

Place: Lurgan Baptist 26:11:2002

Reading: Judges 6:25-40

HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

6. NO TURNING BACK

If you or I lived in the state of Texas we would discover that the Texans take their history very seriously. Some events in Texas history are hard to remember, but others are not. Do you remember when Davy Crockett was a national T.V. hero ? The Alamo was a small mission church in San Antonio, but in 1836, it became the scene of some very dramatic events. Texas had declared itself independent of Mexico and Mexico responded by sending in an army led by General Santa Ana. At the Alamo a small group of men including Davy Crockett found themselves facing three thousand Mexican soldiers. They faced a critical situation, they could surrender, fight or flee. Colonel W.B.Travis drew a line on the dirt with his sword and challenged those who were willing to stay and fight to certain death, to step across that line. All but one did, and all died for their courageous choice.

A simple choice, but a decisive one. Once they moved across that line, there was no turning back. By their courage they aroused an entire nation, and " *Remember the Alamo,*" became the great battle cry of the Texans as they fought off the Mexicans. The courage of those committed men moved other men to courage. Now

there was an Alamo kind of experience in the life of Gideon, a decisive turning point. It was God who drew the line and He caused Gideon to step across and commit himself to doing God's will. Gideon's choice did not mean death, but it did mean there could be no turning back, and, because of his courage, his nation was roused to action.

You see, the Lord is reminding us here that it is not enough to answer God's call in the privacy of our own lives, no matter how sincere that response might be. Private commitment must produce Public discipleship. We must publicly identify ourselves with the Lord in such a way, that there is no turning back. Now this section of (Ch 6) falls into three easily divided parts.

(1) A DIFFICULT ASSIGNMENT

Gideon was to throw down the altar of Baal and build an altar unto the Lord. Now I want you to notice that as the story develops, Gideon tested the Lord three times in the area of faith. (6:17, 37, 39,) In (6:17) for example, Gideon tests God. But now God tests Gideon. You see, before delivering Israel from the Midianites Gideon was to throw down the altar of Baal in his own backyard. The existence of such an altar, no doubt one of many in Israel just showed how widespread idolatry really was and lights up again the opening words of (6:1) My ... here in Gideon's own backyard was the very reason why God had allowed Midian to overwhelm Israel and pursue a scorched earth policy. Joash Gideon's father had an built an altar to Baal on his own property and with it an Asherah (Ashtaroth)

A wooden pillar representing the consort of Baal. This seemed to be the village shrine and Joash was the man who looked after it. Now this backyard shrine was the object of God's command. God's will was clear. Until Gideon put things right in his own backyard, the Lord would not and could not use him to deliver His people. He was to take a young bull, which belonged to his father and a seven year old bull and use them to tear down the massive Baal altar. Then he was to cut down the wooden Asherah, and using that wood, he was to sacrifice the seven year old bull on a new altar which he was to build for the Lord.

Now there is a significance in the two bulls which God commanded Gideon to use. The young bull belonged to Joash, and, as the local Baal shrine-keeper, he probably intended to sacrifice it to Baal. That very bull was to be used to destroy Baal's altar. The second bull was seven years old, and that was the length of the Midianite oppression. But as Gideon offered that bull in faith to God on God's altar, the period of oppression ended. Seven years of bondage went up in the smoke of obedient service. *Now this was a difficult assignment.* Why ? Well, where is the most difficult place to stand for the Lord ? In the home, amongst our family and friends. Is it not here that we find it so difficult to stand for the Lord ? Is it not easier to stand for the Lord where folk don't know you ? After all Gideon lived with Joash every day and the Midianites seemed a lot less intimidating than Joash and Ophrah. The Lord was asking Gideon to fight the most difficult battle. (1) Now look at the different steps in this assignment.

(a) *THERE WAS DESTRUCTION:*

" *Throw down the altar of Baal* " (6:25) Now that was no easy task. A Baal altar discovered at Megiddo, not far from Ophrah, was twenty five feet square and four and a half feet high, made of stones cemented by mud. No wonder Gideon needed the bulls and the ten men. But God was specific. (6:25) *Baal must go before Midian can go.* Before Gideon could be the deliverer of Israel, he had to be the destroyer of the false god Baal. Is it not the same with us ? Before we can have victory in our lives over the sins or problems or habits that are defeating or discouraging us, the Lord Jesus must be the unquestioned Lord of our lives. There is no victory where there is idolatry or a divided heart.

There can be no compromise if we desire to know the Lord at work in our lives. My what is the Baal in your life ? What is the dearest idol ? It may be any one of a hundred things. But whatever it is, it must be chopped down before God will deal with the Midian in your life. (a)

(b) *THERE WAS CONSTRUCTION:*

Look at (6:26) Gideon is not only to make good his own name but he is to exalt Jehovah in his own home. For how can he be the deliverer of Israel while his own home is still in bondage ? Is he to lift up an altar of Jehovah for all the nation while those who are nearest and dearest to him continue to bow to Baal ? Do you see that the circle of Divine influence expands from the

centre ?

First, himself right (6:17-24) and now the home right. There are many who are jealous for God's altar to be set up for all the land, but what about setting it up in our homes ? My is this not where we fail most ? The family altar, where prayer is offered, and the Word is read needs to be established again ! (a) (b)

(c) *THERE WAS OBSTRUCTION:*

I mean the reaction of the people was what Gideon expected. My nothing had so shaken Ophrah in all the village's history. What a furore as the town councilmen sipped their warm goat's milk in the town gate that morning. Lord Baal's altar wrecked, Lady Asherah's pole hacked to pieces and used for firewood they'd never known such sacrilege. Wait'll they catch the rascal who did it. As Alexander Whyte comments, "*The worshippers of Baal never neglected their morning devotions. Early will I seek thee they could say to their god with truth and a good conscience.*" But when they got to the altar that morning to worship, they were infuriated. (6:30) My does that not give you a graphic picture of how low things had fallen ? You see, once you take a stand for God, you'll face all sorts of opposition. Can you see the stages ? (a) (b) (c) and now

(d) *INSTRUCTION:*

1. Joash was Instructed Himself:

I wonder when he realised what Gideon had done, was he shamed and challenged ? Did he think, "*I think should have done the same years earlier ?*" Did he secretly long for a return to the "*old paths ?*" Whatever, when his son stood up for the old time religion, Joash was immediately by his side. Indeed he gave him a new name, "*Jerubbaal,*" it means "*Let Baal contend.*" It came to mean "*Baal-fighter, or Baal-conqueror.*" You see, Gideon's consecration to God had an effect on the lives of others. I wonder is that why we have so little influence for Christ on our own family ? Is it because that we ourselves are not willing to go to the length of full surrender to the Lord ? 1.

2. Joash instructed the People:

Look at (6:31) He said, "*Listen, if Baal really is God, he does not need you to defend him. If he cannot defend himself he is not worthy of worship. If he is really God, Gideon will be struck dead.*" My every time men in that village looked on Gideon, they had visible proof of the weakness of Baal and the power of God. Because God had made him strong Gideon won a great victory in his own backyard, and that victory established him in the eyes of the people as God's appointed deliverer.

A similar event happened in the life of John Knox the great Scottish Reformer. In 1548, he was a prisoner on a French slave ship, chained to a rowing bench and lashed constantly by the guards. He was there because of his preaching of the Word of God and his opposition to Roman Catholicism. One day the lieutenant brought aboard a wooden image of the virgin Mary and

demanded that the slaves kiss it. Knox refused and they pushed it violently against his face.

He grabbed it and threw it overboard, shouting, " *Let our lady now save herself, she is light enough let her learn to swim.*" When no divine judgement fell on Knox, two things happened. Never again were believers required to engage in Roman Catholic exercises against their wishes, and men began to look to Knox as their leader. Eventually, the Scottish Reformation was the result. Tell me, is your consecration to the Lord affecting others ? Tearing down Baal's altar was Gideon's first assignment, but it was only the first, for look at the next stage in Gideon's spiritual preparation.

(2) A DIVINE ENABLEMENT

You see, when God calls us to do a specific job for Him He equips us. Look at (6:34) You see, Midian had raised his head for the eighth time, but this time God is entering the conflict. Do you recall what Midian means ? It means " *strife.*" Because of this " *strife,*" Israel had lost their Freedom, their Fruitfulness, and their Food. (6:2-4) That's what happens when " *strife,*" comes into a church fellowship. But now God is raising and equipping Gideon to deal with this strife. For to bring unity among the people of God you need judges, or elders who are filled and controlled by the Spirit of God. " *But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.*"
Notice:

(a) **THE MEANING OF THIS:**

The verse reads literally, " *The Spirit of the Lord clothed Himself with Gideon.*" (6:34) The word is used elsewhere to describe a man putting on his clothes (Gen 28:20) or a warrior putting on a suit of armour. (Is 59:17) What a delightful picture. The Holy Spirit wore Gideon the way a man puts on a suit of clothes. Its a vivid way of saying that the Holy Spirit took possession of Gideon, controlling and empowering him for the task He wanted him to do. My the same Holy Spirit who clothed Himself with Gideon has come to indwell you as a child of God. You are His temple, His dwelling place, and His ministry in your life is even richer than His ministry in Gideon's life. (1 Cor 6:19) One of the professors at Dallas Theological Seminary Howard Hendricks used to say to his *students*, " *Men every morning I pray, Lord here I am. I want to be your suit of clothes today. I want You to take me and use me. Lord just walk around in me today.*" Is that your daily prayer ? (a)

(b) **THE MEANS TO THIS:**

Why did the Spirit of the Lord clothe Himself with Gideon ? Because he was obedient. (6:27) And when we are obedient God pours His power into our lives. (Eph 5:18 Col 3:16) " *The Spirit of the Lord clothed Himself with Gideon.*" There's one thing about a suit of clothes. It does not fight its wearer. It submits to the human body and moves with it. But we as believers as not like passive garments. We " *grieve,*" the Holy Spirit

by our Sinfulness, we " *quench*," the Holy Spirit by our Selfishness, thus we hinder His ministry in our lives. And we need to be filled afresh. Did you notice:

(c) ***THE MARKS OF THIS:***

The evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in Gideon's life.

Look at (6:34) Gideon's answer to the gathering of the hosts of the enemy, was to blow a trumpet, that is he openly declared war against Midian and summoned Israel to action. You see, a man who knows the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life:

1. DISPLAYS LEADERSHIP:

He has got influence with others. Look where they came from. First came his own family, the Abiezrites. (6:11) Obedience at home has produced response at home. Then his tribe came Manasseh and then others. A short time ago they were ready to kill him, but now they recognise him as their God-given leader. Influenced by the Spirit of God Gideon influences others. 1.

2. DESIRES FELLOWSHIP:

" *And he sent messengers* " (6:35) Gideon knew and the enemy knew that the strength of Israel was in gathering together. From when God's people are in touch with God, and in true fellowship with one another they are " *terrible as an army with banners.*"

(S.S. 6:10) Do you know the old saying ? United we stand, divided we fall ! That's why Satan does his utmost to sow discord among the brethren. (1) (2)

(3) **A DEFINITE REQUIREMENT**

Gideon must have been encouraged by the response of God's people, 32,000 responded. (7:3) But then Gideon was so like us. He moved between fear and faith. For as he gazed on the teeming multitudes below him he again shrank from the idea of leading Israel into battle. Do you know what Gideon needed ? Reassurance, that God wanted him to undertake this frightening task. The test involved two steps.

1. The fleece had to be wet, the ground had to be dry.

2. The fleece had to be dry, the ground had to be wet.

You see, Gideon was seeking a Definite Requirement, that he had to go. Now it's this passage that has caught the imagination of many believers and often we hear people speak about " *putting out the fleece.*" Is that really what we ought to do ? Is this God's way of giving us guidance ? (Gen 15:8 24:14 Is 7:1 2 Kings 20:10)

When John Wesley was 32 years old he was a bachelor missionary in the colony of Georgia. While he was serving a church in Savannah, he met a young woman named Sophia Christina Hopkey. She was pretty and intelligent and Wesley fell over heels in love with her. But Wesley belonged to a group called the Holy Club and one of their ideals was that members should remain single. So Wesley was caught in a dilemma. Was it the

will the will of God for him to marry Sophie or not ?

To find out he and a friend named Charles Delamotte decided to draw lots. One three pieces of paper they wrote, " *Marry,*" " *Think not of it this year,*" and " *Think of it no more.*" Then they put the pieces in a container. Delamotte closed his eyes and drew out the third one, " *Think of it no more.*"

Wesley was brokenhearted, but he took the result to be the will of God. He ended the courtship and not after sailed back to England. In his journal, he wrote over the record of his romance, " *Snatched as a brand out of the fire.*" Shortly after his return to England, Wesley came to saving faith in Christ, and he began his evangelistic ministry which God used so greatly. During his travels he fell in love with another woman, a widow and a Bible class teacher called Grace Murray. This time he tried a different approach to finding the will of God about marriage. He listed seven factors he desired in a wife her roles as " *Housekeeper, Nurse, Companion, Friend, and a Fellow Labourer in the Gospel of Christ Her Gifts and the Fruits of her Labours.*" He set out the pros and cons and then he stated his conclusion:

" *Therefore all my seven arguments against marriage are totally set aside. Nay, some of them seem to prove that I ought to marry and that G.M. is the person.*"

Unfortunately, John's brother Charles did not agree. He believed that marriage would hamper John's evangelistic work. When he heard the news, he

galloped over to Grace's home, jumped off his horse, ran, and said to her, " *Grace Murray you have broken my heart.*" Then he fainted at her feet. That shook Grace so badly that she hastily married another man. Strike two for Wesley !

Finally, eighteen months later at the age of forty seven John did marry a wealthy widow named Mary Vazeille. I do not know how Wesley chose her or what Charles had to say, but John made a mistake. He had a very unhappy marriage, and twenty years she left him. When she did, Wesley wrote in his journal, " *I have not left her, I would not send her away, I will not recall her.*"

Now was John Wesley right the first time when he used lots ? How about the second time when he used common sense ? How do we know God's will for our lives ? Do we look for some kind of supernatural sign ? Do we put God to certain tests ? You see, there are problems with setting fleeces ! Think with me about:

(a) *THE PROBLEMS WE NEED TO LEARN FROM:*

As we look at Gideon's actions there are 4 things that stand out !

1. Gideon already knew God's Will:

Did you notice that little phrase in (6:36-37) ? Twice over it appears. " *As Thou hast said.*" Gideon knew very well what God had said. He knew clearly what God wanted him to do. Do you recall the Commission

? God repeated it three times so that Gideon would not be unsure. (6:12, 14, 16) Then there was the Miracle. (6:21) Confirming that the commission was from God.

Finally, the Holy Spirit clothed Himself with Gideon. My when we consider all these things we come to the conclusion that Gideon knew exactly what God's will was.

2. Gideon's Faith was Temporarily Eclipsed:

He was in effect saying, " *Lord if you do this, then I will know.*" But God had already promised Gideon that he would deliver Israel by his hands. So by using the fleece Gideon was saying, " *I know what You have promised but I am not sure that I really believe You.*" When we come to the question of God's will we have clear biblical promises that the Lord will never fail to direct and guide us as we follow Him. " *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go, I will guide thee with mine eye.*" " *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.*" " *The Lord shall guide thee continually.*" (Ps 32:8 37:23 Is 58:11) Is setting out the fleece not doubting the promises of God ?

3. Gideon was Telling God what to do:

He did not come to the Lord and say, " *Lord I am still afraid. I have lots of doubts. Please reveal Yourself again to me.*" That kind of request is always appropriate. No, he came and said, " *Lord here is my programme, and I want it looked after by tomorrow morning. Wet the fleece and keep the ground dry.*" The

sovereign God must do what Gideon said or else ! Now I don't want to be too hard on Gideon, for he had grown up in a thoroughly pagan environment with an idolatrous father. I can understand Gideon's confusion about dictating to God, but his confusion should not become my example. What was excusable in his life is not excusable in mine.

4. Gideon's Action did not Solve the Problem:

Sure enough the next morning when he got up, the fleece was wet and the ground was dry. But then he began to think, " *How do I really know this was of God ?*" Surely the wool would retain moisture and the rock would dry up quickly. Maybe it was just a coincidence." So what does he do ? He goes into the presence of God again. Will you notice that he was aware that he was treading on very thin ice. (6:39) " *Let not thine anger me.*" " *Lord, please don't be angry, but we are going to have run through all this again. This time we will reverse it. Let us wet the ground and keep the wool dry.*" Suppose I ask the Lord to do something for me by 10.00 pm. The phone rings at

10.05 pm. Now is that God or Satan ? Or if it rings at 9.59 pm, was that Satan trying to trick me ? On this kind of basis, how can I ever be sure ?

My we need to be careful about " *seeking signs,*" " *receiving special revelations,*" or even using the phrase, " *God told me to do this.*" Signs are often described in Scripture as the product of unbelief. (Matt 11:38-39 1 Cor 1:22-23) Gideon was filled with

unbelief yet how gracious was God. (6:40) The fact that God stooped to Gideon's weakness only proves that He is a gracious God who understands how we are made. (Ps 103:14) (a) The problems we need to learn from. A Christian lady in the U.S.A wanted to go to Israel. One night she read all about the trip, the itinerary, the guides, the places to be visited. She also read that she would be flying on board a 747 jumbo plane. But her question was this, was it God's will for her to go ?

She committed herself to the Lord that night, went to bed, and when she woke the next morning, she looked at her alarm clock. Do you know what she saw ? 747, and she took that as her guidance. My be careful ! (a) But then there are:

(b) THE PRINCIPLES WE NEED TO LIVE BY:

Let me suggest four clear biblical principles about God's guidance in our lives.

1. An Acquaintance with the Son of God:

Imagine you're driving in a strange city. Which would you rather have with you a road map and a list of addresses, or someone who knows the city intimately, knows where you want to go and how to get there. The answer is obvious. Given a choice we will choose a guide over guidance any time. Is this not the way God works in our lives ? Time and again in the Scriptures we discover we have a Guide, the Lord Jesus who personally leads and directs me. Guidance comes from

the Guide, and if we are out of fellowship with the Lord we can be walking encyclopaedias about the will of God, but we will not His will personally. If I would know His guidance I must enjoy His fellowship. An old Model T Ford was pulled off to the side of the road with its bonnet up, and a young man was trying desperately to get it running. He had been working at it for some time without any success when a beautiful chauffeur-driven limousine stopped behind him and a well-dressed man got out. He watched the fellow for awhile and finally suggested that he make a minor adjustment in one part.

The young man was sceptical, but nothing else had worked, so he did what he was told. " Now," said the man " *your car will run. Crank it up.*" So the young man cranked it once, and sure enough, the engine started running as if it were brand new. The young fellow was amazed this kind of man knew so much about cars, so he asked him, " *How did you know exactly what to do ?*" " *Well,*" the other man said, " *I'm Henry Ford. I made the car, so I know all about how it works.*" My the Lord, our Guide made us, loves us, knows us, and as we enjoy His company, we get to know His mind. (a)

(b) An Obedience to the Word of God:

Gideon did not know God's will by putting out the fleece but by obeying the revealed Word of God. My the Word of God is the Will of God. And if we would get to know God's will we must get to know God's Word. Unequal Yoke !

(c) An Experience of the Peace of God:

For does the Holy Spirit not give a deep inner peace and contentment about the Father's will for my life ?
(Col 3:15)

(d) A Reliance upon the Saints of God:

Thank God, for the scriptural gifts, and discernment that the Lord has given other believers. Do you draw on these resources ? Realising that "*in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.*" (Prov 11:14) My we can know God's will. Gideon's problem was not that he did not know God's will, but that he hesitated in doing it. Gideon at last was ready to obey what about you ?