

Called and Sent

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 00] By way of introduction, I'm just going to start by telling a story of something that happened to me just over 10 years ago when I was travelling in Vietnam.

I was in Hanoi. One day I went for a long walk. I was out on my feet all day looking around, seeing what it had to offer. I'd had a great day.

And in the morning when I set off, I couldn't tell in the sunshine that our hotel, you might say, wasn't in the nicest of districts.

But as I was walking home, as the sun was setting as it was going down, I realised that the streets were deserted for a reason. So I'm not far from the hotel and I'm walking up this long street, out of nowhere, a guy on a moped, a scooter, he mounts the curb and he drives right at me.

And as he gets closer to me, I don't know really what's going on. And he took a swing for me. And what he was aiming for, I was wearing a gold chain. I don't know how he saw it.

[1 : 10] He must have had a great vision. But he saw my gold chain that I'd round my neck and he went to grab it, grab the gold chain I was wearing. I still don't know how I managed it.

But somehow I managed to grab it at the same time and it sort of broke and fell into my hands. At which point, I just pelted the rest of the way as quick as I could back to the hotel.

It's a pretty lucky escape, I think. But I've been thinking about that. And I think actually, I was a bit of a fool that day because if I'd have asked around or got a guide, somebody to lead me, they'd have probably told me not to walk around that part of the city, especially when it was getting dark.

What I needed was somebody to guide me. I needed somebody to lead me. But I thought I knew better. I thought I had it sussed.

I knew what I was doing. I could just fend for myself. Left myself, I led myself into danger. I led myself into danger. A guide would have led me to safety.

[2 : 24] Now I'm telling that story because it's a picture of what goes on with us spiritually. We need to be led. We need to be guided with how to live.

The church needs to be led. And praise God, we have the greatest leader, a king in fact, who we follow, the Lord Jesus Christ, he's the head of the church, and he leads his church away from spiritual danger to a place of spiritual safety.

Now Gideon, as we've met, and we're going to look more into it, Gideon is a man called to lead God's people. And this evening we'll see the task that he's given is to, once he's called and once he's acknowledged by God, the task that he's given is to lead his people, his family away from spiritual danger to spiritual safety.

And in fact, that kind of sums up what God's mission in the world is today, isn't it? Both inside and outside the church is to lead people away from things that are spiritually dangerous, to lead them away from that, to things that, to spiritual safety.

That's what repentance is really. It's what we're talking about is turning away from spiritual dangerous things that's idolatry towards things that, towards spiritual safety, towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 02] And we need people to lead us in turning, in doing that. And we lead each other in doing that. And we're going to look at that as we look at the life of Gideon, we're going to look at that in three points.

The Lord uses nobodies, we have peace with God and put your house in order. The Lord uses nobodies, we have peace with God and put your house in order.

But before we get going with all that, I just want to set the stage a little bit in the book of Judges as a whole and in this chapter. It's really a book that demonstrates two big things or themes, the sinfulness of man and the amazing patience of God with His people.

You could say that those two things carry on throughout the whole Old Testament as we see the sinfulness of man, they get worse and just the patience that God had with His people. And we see that in Judges because the whole book really centers around a repeated cycle of events. In each event that occurs throughout the book of Judges, there's four big ideas that repeat each other in the cycle.

[5 : 10] Firstly, Israel turns away from the Lord, they turn towards the idolatry and other things. So Israel turns away from the Lord. Secondly, the Lord sends a foreign nation to conquer them.

Thirdly, then the people cry out to God and then fourthly, God answers their cries by sending a deliverer. And in each cycle, you're kind of hoping, expecting God's people to learn the lesson, but they don't.

In fact, they just get worse at every cycle and it's like a spiral going down, down, down. Judges doesn't start in a great place and doesn't end in a great place. And there's this devastating line that finishes the book.

It's a completely devastating indictment of where they're at. It says, in those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. That's a little bit like, think about me in the story that I told you. I kind of did what I thought was right in my own eyes. If I'd have had somebody leading me, I'd have probably done something different.

[6 : 14] The whole point in the book of Judges is that Israel needs a leader, a king, and without one, they're a law unto themselves. They're a law unto themselves.

They're not staggering, despite their repeated sin, the Lord keeps rescuing them. He keeps delivering them. And it just reminds us of how good and how sure His covenant promises are, how good and how sure they are.

So that's a bit of an overview of Judges. Our text today begins right in the middle of one of these cycles of those four events.

Just look quickly with me at verses, we're going to look at verses, some of the verses from 1 to 10 that just come before our passage. We get a little bit of background about what's going on. Verse one, the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

And the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years. Verse six, and Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out the help to the Lord.

[7 : 24] See the cycle of what happens? And we're in the middle of that cycle. Like the cycle before, like the cycle after, the Lord sends them a delivery, this time Gideon. Amazing patience and love.

God has free people. And it's what leads us into the passage that we're looking at tonight. And so we're going to look at our first point, the Lord uses nobodies.

The Lord uses nobodies. Gideons are nobody. The most unlikely person to rescue Israel.

He doesn't have any of the attributes you'd expect. I mean, look at him. He's hiding. He's hiding. He's threshing the wheat in the wine press.

Now normally, threshing the wheat, this would be done in the open where it was windy so that when they threw up the wheat and the chaff together, the heavier wheat would fall to the ground and the chaff would be the stuff that you didn't want to be blown away.

[8 : 22] It's not windy in a wine press. How do you, I don't know how he'd do his job in a wine press. He's like a little mouse hiding what he's doing. Now there might be good reason for it.

You read in verse four of chapter six that the Midianites have been devouring the produce of the land. We read that. I mean, it's hardly the image of a warrior, is it?

And all the time the angel of the Lord has been sat there watching him. We're not told how long before, but Gideon is unaware that he's there.

But when he does make himself known, the angel of the Lord, he says the strangest thing. It's the strangest thing to say, given that Gideon is doing, he's hiding, remember?

He said, he says, the Lord is with you. And here's the strange bit. Oh, mighty man of Valor.

[9 : 20] Mighty man of Valor? Really? Are you serious? This bloke hiding, really?

And you know, the same thought goes through Gideon's head. It's like, is he talking to me? He mistakes him. He thinks he must be talking not about him, but about the nation.

Look what he says back. He says, please, my Lord, if the Lord is with us, plural, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?

And where all his wonderful deeds that our Father recount to us saying did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt, but now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian. But the Lord, the angel of the Lord, reasserts himself in the singular, going this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian, did not I send you, you Gideon.

The verse 15, he protests, please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I'm the least in my Father's house. He's trying to get out of it.

[10 : 38] And that's not quite right from Gideon. His clan is not the weakest in Manasseh by a long shot. His dad, Joash, is the organiser of Baal worship, and neither is he the least in his family.

Later on, we read he gets 10 servants to help him. That doesn't sound like the least. And if your dad's the organiser of cult worship, he's not the weakest clan either. So he's trying to pull the wool over his eyes.

Nevertheless, his dad is the cult pagan leader. He's got an altar to Baal in his back garden. So the question comes again, is this really the right man to save Israel?

What we see is the writer, he's hinting at something else as well. His echoes of Moses' calling going on. You remember Moses? Moses was an unlikely hero. He grew up as an Egyptian, surrounded by Egyptian pagan idolatry, and he had very close contact to the chief of pagan worship, Pharaoh.

Moses was a murderer. Surely not the right character to deliver God's people. And he didn't want to do it either. The burning bush, what does Moses say? Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?

[11 : 53] God's answer to Moses, his affirmation, it's almost identical to what he says to Gideon verse 16.

But I will be with you. What's the point in both of those situations?

God doesn't use impressive people. There's nothing really impressive, humanly speaking, about Moses or Gideon.

And in fact, if you go through others that God uses, we see the same thing coming through. David, a young shepherd, really?

He's going to kill a giant, are you sure? The disciples, a bunch of fishermen, really, this rabble.

These are the last people that you would go to.

[12 : 48] In Jesus, we look at his family line, it's not pretty. He's born in a stable and he grows up in Nazareth. Remember what other people say? What good has ever come from Nazareth?

God uses unimpressive people. And if you feel like that, this teaches and reminds us that if you're feeling genuinely weak, if you don't have a great family history, if your own history is checkered with failings, maybe things that you feel ashamed of, or perhaps even things that have gone on that you wouldn't want anyone else to know.

If you feel like that, when you're part of God's people, like Gideon, like Moses, God still has a plan for each of us to use us.

You remember the Parable of the Sower? What happens to the good seed that lands on fertile soil? It bears fruit 30, 60, or even 100 fold.

So standing in society matters nothing in here. What about the similar message, Parable of the Mustard Seed?

[14 : 14] The Mustard Seed, the smallest seed. You take, get a mustard seed and put it in your hand. It is pathetic. If I had one and blew it, you'd never find it.

If you see Jesus, the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Of all the seeds, surely, if I was choosing, I'd go for something much better. Wouldn't you just all go for a Brazil nut?

That's a miles better seed. It's massive. No, a mustard seed. Looks like nothing, but goes on to be a tree where all the birds can shelter.

That's what it grows. 100 fold? One Corinthians. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world. Even things that are not to bring to nothing, things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

[15 : 25] Whatever you feel, God can use you and will use you for his glory. Let's move on to our second point.

We have peace with God. Now you might have noticed that at this point, Gideon still doesn't know who he's speaking to.

He's got a vague idea. I think we can pick that up, but he's cautious and he wants a sign to know exactly who it is. This uncertainty in Gideon's life, this sort of almost a lack of faith is something that comes up again and again in Gideon's life.

And again, it's very similar to Moses. Remember Moses, the burning bush, the Lord tells him, like he tells Gideon, I'm with you.

What does Moses replace this? People won't believe me when I go. Moses, what does he get? He gets a sign. Throw down your staff, says the Lord. It turns into a snake.

[16:28] Now put your hand out, says the Lord. Moses catches the servant by the tail and it turns back into a staff. He wants a sign. It's just like Gideon. He wants to know.

Verse 17, if now I have found favour in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. He's do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present or my offering and set it before you.

And he said, that's the end of the Lord speaking, I will stay till you return. And so Gideon goes and prepares a gift, an offering. And it's a huge offering.

Just look at what we have. We've got a young goat and this is the big, that staggers me, unleavened cakes but made from an eapot of flour. Now just to give you an idea, an eapot of flour is about 22 litres of flour.

That is loads of flour. That's an incredible amount of food. It's massive. It's just a ridiculous amount of food. Whoever this is, whatever sort of gift it is, he knows that he can't eat all that.

[17:31] And so there's a hint. Gideon knows he's talking to someone special. An offering that size is only reserved for a deity. He places the offering on a rock following the angel's instruction and the angel uses staff to touch the offering.

Notice link again, Moses staff used in a sign, all pointers. And fire we read, springs up from the rock and consumes the offering. It's a miraculous sign.

Let's just go over what happened. The logic of it, Gideon asks for a sign to confirm that he's found favour. This way he asks for a sign. He wants to know that he's got favour with this, with this, whoever it is, because he's not quite sure.

The angel, the Lord, accepts his offering and performs this miraculous sign. Hence, Gideon should, shouldn't he, deduce that he's found favour. That's the obvious way that this works out for him.

He says, I need a sign to know I've got favour. Surely that's what he should think now. He's had a sign. I've got favour. It's not a sign he gets a sign, but the angel, the Lord, disappears and on disappearing and the sign, he realises who he's been speaking with, that it was the Lord.

[18:50] And his response, fear. Alas, O Lord God, for now I've seen the angel of the Lord face to face.

What's he afraid of? The link back to Moses again. What does the Lord say to Moses at the top of my sign?

I know one can see my face and live. The angel of the Lord is a manifestation of the Lord himself, is what we realise. Gideon's thinking, oh, crumbs.

How did it know it was the Lord I was speaking with? I'm such an idiot. That's it for me now. I've had it. Alas, O Lord God, for now I've seen the angel of the Lord face to face.

The Lord's response. Verse 23, peace be to you.

[19:50] Do not fear, you shall not die. Because of course he has found favour.

This encounter with the Lord himself is proof, the whole incident that he's accepted before the Lord. His offering was accepted because he had peace with God.

Gideon has peace with Almighty God. Now what I'm going to say next, I don't want you to mishear me.

Gideon responds with fear. And there is a right way to fear the Lord, and we should all have that.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Proverbs 1 verse 7. There is a right way to fear the Lord that is captured by reverence and awe.

You think of Isaiah before the Lord, woys me for I'm a man of unclean lips when we see Isaiah there. There's genuine godly fear, reverence and awe. God sees himself in light of God's holiness.

[20:54] That's not what we see in Gideon. It's not genuine godly fear, reverence and awe, but human here because he wants to look, he's worried about himself.

It's human fear because he's scared for his own where he's going to go. And it highlights to us that he didn't really believe in the Word that came beforehand.

He asked for a sign for favour. He gets a sign, but he doesn't believe he has it. The sign wasn't enough. He thinks he's going to die. Isaiah doesn't think like that when he encounters the Lord. He sees his sinfulness in light of God's holiness, but Gideon just fears for his life. We can all be a bit like Gideon. We can all be a bit like Gideon. How do you know you have peace with God today?

[21 : 52] Do you know that? Maybe you don't. You don't know how do we know we have peace with God? The answer is we look at Tukulvany.

We look to the cross. That's how we know. Romans 5, 8, for God demonstrates, he demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

It is a sign, but it's more than a sign because it's the mechanism by which we have favor with God. It's the reason we have favor and peace with the Almighty.

You will see the Lord face to face and live. For Christ died once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God.

If you want to look anyway to know if you've got the Lord's favor to know whether you're accepted by him, we don't need a sign. We look to a crucified Savior where all your failings and faults, sins and transgressions have been removed, placed on his head.

[23 : 03] Upon him was the chastisement that brought us what? Peace.

So we thought about Gideon being called, that he has favor with the Lord, but what's the purpose he's called for? Now, we're in the book of Judges and if we're listening earlier to that repeated cycle, you're probably thinking he's going to deliver Israel from the Midianites.

He's going to deliver Israel from the Midianites. But that is not Israel's biggest problem. That is not Israel's biggest problem. As we look at our third point, put your house in order.

Put your house in order. Before we jump into this point, let's just pause, remind ourselves of the situation we gave you and his family. So Josh is his dad. I mentioned earlier, he's responsible for setting up the Baal altar in the clan in his family.

So we know, if that's his dad, that it's more than probably likely that he's been raised on idol worship. That would have been in his family.

[24 : 08] Gideon must cleanse his own house before embarking on God's mission. Before he goes to battle with the Midianites, you think the fundamental test of covenant relationship with Yahweh is, you shall have no other gods before me.

He can't serve the Lord in battle whilst the family worship Baal at home. This is the crux of it all. The real problem with Israel is not the Midianite oppression, but the spiritual layer of the land, the idolatry of Israel.

And so what happens? Gideon follows the Lord's commands. He uses his dad's bull to tear down the Baal altar. And then the same bull that he uses to tear down the altar. He offers that bull, and then he uses, he cuts down the Asherah poles that are made of wood, and he uses these wooden poles as fuel to burn the bull.

He does it at night. He's still afraid because he knows that his clan will defend their idol before they defend him. The next day comes, it all comes to light, what's going on, and they want to kill him.

In those days, the head of the household was accountable, if you like, for the actions of family members. So it's Jewish that they go to, they order Jewish to hand over because they're going to execute him.

[25 : 29] The irony of it all is the sentence of death which the idolaters, the clan deserve, is what they pronounce over the one who's destroyed the idol.

We can see how far Israel has gone. It is completely pagan. Isn't it amazing that the Lord's still interested in delivering them?

But Josh is dead, he stands up to the men. In the heat of the moment his son matters more. Baal has been totally humiliated, a God that can't save himself but needs to be saved by the people.

Thus the lwam, if Baal really is a God, let him defend himself. The truth is he can't. Baal can't defend himself and he can't save.

He's all smashed. Gideon, what are we seeing then? Gideon has led his clan, his family, away from idol worship. He's put his own house in order.

[26 : 31] He's led them away from spiritual danger. He's led them away from spiritual danger to spiritual safety.

As many of you know, we've just moved house to Winchborough and for those of you who've moved before, the first few weeks when you move is chaos, isn't it? It's total chaos. Half your stuff's in boxes and bags. You've forgotten which stuff is in which box. So you can't really move on with your life. You end up just moving stuff in and out of rooms, deciding where it's going to go and you can't really sort of get on with normal life until everything's sorted. You need to get it in order. The only real people that can sort it out is me and Annabelle. We have to sort out our own house. We have that responsibility. And so the only real people who can sort out Israel, we've got Gideon here, but the same comes when we think about the church. Of course Jesus is the head of the church, but he's given it if you like.

[27 : 39] We as the church, we need, there's times when we need to put our own house in order. We need to lead the church in making sure that we do that.

Is that the job of someone in a formal leadership position, you know, the minister, the elders? Yeah. Of course God has made the church, he's set it up in such a way that we have people called and set apart to do that and praise God for that.

But it's not them only. We are all leaders in one way or another, whether your parents leading each other or husbands leading their wives, parents leading their children, whether they are older folk, leading the younger folk, or whether you're dealing in Sunday school, or whether you're just leading one another, helping one another.

We must lead one another and deal, what we learn from this is it is radical what Gideon does and we must be radical with our own idolatry within the church, in one another, when you see it in Sunday Al-Sum, when you see it in yourself.

We must, what do they cut down the back? They destroy the bowels and the asherah poles. We must do that and we need the church to help one another. The clan of Manasseh need Gideon to lead them.

[29 : 05] Doing that is not an easy thing. It might be met with hostility. We're all proud in somewhere and we don't like being exposed or having our sins pointed out, we might even kick against it.

There's only a little bit of lust. Is it perfect? Doesn't everyone look at women that way? You might get that response. You might need to be a Gideon in someone else's life.

You might need to bring a Gideon into your own life. Being led away from sin, leading others away from sin.

We're a community of grace. We're all flawed and a community that lives like that encourages one another in holy repentance, holy living.

It's a gift from God. And as difficult as those times are, it is a gift. And I think we should look to take advantage of the blessing that it is to live in a community that wants the best for one another in terms of how we live.

[30 : 19] After all, isn't that what Jesus came to do? He came to lead His people away from idols that kept them captive, to set them free with good news.

Let them free, to set us free from bowing not to the altar of Baal but to the altar of comfort or the altar of money or the altar of Netflix or the altar of people's opinions or whatever it is.

Real true life is offered. I am the life, the truth and the way, says Jesus. All life is found in Him.

And so as we come in for landing, we've looked at the early part of Gideon's life. We've looked at his call, that he was a nobody.

We've looked at his acceptance, that he has peace with God. And we looked at his mission to put his house in order. To bring people from spiritual danger to spiritual safety.

[31 : 37] The Lord uses nobodies. Let's just remind ourselves of the three things we've looked at. The Lord uses nobodies. If you feel like a nobody today that you don't have the right skills or family background or there's too much sin in your life, God can use you.

You know, as I said, neither did Jesus. His family line was filled with adulterers, murderers and even prostitutes.

Secondly, the Lord accepts you. You have peace with God based on His finished work on the cross. It's not only the sign that you're approved, but it's a whole mechanism by which you're approved because by faith you have a righteous standing before the Lord.

You have peace with God. And then finally, we need leaders and we are leaders to one another to get a house in order.

Who are prepared sometimes to upset the apple cart. Jesus led his people away from spiritual danger to spiritual safety.

[32 : 42] We need to lead people and lead one another in a community of grace, radically dealing with those things that take us away from the living God.

Gideon is a pointer to Jesus. Gideon is a pointer to Jesus, a deliverer sent to cleanse God's people. And if you remember, even Jesus was affirmed by the living God.

Remember at his baptism, you are my son. With you, I'm well pleased. He knew that the Lord was with him.

He's the one who leads his church towards repentance. That's the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. His death makes a way that we can turn away from idols towards the living God.

He is our peace. He is our peace. We can boldly approach the throne of grace without human fear because he is our peace.

[33 : 45] Let me pray. Almighty God, we thank you so much that you're the one who leads us.

If we were left to ourselves, we'd be, we were once lost wandering around in darkness, not knowing which way to go.

We'd be a law, we were a law unto ourselves. Just like these people in the times of the judges, they did what was right in their own eyes and we were once like that.

But we thank that you've led us away from that into the kingdom of your Son. We thank you that we know your great love for us.

And we pray that you would help us to allow ourselves to be led by you. We listen to you and I thank you for the church, for the community that we're in and pray that you'd help us to lead one another.

[34 : 49] Help us to sometimes have those difficult conversations that we'd bring a Gideon into our lives or be a Gideon in someone else's life. And so we pray for this word today that you'd imprint it on our hearts and help us to live according to the message that we've heard.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.