

Opening Scripture: Psalm 44:1–3 God, we have heard with our ears—our ancestors have told us— the work you accomplished in their days, in days long ago: ² In order to plant them, you displaced the nations by your hand; in order to settle them, you brought disaster on the peoples. ³ For they did not take the land by their sword— their arm did not bring them victory— but by your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, because you were favorable toward them.

Introduction:

Moses—protested that he was the wrong choice for the job—he lacked confidence, speaking ability, was a fugitive for murder.

David—the youngest and smallest of his brothers, a lowly shepherd by day and music composer by night.

Esther—a young Jewish orphan living in exile, Esther had no pedigree and no prospects and yet God brought her to the position of the queen of Persia.

Mary—a humble girl in a farm town. Yet she was chosen to bring the Messiah into the world.

Peter—a fisherman by trade, brash, impulsive, a bit mouthy—became the most prominent leader of Jesus’ disciples turning the world upside down.

What made the difference in each of their lives was not their talent, their abilities, their privilege, or wealth—what made the difference was that God had chosen them from obscurity.

Main Thought: God accomplishes His purposes through people of His choosing who operate with His power for His glory and our good.

God doesn’t call individuals who are already qualified—instead, he qualifies the called.

And that is the story of Gideon. How does God do this? We’ll look at five aspects of Gideon’s equipping for the job ahead as Judge: (1) He’s a **called** man whom the Lord had chosen; (2) He’s a **common** man with no claims of greatness in himself nor personal strength; (3) He’s a **converted** man; (4) He’s a **consecrated** man who tore down Baal’s altars and restored the worship of Yahweh; (5) He’s a **confirmed** man—having been tested in small things before the big dance with the forces of Midian.

Judges 6:1–6 The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord handed them over to Midian seven years, ² and they oppressed Israel. Because of Midian, the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. ³ Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and the people of the east came and attacked them. ⁴ They encamped against them and destroyed the produce of the land, even as far as Gaza. They left nothing for Israel to eat, as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. ⁵ For the Midianites came with their cattle and their tents like a great swarm of locusts. They and their camels were without number, and they entered the land to lay waste to it. ⁶ ***So Israel became poverty-stricken because of Midian, and the Israelites cried out to the Lord.***

This was the fourth time Israel had forsaken their heritage, leading to their oppression. Imagine waking up to the sound of camel hooves stampeding through your village, the screams of women and children echoing through the streets. This was a common reality for the Israelites under Midianite oppression. Raiding unfortified towns and villages, the Midianite marauders forced the Israelites to seek refuge in caves. For seven years, the Midianites devastated the land, causing starvation and death by destroying essential crops—wheat, barley, and olives, and taking or killing off their livestock. The author compares the Midianite destruction to a swarm of locusts. Despite the seemingly hopeless situation, God had the plan to raise up an unlikely leader who would deliver His people from their tormentors.

Notice God's grace *before deliverance*. People want deliverance from what torments them but they don't want the truth. But God sends a prophet before he sends a deliverer. Gideon's name is "Thresher," in Hebrew that name is גִּדְעוֹן (Gideown). And we meet him doing his job—threshing wheat but in a very odd way.

Judges 6:11–12 The angel of the Lord came, and he sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. ¹² Then the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "The Lord is with you, valiant warrior."

We learn 5 things about Gideon who became Israel's judge.

1. Gideon is a called man. We had mentioned a few weeks back that the Angel of the LORD is likely a Theophany or more specifically, a Christophany, which is an appearance of Christ in the OT in bodily or material form. This is due to the fact that the AOTL is the only heavenly messenger who receives worship and speaks directly as God, not merely *for* God. This is why we think it is an appearance of Christ in the OT, because Jesus is the only rabbi, leader, or prophet in Israel's history who assumes the divine prerogatives and titles of Yahweh. Jesus received the Disciples' worship, and also, when he taught, he did so as if he was speaking with God's authentic voice, not merely as a spokesman for God.

It is the LORD who is standing face-to-face with Gideon. God has come calling on the Thresher of Manasseh even though he does not quite yet understand who it is that stands in front of him.

God's calling is always accompanied and evidenced by the promise of His presence. "The LORD is with you." This statement is significant because it connects Gideon to the lineage of great leaders who relied upon God's presence, such as Moses and Joshua. This promise of the LORD's presence is followed by a title: **"Mighty Man of Valor,"** which only makes sense because of the first clause. If the LORD is not with him, the notion that he would, in himself, be considered a mighty man of valor is frankly silly.

As Christians, we embrace our weaknesses because they draw attention away from our limits and onto God's power and glory.

2 Corinthians 12:9–10 God's response to Paul was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Paul is here boasting, not in his talents, or his intelligence or his accomplishments. He's boasting in the fact that when he was physically at his weakest, struggling with what he calls "a thorn in the flesh"—God's grace was sufficient for him—meaning, that sometimes what is more important than the answer to our prayer (for relief) is God's strength and grace to bear up under the circumstances that God has allowed to come to our doorstep. Why? Because, as Paul noted, it produces in us a patience and character that quick and easy answers to prayer could never produce. God's strength was demonstrated and perfected in his weakness.

Application: Do we often think like that? Our strength lies not in our innate capabilities, nor is it defined by our endeavors. Rather, our strength of faith and our assurance rests in our election.

Romans 8:28 reminds us: We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

The author of Gideon's story wants us to see that Gideon wasn't looking for God, he wasn't a man of great faith, and he had no skill nor boldness. Yet God, for his own reasons, *calls the man and he makes the man.*

2. Gideon was a common man. Gideon naturally experiences doubt upon hearing the Angel of the Lord's calling on his life, especially that business about him being “Gideon the Lionheart” which surely must be a joke. But not if the first line of that sentence is true. Because if the Lord is with him, then a truer statement has never been said. Judges 6:13–15 Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about? They said, ‘Hasn’t the Lord brought us out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian.”¹⁴ The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!”¹⁵ He said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s family.”

Gideon essentially voices two objections:

First, “You say the Lord is with me—but how can He be with “Us” in light of our circumstances? Gideon naturally wants to know why it is that God doesn’t do what he’s read and heard about in his Bible? Where are all the miracles, the signs and wonders you did for our ancestors? The prophet and the people of old praised God for having brought the people out of Egypt. But now the LORD has abandoned us to these wicked and evil Midianites. What gives?

Secondly, he protests, “How can a person like me be Israel’s deliverer?” Look at me. Instead of threshing grain on a hilltop for all to see, I’m hiding down here in this quarried-out winepress where no one can see me thresh a meager existence. And I don’t know if you’ve noticed, Lord, but my family isn’t powerful nor prestigious, and I am the runt of the litter.

We can say a few things about his emerging doubts:

- He’s lived with them for quite some time. His response is immediate and precise as if he has mulled it over for a while.
- He lacks perspective. Sure, he knows ancient history when God did miracle after miracle for the children of Israel through Moses and Joshua—but he seems to be unaware of Israel’s more recent history—repeated failures to live according to the covenant God made with them. You want to know **why they’re in this predicament?** Look in your Dad’s backyard.
- He lacks knowledge. He lacks biblical literacy on the finer points. *Moses literally prophesied that if they entered the land and worshipped the gods of Canaan and the Midianites, a plague of locusts would descend on their land and devour it, and the people would end up living like animals hiding out in caves and deserts (Deut 28–32).*
- His doubt wasn’t terminal. Have you ever met someone (or maybe you are someone) who is a terminal skeptic? I mean, no set of data put before them could ever result in faith and trust in Christ. But Gideon is not that kind of doubter. Sure, he is struggling with doubt, but he’s also open to being convinced.

Gideon’s doubts were nourished by ignorance of Scripture and his own history and fueled by an accurate self-assessment. He knows God doesn’t do these things anymore, and he’s sure he’s not the man for the job.

Is there anything more common among men than doubt? It's a shared experience as fallen human beings—we doubt what God can do, and we doubt that he can use the likes of us.

3. Gideon was a converted man. Now, I want you to notice his conversion here.

Judges 6:16–23 The Lord assured Gideon of His presence and promised that he would defeat Midian as if they were “one man.” In response, Gideon requested a sign to confirm that he was truly speaking with the Lord. Gideon asked the Lord to wait for him while he prepared a gift. The Lord agreed to wait, and Gideon prepared a meal of a young goat and unleavened bread.

Judges 6:20–24 The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat with the unleavened bread, put it on this stone, and pour the broth on it.” (So just, douse the meal in gravy). So he did that. ²¹ The angel of the Lord extended the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire came up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. ²² When Gideon realized that he was the angel of the Lord, he said, “Oh no, Lord God! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!” ²³ But the Lord said to him, “Peace to you. Don't be afraid, for you will not die.” ²⁴ So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord Is Peace. It is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites today.” The flames ignited the altar burning up the meat and bread and the broth—which was a symbol of God accepting his sacrifice.

Suddenly, he realizes that this truly is the AOTL, and exclaims, “Adonai Yahweh!” And he is terrified because he realizes he stood face-to-face with God. Most often, when the OT speaks of God's face, it is in the context of Divine self-revelation. In the ANE, when you entered the presence of the King, you came in with your head low and bowed, never making eye contact until the King turned his face toward you. In this case, you were then allowed to lift up your face and make eye contact. But if the King turned his face away from you or hid his face from you, you were out of favor. The King's “face” in the ancient world was synonymous with his “presence” revealed in his countenance. And his countenance was either favorable or disapproving. This is why we see the ideas of God's presence, and his face used so interchangeably in the Pentateuch.

While he may lack knowledge on the finer points of the Mosaic law, he does understand broader concepts of Jewish theology—

- In **Genesis 32:30**, Jacob is astonished that he after he wrestled with the AOTL, He had seen God face-to-face and lived to tell about it.
- In **Exodus 33:20** Moses requested to see God's face unveiled, unfiltered and God forbid it because, He told Moses “No man can see the face of God and live.”

In the OT, people could only see God through his glory (the cloud) and in the image of the AOTL. That was God's revelation of himself in a way that wouldn't cause the human to drop dead from the full rays of God's powerful presence.

And in the Christian life, the believer has full access to the presence of God through Christ, the mediator of a new and better covenant...

1 Timothy 6:15–16 He [God] is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who ***alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light***, whom no one has seen or can see, to him be honor and eternal power. Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:4–7 In their case [pagan Gentiles] the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the ***light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God***. For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’s sake. ⁶ For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give ***the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ***. ⁷ Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us.

Hebrews 1:1–3, ESV Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is ***the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature***, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Colossians 1:15 He [Christ] is ***the image of the invisible God***.

We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Spirit. Our conversion begins with the right confession of the one true God who has existed for all eternity as Father, Son and Spirit.

And it is through Christ that we look and can see the glory and the radiance of God’s presence.

Gideon’s conversion began with the right doctrine—when the AOTL vanishes in front of him, he suddenly exclaims that he has come face-to-face with the God of the Universe who has taken on a bodily form.

4. Gideon was a consecrated man. There is no more important attribute or trait that Gideon could have than this—he obeys the Angel of the Lord. Judges 6:25–27 “On that very night the Lord said to him, “Take your father’s young bull and a second bull seven years old. Then ***tear down the altar of Baal*** that belongs to your father and ***cut down the Asherah pole*** beside it. ²⁶ ***Build a well-constructed altar to the Lord your God*** on the top of this mound. Take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down.” ²⁷ So Gideon took ten of his male servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because he was too afraid of his father’s family and the men of the city to do it in the daytime, he did it at night.” So, Gideon is given a smaller task. He is to tear down one altar of Baal and the Asherah totem beside it. Notice where it is—in his father’s backyard. Foreign gods have come home, there in his house and worshipped by his family. This echoes God’s command to Moses to destroy these altars to Baal and the Asherah totems (Exod 34:12–13; Deut 7:5).

This altar was to be erected on a bluff, intended to be seen by all the city’s residents. They were to use the chopped up pieces of the Asherah altar as fuel to burn in the new altar for Yahweh. This covert act undertaken under the cover of night is quickly discovered by the townsfolk at dawn. And they are furious. This is the first judge in the book who faces opposition from his own people. The Israelite’s Canaanization is in full swing. Joash, his father goes to bat for him—saying, “Can’t Baal defend himself?” They come to discover their folly and they rename Gideon “Jerub Baal” meaning “Let Baal contend with you.”

Here we are dealing with an altar to a wicked sex god, Baal, and to his attending god Asherah. While these false gods may not have stone altars and physical shrines the way they used to, make no mistake about it, these “gods” haven’t gone anywhere. They’ve just morphed into new realities—the gods of leisure and pleasure, the gods of self-actualization and self-fulfillment, the gods of individual autonomy totally divorced from any external authority, including natural law or their own bodies, and the gods of personal convenience making it effortless to snuff out the lives of the innocent.

2 Corinthians 6:15–17 “What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For ***we are the temple of the living God***, as God said: I will dwell and walk ***among them***, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹⁷ Therefore, ***come out from among them*** and be separate, says the Lord; do not touch any unclean thing, and I will welcome you (cf. Isa 52:11).

If we are the Temple of the Living God who has by his Holy Spirit taken up residence in this holy community who make the good confession, then what does the Temple of Jesus have in common with doctrines of demons or the practices of this world?

Gideon’s immediate response is to obey the AOTL and tear down altars to false gods and replace them with true worship.

5. Gideon was a confirmed man.—having been tested, tried and approved in a limited field exercise that gets him ready for the big dance against the Midianites. Judges 6:39–40 Gideon then said to God, “Don’t be angry with me; let me speak one more time. Please allow me to make one more test with the fleece. Let it remain dry, and the dew be all over the ground.”⁴⁰ That night, God did as Gideon requested: only the fleece was dry, and dew was all over the ground.

The notorious “Fleece” incident in Gideon’s story was intended for him to get closure on two things: (1) He needed one more confirmation of his calling and election. (2) He needed this confirmation regarding God’s will.

His calling is finally confirmed in one definite sign that for him is unmistakable. God is with me. And now, it’s time to go to war.

Today, we don’t put fleeces out to confirm our calling or God’s will because the NT believer has the presence of God the Holy Spirit residing in us personally and in our community when we gather. The Spirit was poured out, not on a few select individuals, but on all believers such that our sons and daughters will prophesy, our old men will have dreams, and our young men will see visions. God’s presence is poured out on the well-connected and the servants, the socially advantaged and those of low social standing. Men and women, young and old.

Application: We are confirmed in the Christian Faith by three things:

- We make the good confession: Romans 10:9 If you confess with your mouth ***Jesus as Lord***, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor 12:3) that no one Speaking by the Holy Spirit can say “Jesus by accursed,” and no one can make the confession that “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. A genuine believer who has received the work of the Holy Spirit in grace will experience a changed heart which bubbles up in a right confession of Jesus as the Son of God and God the Son. And that person will be deeply offended and annoyed by error. Because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and he is jealous for the truth.
- Spiritual enabling for service: 1 Corinthians 1:5–7 That you were enriched in him in every way, in all speech and all knowledge.⁶ In this way, the ***testimony about Christ was confirmed*** among you,⁷ so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Show me a church where there is no diversity of spiritual enablements for service in the body—show me a church that does nothing but show up to hear their Christian celebrity pastor teach but doesn’t result in the equipping of the individual saints for the work of the ministry and I’ll show you a church where the Spirit’s presence likely is not there.
- The good works that follow grace: Ephesians 2:8–10 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this *is* not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;⁹ ***not a result of works***, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus ***for good works***, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. If I may be so bold, I would venture to say that there are many here today that have a perfectly orthodox understanding of salvation by grace apart from good works, but then you lack a sound theology of good works. Paul tells us “We are God’s work, Created in

Christ for holy vocation.” Look at how Peter puts this, 2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to ***confirm your calling and election***, because if you do these things, you will never stumble.

Gideon needed a fleece, a sign, to confirm his election and calling but you and I don't need that because we have received the transforming agent of God's Holy Spirit who baptizes our spirits into Christ's atoning work, who enables us to make the right confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and God the Son—the Savior and Lord of all; and enables us with spiritual gifts, insight, knowledge, and discernment to serve the body of Christ for its building up and edification; evidenced and confirmed by the good works he's prepared for us in advance.

Main Thought: God accomplishes His purposes through people of His choosing who operate with His power for His glory and our good.

God doesn't call qualified people. He qualifies the people that he calls.