

Place: Lurgan Baptist 19:11:2002

Reading: Judges 6:1-24

## HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

### GOD'S MAN IN MANASSEH

In May 1855, an eighteen year old boy went to the deacons of a church in Boston. He had been raised in a Unitarian church, in almost total ignorance of the gospel, but when he had moved to Boston to make his fortune, he began to attend a Bible-believing church. Then in April of 1855, his Sunday School teacher had come into the store where he was working and simply and persuasively shared the gospel and urged the young man to trust in the Lord Jesus. He did, and now he was applying to join the church. One fact quickly became obvious. This young man was totally ignorant of Biblical truth. One of the deacons asked him, "*Son, what has Christ done for us all .... for you .... which entitles Him to our love ?*" His response was, "*I don't know. I think Christ has done a great deal for us, but I don't think of anything in particular as I know of.*" Hardly an impressive start.

Years later his Sunday School teacher said of him,

*" I can truly say that I have seen few persons whose minds were spiritually darker than was his when he came into my Sunday School class and I think the committee of the church seldom met an applicant for*

*membership who seemed more unlikely ever to become a Christian of clear and decided views of Gospel truth, still less to fill any space of public or extended usefulness."*

Nothing happened very quickly to change their minds. The deacons decided to out him on a year long instruction course to teach him basic Christian truths. Perhaps they wanted to work on some of his other rough spots as well. Not only was he ignorant of spiritual truths, he had trouble reading and writing, and his spoken grammar was atrocious. The year did not help very much but since it was obvious that he was a sincere soul they accepted him as church member. Over the next few years I am sure that many people looked at that young man convinced that God would never use a person like that. *They wrote him off Dwight L. Moody.*

But God did not. By God's grace and love D.L.Moody was transformed into one of the most effective and significant servants of God in church history, a man whose impact is still with us. You see, one of the great truths of Scripture is that when God looks at us, He does not see us for what we are, but for what we can become as He works in our lives.

God is in the business of taking weak, insignificant people and transforming them by His power. The Lord looks at us as a sculptor looks at a rough stone, He has carefully chosen to make into a masterpiece. As an architect looks out on a muddy building site and see's the towering structure he has planned to build there.

God begins with us where we are. He knows our weaknesses, failures, discouragement's, doubts and inadequacies, but He does not say, " *You can get rid of those and then I can use you.*" No, He comes to us in our weakness with the promise of His presence that will transform our weakness into His strength. Now this truth is vividly portrayed in the life of Gideon, the fifth judge of Israel. Gideon should be a great source of encouragement to us all, for " *he was a man of like passions as we are.*" Fearful, hesitant, discouraged. To understand his life we must set him against the background that is brought before us in ( Ch 6 ) Now if you look at this section you will note that its all about God. In the opening section we have:

### **(1) CONDEMNATION BY GOD**

" *And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.*" ( 6:1 ) The balmy days of Deborah and Barak had been followed by days of gloom and evil. For forty years the land had enjoyed rest. ( 5:31 ) Then the old story was repeated, the story that darkens so many pages of the book of Judges. " *And the children of Israel ....*" ( 6:1 ) So there was:

#### **(a) DEPARTURE:**

Look at ( 6:1 ) Now this is the fourth time that we are on the spiritual merry go round. After forty of the brightest and best years of their history, the people took their eyes off the Lord and focused their lustful gaze on the idols and evils of Baal worship. Departure

! Do you see what that led to ?

#### **(b) DISCIPLINE:**

" *And the Lord delivered ....*" ( 6:1 ) *If we not enjoy the sunlight of God's face we shall feel the sting of God's rod.* Because this nation refused to walk in God's ways, they smarted under His discipline. My .... the secret of going on well, is to keep your eye on Christ. The Lord says, " *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go, I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.*" ( Ps 32:8-9 ) If we are like the horse, headstrong or if we are like the mule, stubborn, if we insist on having our own way, then the bit and bridle will guide us. ( Gal 6:7 ) Departure, Discipline, and now;

#### **(c) DEFEAT:**

( 6:2 ) Sin had opened the door for the enemy. Now who were these Midianites who oppressed Israel ? They were the descendants of Midian a son of Abraham. ( Gen 25:2 ) Look at ( 25:4 ) Do you remember that it was the Midianites who sold Joseph into Egypt ? ( Gen 37:28 ) Now in Gideon's day they are robbing Israel of their God given heritage leaving them

" *greatly impoverished.*" ( 6:6 ) Can you see here that one step led to another ? (a) (b) (c) and now:

#### **(d) DISTRESS:**

Look at ( 6:2 ) Mountain sunlight was exchanged for the shadow of the cave when Israel came under the rule of Midian.

What a contrast this was, to the days when Deborah judged them under a palm tree in the sunny heights of Mount Ephraim. But now in trembling and fear, they hide in the holes of the earth. Do you see the

**(e) DEVASTATION:**

Of the land ! ( 6:6 ) You have a garden, and you work hard all spring and summer to make that garden produce abundantly. But every year, just about the time you're ready to gather in the harvest, your neighbours swoop down and take your produce away from you by force.

This goes on year after year, and there's nothing you can do about it. Now if you can imagine that scenario, then you'll have some idea of the suffering the Jews experienced every harvest when the Midianites made their annual raids. My .... for seven years, the Lord allowed the Midianites and their allies to ravage " *the land of milk and honey,*" leaving the people in the deepest poverty. You see, what they did was this. They crossed the Jordan somewhere around Bethshan pushed across the rich plain of Esdraelon, plundering the threshed wheat, the harvested crops and the domestic animals. They employed " *a scorched earth policy.*"

Now these Midianites had discovered a new

devastating weapon. *Do you know what it was ? The camel !* Now with all our military technology today we might poke fun at the old camel. But these camels gave the Midianites an enormous military advantage. For the camel can travel three or four days with a heavy load on its back and cover about three hundred miles without food and water. With this powerful new military weapon the Midianites developed a clever strategy. Rather than invade and occupy the land they waited for the harvest, then they swept in overwhelmed the land, stripped it bare like a plague of locusts, cleared out and waited for the next harvest. It appeared that the Midianites were invincible. Nothing could stop them.

Thus,

**(f) DESPAIR:**

Gripped the hearts of the people " *and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.*" ( 6:6 ) For seven years God had been waiting to hear that cry. A cry that would bring deliverance and unlock the floodgates of God's mercy. My .... repentance is always the forerunner of revival. God is waiting today for a heartfelt cry from His people. Oh, we boast so much, and we weep so little.

( Rev 3:17 ) Now do you know what the word " *Midian,*" means ? It means " *strife.*" And when Midian came in God's people lost three of their most valuable possessions.

**1. They lost their FREEDOM:**

( 6:2 ) Have you ever had the experience of being in a church when strife comes in ? Of course you have. What happens ? The beauty of Christian fellowship is marred, long standing friendships are broken.

In the place of fellowship, confidence, freeness, openness lips become silent, believers avoid each other, suspicion and whispering grows until the saints of God who " *should love one another with a pure heart fervently,*" are biting and devouring one another. ( Gal 5:15 ) My .... when Midian comes in strife, liberty and love goes out.

### 2. They lost their FRUITFULNESS:

Look at ( 6:4 ) Fruitfulness can be viewed in the NT in terms of character .... being. ( Jn 15:1 ) Or in terms of service .... doing. Character has to do with Production, whereas Service has to do with Reproduction. ( Rom 1:13 ) But when Midian ( strife ) comes in fruitfulness goes out. For how can we expect the blessing of God when strife is rampant among God's people ! ( Ps 133:3 ) 1. 2.

### 3. They lost their FOOD:

( 6:4 ) Hunger was the result ! Sickly saints, poverty all around. Is it not true that when ministry is given in an atmosphere of strife, each believer is wondering, if the ministry is having an effect on the people they don't like ? They're hoping that a certain person is present, thinking that the word is for them. You see, the best of ministry produces negligible results when strife comes in. " *And*

*the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.*" ( 6:1 ) (1)

## **(2) CONFRONTATION WITH GOD**

For in response to their cry God raised up a Prophet ( 6:8 ) Now that would be like a stranded motorist calling a garage for assistance, and the garage sending a baker instead of a mechanic. Here is Israel needing deliverance and God sends a prophet. A proclaimer of His word who rehearses God's grace: ( 6:8-9 ) repeats God's demand: ( 6:10 ) and levels God's accusation. My .... God sends a prophet because Israel needs more than immediate relief they need to understand why they are oppressed. The answer is in ( 6:10 ) " *But ye have not obeyed my voice.*" A Prophet and then a Judge.

Notice what ( 6:11 ) says ! Or " *The Angel of the Lord.*" This was a theophany an appearance of God. The angel of the Lord is the Lord Jesus. Did you notice how Gideon address's the angel ? ( 6:13, 15, 22 ) So we are correct in saying that this is a ( 2 ) Now this Confrontation with God reveals to us several things. It reveals:

### **(a) THE MEANS TO GOD:**

That is, the way to God. ( 6:11 ) Where did Gideon offer this sacrifice ? ( 6:19 ) " *Under the oak.*" Where did God meet with Jacob when He told him to go to Bethel ? He buried the idolatrous instruments of his family and the earrings of his children under the oak tree. ( Gen 35:4 ) Is the oak not a type of the cross ? You see, Gideon realised that God only met with His people in the place

of sacrifice and there is no place of meeting between man and God but at the cross. The only way to God is the way of sacrifice, through the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. (a)

### **(b) THE MAN OF GOD:**

The name Gideon means "*hewer or feller*," an apt name for he was called by God to fell the enemy. This did not automatically mean that Gideon was a man of courage, indeed the first picture we have of Gideon is that of a defeated, discouraged, disheartened man of God. Gideon at this stage of his life, reminds me of the man who came to his psychiatrist with a problem. "*Doctor, you must help me. Everything's going wrong. I feel worthless. My friends tell I have a terrible inferiority complex. Can you help me ?*" The psychiatrist told that he would give him some tests and evaluate them. A week later, the man came back and the psychiatrist said, "*Friend I have some good news and some bad news for you. The good news is that we have proved you do not have a complex. There is no doubt about that. But the bad news is, you are inferior.*"

Now if you had been in Ophrah and met Gideon just before the Angel did you would have found a thoroughly discouraged man. Gideon is so like ourselves. Indeed this context tells us something about:

#### 1. Gideon's HUMANITY:

Look at ( 6:11 ) Now that was against all common practice. Wheat was usually threshed in a wide open space

where the breeze could blow freely and separate the wheat from the chaff, but on this occasion Gideon went into hiding for fear of the enemy. Here was a man filled with fear, yet he was the man God chose. ( 6:27 )

Gideon might have said to you, "*Man I feel lower than a flea's knees. These Midianites are turning us all into slaves, and there is not a thing we can do about it.*" Now if you had been choosing a man to deliver Israel would you have chosen Gideon ? He would probably have been your last choice, but he was God's first. Incidentally, if you want to be a leader, an undershepherd, and elder of God's people, you must learn to thresh out wheat. You must know the Word, study the Word, teach the Word. 1. Did you notice:

#### 2. Gideon's HISTORY:

Look at ( 6:13 ) Notice the words on Gideon's lips. "*Oh, if, why, where, now.*" A little girl was listening to her mother tell some great stories about people like Moses, Joshua, Samson, and Daniel. Finally she turned to her mother and said, "*Mummy you know God was much more exciting back then.*" I think Gideon felt like that. He loved to hear what God had done for Israel in the past, but where were the miracles now ? Where was God now ? You see, Gideon is a man with an exercise, with a concern, with a heart for the people of God. When he contrasted their Present Tragedy with their Past Triumphs he cried. Why ? My .... is that cry ever on your lips ? Why are things in the state they are ? Why the lack of blessing ? Why the apathy and indifference of the people of God ? Why the ecumenical trend even among our own churches ? Why this veering towards

Rome ? Of course the answer is found in  
( 6:10 ) " *But ye have not obeyed my voice.*"

We live in a day when Scripture has been set aside and the common ground is a shared commitment to Charismatic phenomena and experiences. Are you concerned ? Are you exercised enough to take your stand for Christ and the purity of His gospel ? 1. 2.

### 3. Gideon's HUMILITY:

Do you see ( 6:15 ) He has grasped his nothingness, his littleness but then little is much when God is in it. Have you ever felt like Gideon felt when the Lord has asked you to do something for Him ? *Unworthy, unfit, unqualified* ? When Charles Haddon Spurgeon was just 19 years of age he was called to pastor Park Street, Church in London. He was convinced a mistake had been made and that the invitation to pastor the church was intended for another man by the same name. But understanding that his strength came from the Lord he accepted the invitation and became known as " *The Prince of Preachers.*" My .... is God asking you to do something and you feel inadequate ? Oh, remember that God's commands are God's enablings ! (a) (b)

### **(c) THE MANDATE FROM GOD:**

" *And the Lord looked upon him ....* " ( 6:14 ) Is that not the way the Saviour looked on Peter years later ? " *And when Jesus beheld him.*" ( Jn 1:42 ) You see, the Lord saw Gideon not for what he was but for what he would become. He saw not only the actualities in Gideon, he

saw the possibilities in Gideon. And the Lord said,  
" *Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites, have not I sent thee ?*" Note:

### 1. His ACTIVITY:

" *Go ....* " ( 6:14 ) Here is the " *go,*" of God to His people to fulfil all His commands. You see, Gideon was not told to wait until the eighth Midianite invasion. He was to take the offensive and attack Midian. Would to God the church of Jesus Christ embattled as it is, would come off the defensive and go on the offensive for Christ. My .... is it not a shame when the false cults are on the offensive and the church is on the defensive ? Perhaps you're saying, " *But how I can go ? The job is too big for me, and I am too small for the job.*" Note:

### 2. His ADEQUACY:

" *Go in ths thy might ....* " ( 6:14 ) Oh, there is such a transference that its not God's might its Gideons. Its as though God has taken His might and put it inside Gideon, so that Gideon is now full of the might of the Lord. Do you recall what Paul says, " *Our sufficiency is of God.*" ( 2 Cor 3:5 ) Can you see 1. 2.

### 3. His ASSURANCE:

" *Thou shalt save Israel ....* " ( 6:14 ) Victory is secure, there is no doubt it !

### 4. His AUTHORITY:

" *Have not I sent thee.*" ( 6:14 ) Are you doing the job that you're doing for God because God has sent you ?

My .... fellow elder, are you honestly convinced that the Lord has raised you up to be an elder ? You didn't just drop into it ! Nobody pushed you into it ! You didn't take it just because there was some vote where a group of Christians felt you would make a lovely elder ! No ! Paul speaking to the elders at Ephesus says, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers ....*" ( Acts 20:28 ) Who makes elders ? The Holy Spirit ! Do you recognise that ? Are you overseeing because the Lord has given you a shepherd's heart ? Picture number 1: Picture 2: but look at Picture 3:

### (3) CONFIRMATION FROM GOD

Gideon needs a sign. He was always looking for a sign .... some unmistakable proof that God would indeed enable him to carry out what seemed to be an impossible mission. Some proof that this summons from God was authoritative. Now it's interesting to observe as the story develops that Gideon tested the Lord three times in the area of signs. ( 6:17, 37, 39 ) And the Lord tested Gideon three times in the area of faith. ( 6:26, 7:6, 7:18 ) Gideon's first test comes in ( 6:17 ) The sign or proof came in dramatic fashion when the Angel of the Lord extended His staff and touched the food that Gideon had provided. In that breath-taking moment fire sprang out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. This was a Confirmation from

God !

It was:

#### (a) A Confirmation of the **POWER OF GOD:**

" *Then .... there rose up fire out of the rock ....*" ( 6:21 ) The symbol, the evidence of the power of God. ( Lev 9:24 ) Do you recall when Elijah called to God on Mount Carmel ? This man whose soul was consumed with a burning desire to see God glorified ? We read, "*Then the fire of the Lord fell.*" ( 1 Kings 18:38 ) Now don't miss the Timing of this Token ! "*Then .... there rose up fire out of the rock.*" Then .... When ? When Gideon continued in the presence of the Lord. Then .... When ? When Gideon obeyed God. ( Acts 5:32 ) Then .... When ? When Gideon put his all on the altar ! Does that give us a clue as to why there is a lack of God's power in our lives ? Are we continuing in the Presence of God ? Are we obedient to the Word of God ? Are we surrendered to the Claims of God ? ( Rom 12:1 ) (a)

#### (b) A Confirmation of the **PRESENCE OF GOD:**

God was not only confirming that He was *FOR* Gideon, but that He was *WITH* Gideon. Throughout the centuries the watchword of the militant church has been the parting words of the Lord Jesus, "*Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*" ( Matt 28:20 ) When Prince William of Orange undertook the cause of the low countries where the gospel had progressed mightily in spite of the oppression of Spanish rulers he was reminded of the overwhelming power of Spain and the allied nations. "*You can never resist the mighty*

*power of the empire alone," they said.*

They advised him to wait until he could get assistance from some other nation. *"I am not alone was his answer, for I have formed a league with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and before Him Spains power is nothing."* Nor was he put to shame for God worked marvellously on his behalf. God was looking for a man to lead His people against the Midianites. What kind of man did he find ? A fearless man, a superman, a powerful man ? No ! *"But to this man will I look even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word."* ( Is 66:2 ) Such a man was Gideon, such a man was Moody ***for little is much when God is in it.***

My .... is God calling you to a task that you think is beyond you ? Are you looking to the Lord and not to yourself ? *"Is anything too hard for the Lord ?"* God asked Abraham. ( Gen 18:14 ) The answer comes, *"For with God nothing shall be impossible."* ( Lk 1:37 ) Job discovered that God could do everything. ( Job 42:2 ) and Jeremiah admitted that there was nothing too hard for God. ( Jer 32:17 ) and Paul testified, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* ( Phil 4:13 ) Gideon was God's man in Manasseh. Will you be God's man, God's woman in wherever ?