

When Success Goes to Your Head

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 0 0] Now by way of sort of introduction, I want to just tell the tale of a well-known Scottish company that have come up over the last 10 years. You will have all heard of, well some of you will, have heard of Brew Dog. Now I don't know if beer is your thing to drink, but over the last 10 years, the UK has seen a boom, if you want to call it, in the beer industry, there's been lots of these trendy, new craft beers come up and at the forefront of this revolution is Brew Dog, Scotland's very own Brew Dog, but since 2007 they've now become a global company, they sell millions of tins of beer a week.

They started in 2007 in Frisbee, just two guys, James Watt, Martin Dickett, and they started via, they did a crowdfunding campaign, they managed to raise over £2 million, they ended up moving to a bigger site in Ellen and slowly but surely after starting so small, so little, just two guys starting up on their own sort of brewery, they become this global company, they've got offices all over the world in Australia, you might say humble beginnings, but over the last 18 months, if you've kept an eye on the news, they've been coming under a bit of heat.

In June of this year, the company came under investigation for false advertising, if you recall the story, they advertised that they were going to hide 15 cans around the world that were made of solid gold, only to find out that they were actually gold-plated and so they're getting done for false advertising.

In the same month in June, there was an open letter signed by anonymous employees that published, it was published in the paper, criticizing the firm's business and they openly stated that the business wasn't being run right, that one of the guys, I think it was James Watt, he turned in a bit of a dictator, there's a culture of fear, it was built on this cult of personality and there was lots of people who worked for that, they were complicit in this sort of manipulative way of doing things.

And this James Watt, he was singled out as the one who was the orchestrator of the bullying and the intimidation and as the top dog, pun intended, he's forgotten his humble beginnings and what he's done is let success go to his own head.

[2 : 3 6] Now, the example I've used there, I could have picked a whole number of examples where this has been the case over years where people have had success and they let the success go to their head and think they've become something.

We understand when that happens, we understand why it happens because we want to be recognized for the achievement that we've done and we think that we've deserved it by the skill and we think that we, as the leader, we deserve that kind of respect.

This is what we've seen in Gideon's life, it's what we saw a little bit of last week and all the way through we've drawn this sort of idea that Gideon had the humble beginnings of a nobody but on being tempted, enticed by his own desires, we saw last week he responded with fear, with pride and with bitterness how he used to think he was a nobody but now he thinks he's a somebody.

He used to think he was a nobody but now he thinks he's a somebody. This is the root issue in his heart and we saw that how that was manifested last week with the way he treated his own people and how he used that to sort of elevate his position even further.

But what we see this week is he takes it even a step further than what we could imagine. He takes it even a step further than what we could imagine. And so we're going to look at this sort of last stage in his life this week.

[4 : 13] Now just, I've done this every week, it's just to remind you, just in case you haven't been here as we've been looking at this in Judges just how Judges, just a quick reminder how Judges is structured, it's these repeated cycles of God's people.

Firstly, they go against the Lord and then they, so the Lord sends a foreign power to conquer them. Third step, they cry out to the Lord.

Fourth step, the Lord sends a deliverer, this is Gideon that we look at, he sends a deliverer to deliver them from this foreign power. And then the fifth step which we normally see is that the land has rest from the foreign power.

They have peace once the foreign power is conquered by the deliverer. So that's kind of the structure of it and where towards the very end of that cycle. Just to remind you, if you've not been here, that's kind of where we're at looking at Gideon.

So we're going to look at three sort of headings, we're going to look at success is dangerous, we're going to look at be discerned of who you follow and then at the end we're just going to spend a little bit of time as we've come to the end of this.

[5 : 16] Just thinking about maybe Gideon's legacy, his legacy in the bad legacy that he leaves and the good legacy that he leaves as well. So firstly, we're going to think about success being dangerous.

Success is a dangerous place for Gideon, it turns out, and actually not just for him but for the people of Israel as well. They look at what's been achieved and they think themselves that Gideon, he's a force to be reckoned with, right?

This aggressive, brutal figure what Gideon's become, he's the kind of man they want, he's the kind of leader that they're after. Just look with how they respond to him again in verse 22.

Then the men of Israel are said to Gideon, rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Gideon.

Rule over us, they say, and notice they don't just want Gideon, they don't just want Gideon to be king. Actually, they say, your son and your grandson also, they're asking for a dynasty here.

[6 : 28] They want a dynasty to be established, they want Gideon's family line to remain in power. And when somebody is asking for a dynasty, we know what that means, right? It means that what they're really saying to Gideon is, Gideon, we want you to lead us, we want you to be our king.

That's what they're saying when they say that to Gideon. And the reason they want Gideon, you look back, the reason they want Gideon, rule over us for the reason why, for you have saved us.

You, Gideon, have saved us. The Lord is not in the picture here, He's not in their minds, for you, Gideon, have saved us.

Like we reminded of last week, the Lord was right, wasn't He? In chapter 7 verse 2, remember, lest Israel should boast, that's why He chose 300 men in the first place. But here, the glory due to the Lord, it's given to Gideon.

You have saved us. And at first glance, when we read through that passage, when we read through what happens next, it seems like Gideon responds back to them in a sort of godly way.

[7 : 38] At verse 23, I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you, the Lord will rule over you. When we read that, we think, well, Gideon, he knows what's good, he knows the right way to respond.

He knows that the Lord is in charge, he doesn't want the king, he doesn't want a dynasty, he knows the right way to respond. But what we see is that his actions betray what comes out of his mouth, his actions betray him.

Everything that follows, that Gideon does, actually indicate that what he really wants is, he doesn't want to say he's the king, but he wants to be treated as one.

He thinks he deserves it, because the success has gone to his head. Just look what he does, verse 24, he follows it by saying, I don't want you to rule over me, but almost like an instead, instead do this, verse 24, let me make a request of you.

Every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil, for they had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites, and they answered, we will willingly give them. And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil, and the weight of the golden earrings that he requested were 1700 shekels of gold, beside the crescent ornaments, and the pendants, and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the colors that were around the necks of their camels.

[9 : 01] When he asks for this amount of gold, what he receives, he's not asking for a favour, he's not asking him to do him a favour, or instead of making me king, can you just give me all this gold.

This is an offering for the victor, 1700 shekels. That's a ridiculous amount of gold, in today's, if we're weighing it out today, that would be £42, in weight, and in today's money, that's around the region of £800,000 worth of gold.

This is a treasure chest fit for a king, make no mistake about that, and that's not all. The crescent ornaments, the pendants, purple garments, they're all symbols of royalty.

These are the things he wants to keep from the spoil, he wants to keep all the stuff that implies that he's actually, he wants to be a king. There's also other suggestions that come throughout the passage, we read in verse 30.

There's this suggestion, the amount of sons, 70 sons, if we look in this Canaanite mythology, it's that the Canaanite god El and his goddess Asherah have 70 sons.

[10 : 10] And to cap it all off, and this one takes the biscuit, he calls one of his sons a bimilek. In Hebrew literally means my father is king.

His actions betray him, he really, he wants to be treated as king. Now we're going to look at what he does with the gold in sort of the next point, but I just wanted to pause here for a moment and look at what's happened to Gideon.

I keep mentioning that phrase, he's gone from a nobody to thinking he's a somebody, and his actions, he's ensured that the people think that about him as well.

The high point of his life was 715 where he fell to his knees and worshipped the Lord. Now this is where he's at, he's asking them to offer something to him.

A few weeks ago we looked at how the Lord tested Gideon, and in some ways you might say that the biggest test, it wasn't where do you go when you feel like a nobody, but where do you go after you've had success?

[11 : 24] That is a much bigger test. What happens when the Lord works through his people and brings success, brings victory? Well it's gone to Gideon and says he thinks he's made it.

You just think back to the illustration of Broodog, the reason for all the issues, they've forgotten where they came from, that they actually came from a crowdfunded sort of pursuit where he needed to raise the money to get them off the ground, they needed people.

Broodog forgot all that, success went to their head. Perhaps that's the time when we're actually in real spiritual danger, when we've had great success, and maybe for some of us we know to turn to the Lord when it's difficult, when we're needy, when the need's obvious, or maybe when things are going great in our life or in ministry, you think when you're successful in a job application or you've just bought a new car, a job promotion, or even you're away on holiday, and needs are not that obvious.

And it's especially true when the Lord works through us to do great things, when we're serving God's people or you're witness to a friend, you've had a great time of prayer, you think, you know, oh I've made it, I've made it.

Our guard is down and perhaps we feel a little bit puffed up, we're off our guard. I just want to be honest with you that church leaders we're not immune from this either.

[13 : 07] At the end of a Sunday perhaps, you know, church has gone well, there's been a few encouragements. This is the time when spiritually, leaders are a bit of a target, because our guards down you might start to get puffed up, think, oh look what the Lord did through me today.

Just as an aside, it is a reason to just think, we must pray for our ministers and elders and each other actually, not just in apparent need, because maybe actually, like I've said, the real danger happens when we don't actually realise it.

It looks like things are going well, but it's the success that is causing the sin to manifest. So yes, success goes to his head, and success can go to our head, we need to be watchful of when that happens.

But what Gideon does next, I think you could say it's not really in the playbook of a deliverer, we're just going to look at our second point, be discerning of who you follow.

Gideon's success, it takes him here to a whole new level of what you expect from him. Last week, it was quite a heavy week last week, and we looked at the horrific acts you might say that Gideon did, we saw the way that he tortured his own people.

[14 : 47] And on the surface of things, those things, they can seem to us the things that are more shocking, the torture, the revenge. It turns the narrative from a 12-rate into maybe an 18 when we read that stuff.

What happens next? Initially, it doesn't look as bad as those things, but I don't want us to be deceived by that because actually what he does is worse what Gideon does with the gold.

Just look, verse 27, and Gideon made an ephod of it, that's the gold, he makes an ephod with the gold, and he put it in his city in Offra. Now, an ephod, if you're looking at the Bible, there's a few references, one from the Bible that I want us to think about, and one from other ancient literature that comes around, so it could be one of two options.

We're not actually told in this passage. An ephod is a garment worn by Levitical priests when they were serving in the sacrificial system. Notice Gideon, I think there's a couple of reasons for saying that it's probably not that.

One there's only one made, and it's made out of 42 pounds of gold, so it's pretty heavy. But also, in the ancient literature from around the time, an ephod was sometimes a garment that was draped over as clothing over a god.

[16 : 13] And in those cultures, if you had part of the regalia, then that sort of represented the whole thing. In other words, the ephod represented the god of which it would cover.

Now, in our account, like I say, we're not told other details about this gold, so we have those two options. Either Gideon has moved sort of the priestly service away from where it should be to what he's destined as the new capital city, Offra, which in itself that would have been wrong, or I think more likely and perhaps worse, that this is Gideon reconstructing worship of a false god.

Of a Baal. Baal just means Lord, so he's actually reconstructing. He's going back. You remember that was the problem with which we all started with back in chapter 6, that Josh's dad was doing Baal worship in his back garden.

And I think even more so the way that this comes through, this sort of comes into our thinking is, think for the purposeful link of when the Lord clothed Gideon. Do you remember chapter 6 verse 34, it says, Gideon was clothed with the spirit of the Lord.

Now Gideon creates his own image, clothed in something of his own making with Offra the capital. It ties in with the kingly sort of image that's going on.

[17 : 35] When the Lord was king, worship was done right in the right place. Now Gideon acts like king and worship is done wrong and in the wrong place. Not only is he acting as king, but a bad one.

It's all gone wrong, hasn't it? It's all gone wrong. Idolatry is now state sponsored. Gideon's doing what is right in his own eyes.

This is not the day of the Lord, but the day of Gideon. And of course it evokes memories of when the Lord was given at the bottom of Mount Sinai, rings of gold were given to Aaron to make a golden calf.

Now we have rings of gold given towards making an ephod. Moses hated it and went ballistic. Gideon has proposed and done it.

Verse 27, All Israel hored after it there and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.

[18 : 37] The neuraties in a very different light, it is a snare. It traps them. I just want to go back to the illustration of thinking about Brudo.

When problems start to surface in a company or in an institution, there's often sort of three responses. Those who are complicit in the issue, in the manipulation, and in doing that they sort of encourage it.

They don't think that there's a problem. There's those who see the problem but want to keep their head down because they don't want to put their head above the parapet. And there's those who do put their head above the parapet and they're going to sort of be a target.

But with Israel, it just seems like they're not really that discerning. They're enraptured with Gideon.

They're enraptured with him. And they follow his lead. What he does is worse because he's not leading them towards the Lord but away from Him.

[19 : 49] He's not leading them towards the Lord but away from Him. I just wonder how do we evaluate the people we follow in our own lives?

How do we evaluate the people that we follow? Can we sometimes unknowingly allow ourselves to be led by the wrong type of people?

Because you think Twitter, Instagram, that's what it's all about, isn't it? Following people. I don't want to be heavy handed about internet use and things like that. We know it's used for brilliant, lots of things, brilliant things.

But the people that we follow on those platforms, we can't help be influenced by their views, by what they're trying to sell. And it is worth evaluating that, the influence they have in our daily lives.

Are they leading you towards God or away from Him? But this is, it's not just for the world out there, is it?

[20 : 51] Because it's also relevant for the church leaders that we follow as well. Just like I said with these platforms, we live in an amazing time where you can listen to Bible teaching from all over the world.

I regularly sort of listen to Alistair Begg and read different blogs there. And it's been a immense blessing to me and maybe we do that. But we do have to be careful, don't we?

We do have to have a level of discernment. And I think there is some things that maybe a lamb bell should ring.

I just think, this is not a universal rule, but I always, a lamb bell's ring when a ministry always calls themselves after the person. Now there's exceptions to that, but I think what's going on there?

Or where a Bible is called after a person. It's almost to be, doesn't mean that it's not useful and helpful, but to be wary of things that are drawing things towards a personality rather than towards the living God.

[21 : 59] Who are they promoting? It doesn't end in a good place for Gideon. It doesn't end in a good place for Gideon.

He started as a nobody. He's become a somebody and he's led people away from the Lord. If you look at the track of his life, the first thing that he, after being called by the Lord, the first thing the Lord called him to do was to lead his people away from idolatry.

And he did that. And then he was used by the Lord to gain a great victory over oppression. And it seems like everything's just been turned on its head again.

It doesn't end in a good place for Gideon. But I want to spend a few minutes just as we wrap up this series just looking at perhaps his legacy.

His immediate legacy is about what happens after he dies and then his legacy to us. Whenever you think about things like this, there is a few things that you could touch upon thinking about that, definitely more than we've got time for.

[23 : 04] So I just want to think of two, one bad and one good. And so the bad legacy is the consequences of his sin. The consequences of his sin.

And it's actually quite sort of striking that despite what he's done in leading Israel back to Baal, that they actually, the Lord sort of honors the promise, doesn't he, that they have peace in Israel for 40 years, and he has answered the cries that Israel had to him in chapter 6, verse 28.

So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel and they raised their heads no more and the land had rest for 40 years in the days of Gideon. Despite his actions, Gideon somehow prevents this complete spiritual demise.

But following his death, it's a different story. Verse 33, as soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and horded after the Baals and made Baal berith their God.

And the people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side. And they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerobal, that is Gideon, in return for all the good that he'd done to Israel.

[24 : 19] It's complete spiritual decline. And notice now, it's not just Baal but Baal berith, as I mentioned, Baal means Lord or Master and berith means Covenant. This is Baal of the Covenant, not the Lord.

It is a step worse. A step worse than when he was alive, worse than their previous harlotry. They're in a worse position. It's like a dog returning to its own vomit.

They're in a worse place. And how have they ended up here? Why did the shackles come off after he dies? Now, I'm going to come to these verses in a little bit, and we know from Hebrews 11 that Gideon is in a chapter of the Bible, sort of the Hall of Fame or the Hall of Faith.

And he's mentioned among the likes of Abraham and Moses. So it's right to assume that Gideon repented in his life and had faith in the Lord's promises for his own eternal future.

We can be confident of that because of what the New Testament says about him, that he's a forgiven sinner. Yeah, if you think, if you throw a pebble into a pond and it falls to the bottom, you can reach into the pond and retrieve it, but you can't stop the ripples.

[25 : 35] If you throw a pebble into a pond, it falls to the bottom, you can reach into the pond and retrieve it, but you can't stop the ripples. You can be forgiven of your sin, but you can't stop the consequences.

He's laid out the red carpet for what follows after his death. And I mean, just look at the example he set for his 70 sons. It's not really a surprise of what a bimilek turns out to be.

The guy called my father his king, makes himself fit king and goes on a violent rampage, like father, like son. And it's a good point for us to remember that we're forgiven of our sins, but the consequences, the ripples, they don't go away.

Israel goes from bad to worse. And you remember before I was talking about the structure of judges and step five was rest in the land. Well, this rest in the land this 40 years, it's the last time it happens.

There's no more rest in the land for Israel. And I just hope in some ways, as I've met this sort of bad legacy, that comes after his death, I just hope that it serves as a deterrent in some ways.

[26 : 50] From sin. We have an amazing, gracious, compassionate Savior who forgives us, who wipes us late clean. Of course, that's the case.

But if we take anger for an example, you think of when you give in to anger, you lose your rag, you say that thing that you regret. Once you've said it, you can't sort of un-say it.

You can't take it back. Of course you're forgiven. But the relationship you have with that person, you can't, it still hurts. You can't take it back.

It doesn't mean you can't erase the hurt with the person stood in front of you. It takes time. The ripples carry on. You can take, you can be forgiven.

That pebble can be taken out. But the ripples continue. So that's the bad side of the legacy. But what about the good? Well, I hinted at a moment ago that Gideon is part of God's people.

[27 : 49] And the reason we know that is because of the passage I mentioned, Hebrews 11. And it might come as a bit of a surprise after the way it finishes for him. Hebrews 11, the bit that I'm talking about, it says, And what more shall I say if a time will fail to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms and forced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, but foreign armies to flight.

It's through faith. The Lord uses people to do great things. And what we mustn't do is think that it's what Gideon achieved as making part of God's people.

We can't say that about other people in the Bible. Remember, Judas did miracles and presumably people came to faith from his ministry, but it didn't end well for him. No, it's not about what Gideon did, but that whole chapter in Hebrews, it's about faith.

It's about his faith. Through faith kingdoms were conquered. Gideon was a man of faith in the living God, in the Lord's victory. Ephesians 2, for by grace, you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works that no one may boast. His legacy to the church, to the body of Christ, is the demonstration of his faith that comes earlier in his life, his weak faith in the Lord's promise of victory.

[29 : 33] That is the promise to us that all our good works, God does prepare for us beforehand that we're going to walk in them, but the undeserved kindness of God is to save you through a gift, a free gift, the gift of faith.

That gift of faith, it consists of the knowledge of what the promise is, the promise of eternal life granted through God giving his son, but faith is trusting in that promise for yourself.

It's attributing that work on the cross as totally sufficient to grant you entry into the Kingdom of God so that when we stand before him, we'll know we're accepted.

That any shame, the guilt, we've mentioned the things before, the fear, the pride, the bitterness, even perhaps leading people away from God is not too big a sin for you to be forgiven of.

Do you remember what Jesus says to... I can't remember where it is just now, but he says, whoever leaves one of those children away, it'd be better that a millstone was going to be around his neck.

[30 : 54] Well, Jesus takes Gideon's millstone.

Any shame or things that we've done in the past, I've forgotten, cast to the bottom of the sea. That is the promise of the Gospel, and it is received by faith.

We trust that it is sufficient for us. And so as we come in for landing, we looked at what success does to Gideon. It puffs him up and nobody to us, somebody.

He acts like a king. It's gone to his head. He leads his people back to idolatry, back to a worse place than where they started.

I just want to finish with two further encouragements. It's a reminder, isn't it, to all of us, that as we look at Gideon, he's a flawed sinner. As I've said, he has faith, and God uses him.

[31 : 57] And that's what we are. We're flawed sinners, but we have faith in a big God. Despite our backgrounds, by anything we've done or will do, there is no sin too big for the Lord to forgive.

And in some ways, if we don't feel like we deserve a place in the Lord's kingdom, that's right. The truth is that none of us do.

That's what grace is. Sinners in need of mercy and grace. God has that in an abundance for each of us.

But the final encouragement, actually, comes from, goes back to the book of Hebrews. One of the big overarching themes in the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is better. Jesus is better.

Chapters 1 and 2, we've got, He's better than the angels. Chapter 3, He's better than Moses. Chapters 4 through 10, He's better than the high priest. He's better than the sacrificial system. He's a better sacrifice.

[33 : 01] He's the guarantor of a new covenant. Then we get to this chapter, the Hall of Faith. The first words that come after in chapter 12, therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, those witnesses are the guys, those in the Hall of Faith.

Since we're surrounded by them, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with the endurance, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, enjoyed the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

After all these guys, it points to Jesus. The point, Jesus, He's not just better than the angels, Moses, all the sacrificial system. He's better than all these heroes of the Old Testament as well.

If God can accomplish these amazing things through flawed sinners, imagine what He can accomplish, imagine what God can accomplish through a genuine covenant keeper.

No sin in His mouth. That's the leader we have. The true deliverer, the true judge, the good shepherd, the real king.

[34 : 26] Sat down at the right hand of God, where there is true peace in the land. Promise that will not just last for 40 years, but will last for eternity.

And His legacy, a kingdom, and a people of a kingdom who will be like father, like son. Not like dogs returning to their vomit, but children, each of us that will inherit a kingdom.

We are the legacy. Jesus' legacy is His church.

Let me pray. Father, we once again thank you for your word, and we praise you for the way that you've spoken to us, and we praise you for the Lord Jesus, and we thank you that He is better by far, that we have a wonderful Savior, a wonderful leader, a wonderful king, a shepherd, a judge, a deliverer.

You're the mighty one, and you reign and you rule. And your kingdom will never end or never perish or spoil or fade, or your promises will always remain.

[36 : 06] And so we thank you, Lord. We thank you that for the church, we thank you that we see, as we look around and see each one of us, that that is your great legacy, and we praise you.

And we ask that you would help us, Lord, help us to follow you, help us to remain, to be faithful ourselves and to follow you, Lord, to know what it means to live as followers of Christ.

We pray that you'd bless us with this word, and as we go out into the week that we'd live and work for your praise and glory, we ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.