's sovereignty overrides man's wickedness. The ultimate example of this truth is the Cross, right?

2. *No matter how bad things are, when there is God there is hope.* You say, "My life's a mess right now, and I don't know what to do. Is there hope?" Yes, there is!

Beloved, what matters is not how strong we are, or how smart we are, or how talented we are. What matters is whether we know God or not.

Do you know Him? Be honest. Do you really know God? There's only one way. It's through His Son, Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6)."

3. *God specializes in taking people from where they are to where they should be.* That's what He did with Gideon.

Are you where you should be? Have you availed yourself to God for His service?

Telemachus was a monk who lived in the 4th century. He felt God saying to him, "Go to Rome." He was in a cloistered monastery. He put his possessions in a sack and set out for Rome.

When he arrived in the city, people were thronging in the streets. He asked why all the excitement and was told that this was the day that the gladiators would be fighting and killing each other in the coliseum, the day of the games, the circus. He thought to himself, "Four centuries after Christ and they are still killing each other, for enjoyment?"

He ran to the coliseum and heard the gladiators saying, "Hail to Caesar, we die for Caesar" and he thought, "this isn't right." He jumped over the railing and went out into the middle of the field, got between two gladiators, held up his hands and said "In the name of Christ, forbear."

The crowd protested and began to shout, "Run him through, Run him through." A gladiator came over and hit him in the stomach with the back of his sword. It sent him sprawling in the sand.

He got up and ran back and again said, "In the name of Christ, forbear." The crowd continued to chant, "Run him through."

One gladiator came over and plunged his sword through the little monk's stomach and he fell into the sand, which began to turn crimson with his blood. One last time he gasped out, "In the name of Christ forbear."

A hush came over the 80,000 people in the coliseum. Soon a man stood and left, then another and more, and within minutes all 80,000 had emptied out of the arena. It was the last known gladiatorial contest in the history of Rome.

To sum it up, here's one final lesson...

4. God can use ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes. And when He does He gets all the glory. Will you surrender your life to Him today?