

# Judges 6

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thanks, guys, for reading. And if you keep your Bibles open at Judges chapter 6, we're going to look at that together now. You'll find an outline inside the notice sheet.

You'll find that helpful just to see where we're going as we turn to God's Word together. But let's ask for God's help. Let's pray. Father God, we pray that you'll speak to us now by your Spirit, that you'll give us ears to hear, heads to understand, and hearts willing to change and follow you.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, we've heard this morning and celebrated that God is doing a great work around the world today, building his kingdom among the nations.

And it's been said, we're an Anglican church at St. Silas. It's been said that the average Anglican today is a black woman under the age of 30. She earns \$2 a day, has a family of at least three children, has lost at least one close relative to AIDS, and will walk four miles to church for a three-hour service on a Sunday.

Now, 100 years ago, that would have been unthinkable that that would describe the average Anglican. It's extraordinary what God has done over the last century and in recent decades around the world.

[ 1 : 16 ] And that includes Scotland. And as his people, God wants us to devote ourselves to that task of reaching others and drawing them into his family.

He gives you a new purpose in life, to use our gifts and our resources to spread the news about Jesus. That's not just the task of the missionary, you know, people like Yvonne, who we've sent overseas from St. Silas, Mitchum and Rosie, who are overseas at the moment.

It's a task for all of us. It says this in Acts chapter 17, From one man God made all the nations that they should inhabit the whole earth, and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. Do you see what it's saying? God has put us deliberately in the relationships and the networks that we're in.

He puts us in places so that other people can hear of Jesus and reach out for him. But one of the biggest problems that we face in that great new purpose in life is that often we feel inadequate.

[ 2 : 26 ] We feel weak. We think things like, there's no point in me telling my friends about Jesus. Why would they listen to me? What if they've got objections that I don't know the answer to and they even throw me in my own faith?

So we get scared. And we get scared of being too radical in the way we live for Jesus. We think, I'm scared what other people will think if they see how differently I'm living now.

Maybe we get scared deep down that God isn't powerful enough to save the people in our school, my classmates, my workplace, the people of Scotland.

As though God is powerful enough to save people in other countries, but not here. And we're conscious of our own sin. We think, well, how is God going to use me?

He's probably angry with me because I'm making such a bad effort at cutting out sin in my life. How would he work through me? These are the kind of lies that we hear in our own heads.

[ 3 : 29 ] And if that's how any of us feel, we need to be encouraged this morning by the story of Gideon. This is Old Testament, so it's before Jesus came. We're sometime after Moses and Joshua.

They led God's people into the promised land, but we're before King David, so they don't have a king yet. And we pick things up at a point when the people of God were in a terrible situation.

If you have a look with me at verse one again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. The evil that they're doing is that they're turning to other gods and worshipping other gods.

And the result, verse one, for seven years, God gave them into the hands of the Midianites. And then we get this horrific description of what that was like. Perhaps worth thinking about what it'd been like if you were there, maybe if you were a young person living with your family, if you were a teenager, what would it have been like to see this happen to your family every year?

Spring comes, your parents are out working the fields, plowing the fields, you're helping them. And then the dreadful day comes, you hear a noise before you can see anything.

[ 4 : 34 ] It's the marauding Midianites coming. You see them on the horizon. It's them again. They come into your valley and drive you out. You flee with your family. Your parents find a cave for you to stay in.

They set up camp below you on your family land. They slaughter your animals every evening as they feast on the land. They use your crops to feed their own animals.

And when there's nothing left but mud, they move on again. And they leave you starving, your family devastated. And it happens again the next year and the year after that for seven years.

This is a horror story. And the people cry out to God for help. So that's the backdrop to the amazing rescue that we're going to hear about today and next week.

God is on the move. If you have a look at verse 11, the angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Opera that belonged to Joash the Abbey as right where his son Gideon was.

[ 5 : 35 ] And God's choice of Gideon is meant to encourage us all. It should help us think we can step out in faith and live wholeheartedly for God. We can speak up about Jesus because Gideon is Mr. Jelly.

I've got three headings for us. The fears of Mr. Jelly, the God of Mr. Jelly and the worship of Mr. Jelly. So first of all, the fears of Mr. Jelly that he had to overcome. If you just have a look with me at verse 12.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, the Lord is with you, mighty warrior. And the thing is, on any measure except God's, Gideon is not a mighty warrior.

That is not how you would ever have described Gideon if you knew him. But God's got a great plan to use this little weed, Gideon, to do massive things. I don't know if you remember Mr. Jelly.

He's one of my favorite Mr. Men. And the story starts in his house and he wakes up in the morning and a leaf falls from a tree outside his window and it makes a little stirring noise. So he stays in bed all day because he is so scared of the noise from the leaf.

[ 6 : 44 ] Gideon is Mr. Jelly. We're going to think about six things that make Gideon scared. The first one is, eek! The enemy is too big. Just look at where the angel finds him in verse 11.

The angel sat under the oak belonging to Joash where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press to keep it from the Midianites. Now, you don't thresh wheat in a wine press, okay?

You thresh wheat in the open air where the wind will blow and help you with the wheat and the chaff. Gideon is hiding in a hole because he's scared of the enemy. Just like today, we might be frightened when we feel God is calling us to do things like share our faith and we worry, we're scared of what other people might do to us.

But God is going to use this guy. He calls him a mighty warrior. What's Gideon's second problem? It's, eek! The Lord must have abandoned us.

If you look at verse 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?

[ 7 : 55 ] But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian. So Gideon has a distorted view of God. It's a view that's very common today. It's a view that says, my circumstances are so difficult right now.

God must have abandoned me. Now I know that's a difficult thing to think about. I'm not for a moment playing down how hard life can be, how sad life can be. But we're promised God never abandons his people, no matter how hard things will be.

And he promises he is at work in all things for our good, so that we can actually learn to say things to God, like, God, please change me into the person who can be faithful to you in the midst of all this.

Please use this situation for good to make me more like Jesus. Next, Gideon says, eek, I'm not from the right background, in verse 15.

How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I'm the least in my family. Just like we might feel, well, I've not been a Christian long enough, or I'm not from a Christian home, or there's so much I don't know yet.

[ 9 : 13 ] But it doesn't matter to God. God wants to use him. Then Gideon goes into denial. He says, eek, it can't really be you, in verse 17. If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it's really you talking to me.

He's full of doubts. So the angel commands him, and he goes off. It must have taken ages. He prepares and cooks a young goat. He makes some bread. The angel waits for him. He comes back. He puts them on a rock, and the angel reaches out his staff and touches them, and fire flares out from the rock and consumes the bread and the meat.

And then the angel disappears. It really is the Lord. And Gideon's response, is it courage at last? Look at verse 22. Ah, sovereign Lord, I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.

This is Mr. Jelly. He goes from, it can't really be you, to, oh no, I've seen God. I'm going to perish. I'm going to die. He's too much C-3PO and not enough Han Solo.

You know, C-3PO all the time. We're doomed. We're doomed. Verse 23. But the Lord said to him, peace, do not be afraid. You're not going to die. In other words, if God asks you to do something, he doesn't want you to panic.

[ 10 : 30 ] He wants you to trust him. What does Han Solo say to C-3PO? Stop giving me the odds. Never give me the odds. And sometimes in the Christian life, we pay too much attention to the odds.

And we just need to have a go and take a risk. So that's our first point, the fears of Mr. Jelly that he had to overcome. But how did he overcome them? Well, that's our second point, the God of Mr. Jelly that he had to remember.

Let's just focus on three things about God in this chapter. First of all, he's the God of grace. If you just look at verse 7, then the Midianites had cried out to God for help.

When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, he sent them a prophet who said, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. And then he recounts all his saving work in Israel's past. And he says at the end of verse 10, but you have not listened to me. He sends the word of God through a prophet to tell them, you're not listening to me.

[ 11 : 32 ] That's why you're in such trouble. Instead of a rescuer, they get a prophet. Why? It's because God is holy. They're upset about the Midianites, but they haven't yet grasped it's their fault.

They might be sorry about the situation, but they've not repented of their sin of turning away from God. Now, what might we expect to happen next if we've never heard the story before?

God sends a prophet. I would expect God to wait for the people to say sorry and turn back to him to repent, to pray. But what happens next?

Verse 11. The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in opera that belonged to Joash, where his son Gideon was. So, do you see what's happening?

God sets about saving his people even before they've turned back to him because he's gracious. And the same is true for us.

[ 12 : 32 ] If God had just sent a prophet to us to say to us, you're sinful people, you need to turn back to the living God, and waited for us to turn back before he saved us, he would have waited forever.

But instead, he sends Jesus into the world and embarks on this great saving plan to save us. Then he breathes his spirit into us so that we'll have our eyes opened and see who Jesus is.

God saves us before we've turned back to him. He's the God of grace. He's also the God who is with us. That's the key for Gideon. In verse 12, the angel says, the Lord is with you, mighty warrior. Gideon says, no, no, no, I can't do that. God has abandoned us. And then verse 14 again, the angel turned to him and said, go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand.

Am I not saving you? And then we get it in verse 16 again. The Lord answered, I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites together.

[ 13 : 37 ] Gideon's got to stop looking at the obstacles. He's got to stop looking at his weaknesses. And he has to remember, this is the living God who has sent him and God is with him. And we see that not just in what the angel says, but even in this mysterious messenger himself from the Lord.

He's called the angel of the Lord in verse 11. But in verse 14, just have a look at who turns to Gideon in verse 14. The Lord turns to Gideon.

And then in verse 18, it says, sorry, it's not verse 18. The Lord says, I will, verse 16, the Lord answered, I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites.

At the end of verse 18, and the Lord said, I will wait until you return. So it's the Lord speaking and it's the angel speaking. What's going on? I'm not sure.

But the best way to understand this might be that this is God the Son. Not incarnate yet, not Jesus stepped into the world, but several times in the Old Testament before Jesus, before the eternal Son takes flesh, you have an angel of the Lord who appears to people, who is sent by God and who is God himself.

[15:01] He's God with us. And it reassures Gideon that God is going to be with him as he steps out in faith to serve the Lord. So he's the God of grace, he's the God who is with us, and thirdly, he's the God of patient reassurance.

There's one more eek from Gideon. It comes later in the chapter and it's the fleece thing. Gideon says, eek, okay, I get it, it is you, but can you really keep your promises?

So he asks for reassurance and he puts out a wool fleece on the threshing floor one night and the next morning the ground is dry and the fleece is covered in dew. And then he does the test again in reverse, verse 39.

Verse 39, he says to God, do not be angry with me, let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew. That night God did so.

Only the fleece was dry, all the ground was covered with dew. Now there are lots of different ideas about what we make of this today. Sometimes people talk about, they say, if you're not sure what God wants you to do, put out a fleece.

[16:03] I don't know if you've ever heard that phrase, people have said that to me. And what they mean is, you're not really sure, so pray and try something and see if God opens the door to help you work out God's will. Put out a fleece.

But I don't think that's what Gideon means here at all. Okay? In Gideon's mind, he knows exactly what God wants him to do and he knows what God has promised. If you look at verse 36, Gideon said to God, if you will save Israel by my hand, as you have promised, look.

So he knows God's will. What he's lacking is confidence that God really will do what he's promised to do. And when you've grasped that, you see how this is wonderful patience from the living God. He doesn't condemn Gideon for having these doubts. He sympathizes and he gives him these signs of his grace and his power. And it's important for us to remember, Gideon probably doesn't have a Bible.

At this stage, certainly not as we've got it, but even what had been written so far as Israel has turned away from God. He certainly doesn't know Christ. He doesn't know that the God he has met is powerful enough to rescue his people from the Midianites.

[17:21] So he gets this miraculous reassurance. So there are differences there and yet nonetheless, we have the same reassuring God today. And we get full of uncertainty as to whether God will really keep his promises to us.

Is he really going to save his people from every nation just by the power of his gospel? Is Jesus really going to come in glory any day? And we're told not to put the Lord to the test, but in our struggles, we do get patient reassurance from God.

He gives us the Bible with its living testimony about how God has kept all his promises in the past.

He gives us each other and the opportunities we have to meet together and spur each other on.

He gives us the testimony of answered prayer. And lots of us can look back at amazing experiences in our own lives that perhaps at the time you don't see it, but you look back and you think, that's amazing.

God was clearly at work in my life arranging things. There's that kind of reassurance to us. He gives us reassurance through experiences we might have of God's love and his goodness.

[18:33] And he also gives us the Lord's Supper to share. The writer Dale Ralph Davis says this, God doesn't mind humbling himself in order to bolster our fragile faith, our wavering grip on his word.

He is so eager to do just that that he has provided a table instead of a threshing floor and bread and wine in place of a fleece. So Gideon is given great reassurance in the story, but he's also given a big challenge.

And that's our third point. We've thought about the fears of Mr. Jelly and the God of Mr. Jelly that he has to remember. Thirdly, let's think about the worship of Mr. Jelly that had to change. See, Gideon builds an altar to God in verse 24.

He sacrifices a bull, but it's not good enough. Look at verse 25. That same night, the Lord said to him, take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old.

Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.

[ 19 : 43 ] So Baal and Asherah, right, they're false gods and they're worshipped by Gideon's community and by his family. And God's problem isn't that his people aren't worshipping him at all.

It's that really their lives revolve around these other gods. They had agricultural ones to help with the harvest and they had sex and beauty ones and they had fertility ones and they had commercial ones and they worshipped them alongside God.

So Gideon building an altar to God is not enough for God. The Lord says to him, tear down the other altars. He demands wholehearted worship.

So Gideon has to go about spiritual renewal. And today in Glasgow, although we don't build kind of shrines to them, the gods haven't changed.

If we're feeling modest, what we really want from life is security, comfort, enjoyment. A few friends. If we're more ambitious, we want popularity, power, wealth, consumerism.

[ 20 : 52 ] And so we might say we worship the Lord, we come to church, but the reality is that often, day by day, other things control our hearts. Other things drive our emotions.

Our performance at work, the performance of our ISIS and our savings account, how much money we've got hoarded up, our resting pulse rate, how we're doing with our fitness these days.

That's what really drives us. So we don't serve God with everything we've got because we make choices that put other things first. And we need spiritual renewal like Gideon did.

So Gideon smashes the idols. He's frightened, so he does it at night. But in verse 27, we read, Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him.

And then verse 32, So that day they called Gideon Jerob Baal, saying, Let Baal contend with him because he broke down Baal's altar. Of course he's going to be fine because Baal isn't real.

[ 21 : 55 ] Now Gideon is ready and the Lord is going to use him to work dramatically in this great rescue for his people. And we're going to continue the story next week. It's a great story. But let's pause there and just think, what's the Spirit saying to us through Gideon?

All across the world and in our city, God is building his kingdom. He wants to use us in that gospel spreading work. And too often we hold back because we feel weak.

But God chose Gideon, the biggest weed in the land. And I wonder, have you ever thought before, maybe God has chosen you because you're weak. He's made us deliberately weak.

He's made us people who have to sleep a third of our lives. He wants us to feel weak. He gives us tasks that we're not able to do on our own.

Because like Gideon, we have to stop looking at ourselves so that we'll look at him. And so maybe we need to ask if we're scared, do you really believe that this God is with you in your workplace?

[ 23 : 02 ] That he's there before you arrive? That he's with you in the nightclub at the school gate when you're playing rugby? He's with you, wanting to work through you to advance his kingdom.

And I've used the example this morning of telling friends about Jesus, but in life there might be all kinds of other ways that we become convinced God wants us to do something for him and we're afraid.

Maybe we think God wants us to change our job, to move to a new area where there's a gospel need, to give away a lot of money, to step out and try a new way of serving him, to end a relationship that we're in with someone that's not helpful.

Sometimes the problem isn't that we don't know what to do for God, it's that we know what to do and we're scared. And we need to remember the Lord is with us, we can be brave. All he needs from us to work powerfully through us is spiritual renewal, that we would smash up the idols that control our hearts and that stop us giving ourselves to him.

Let's pray together. Father God, we praise you for your grace that while we were still sinners, you planned your great rescue plan and sent the Lord Jesus into the world to die for sins, to rise again, to save us.

[ 24 : 38 ] We praise you for your presence with us, that you are with us as we step out in faith to serve you, giving us strength in our weakness. We thank you for your patience in reassuring us time and again that you keep your promises and you will keep them.

And so we pray that you will convict us by your spirit of the idols in our hearts, the things we love too much, that control our emotions more than they should, and that hold us back today from wholehearted service.

And Father, please fill us with a love for Jesus that moves us to tear down those idols and step out in obedience of you. For Jesus' name's sake, Amen.