

Remnant Life Church
September 28, 2024
Assurance on the Journey
Judges 6:36-40

There are many words that you primarily only hear in church

- Salvation
- Born-again
- Anointing
- Sanctified
- Eschatology
- Spiritual journey

What is a spiritual journey?

- How do I pack for something like that?
- Do I get to pick the destination, or are we all headed in the same direction?
 - How will I know when I get there?
 - Is there a point when I know that I have arrived?
 - Who determines that place?

The fact is, a spiritual journey is something that every Christian is on for the entirety of their lives

- It is different for everyone
- The road traveled, the pace, and the stops along the way are all unique
- But there are some aspects of that journey that are common to everyone
 - There are crossroads we all encounter that require choices be made – hopefully in wisdom and perhaps with guidance
 - The opportunity for guidance means that many search for signs or direction from many sources to get assurances they are on the right path

But like everywhere you turn today, there are many who will offer their thoughts and suggestions, but how do you know who you can trust or listen to?

- This is why I so often caution you regarding who you listen to online, podcasts, and even TV
 - Fame does not always equal truth
- But we do search because we all desire the comfort of knowing we are making good decisions that are in our best interest, whatever the area of our lives

This morning, as we look at how that impacts our spiritual journey, we are going to examine an unlikely hero from the OT.

First, the story of Gideon is one that presents itself in an unusual way when we consider the task, the journey God had for him

- Gideon was an ordinary man of no special strength or experience
 - At the time of his call he was a simple farmer

- No significant accomplishments worth noting
- Yet he became the 5th judge of all of Israel
- But he was from the smallest tribe of Israel – Manasseh
 - The tribe gets its name from the first-born of Joseph in Egypt
 - And from within this small tribe he was of the weakest clan
 - And his family was the least important
 - Not exactly a glowing resume
 - But God is not impressed by credentials and position
 - He is looking for a willing heart – even a cautiously willing heart like Gideon

Context:

- The nation of Israel has turned to idol worship – Baal and Asherah
 - This is the continuation of a destructive pattern of behavior that had become a painful cycle
 - The people would turn from God and worship the pagan idols of the surrounding nations
 - God would allow those nations to come and attack Israel making their lives very hard
 - They would cry out to God and in His mercy He would deliver them
 - He would put a judge in place to help guide them
 - There would be peace in the land and the people would become comfortable
 - They would turn their backs on God and begin worshipping idols
 - And the cycle would repeat
 - That is what we are looking at here
 - In Gideon's time, God was allowing foreign nations to come and plunder the Israelites' crops and herds
 - So much so that they had to build shelters in caves and hide their crops wherever they could
 - The people cried out to God, and He sent them an unnamed prophet to tell them that it was their sin that had brought this hardship on them
- It is during their time of crying out that we are introduced to Gideon
 - An angel then appears to Gideon and says something strange
 - He is greeted with these words, 'Hello, mighty warrior!'
 - Gideon is confused
 - Like saying to me, 'Hello, all-star catcher for the Phillies!'
 - I would be delighted but it would not be true
 - As you might imagine, Gideon's response is one of skepticism and disbelief
 - Especially when he discovered that the assignment God had for him was to overthrow the Midianites and Amalekites who were continually raiding their land
 - The Amalekites were descendants of Esau
 - And was the first military conflict Israel had coming out of Egypt
 - The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah
 - Joseph was sold to a band of Midianites

- And Moses' FIL was a Midianite
 - Both were very powerful nations
- Because of what lay before him and as a result of that disbelief in himself, he asked God for a sign

READ – Judges 6:34-40

- How should we interpret what Gideon does?
 - Is this a lack of faith in God?
 - Is this a sinful response by Gideon to put God to the test?
 - After all **Deut 16:6** says specifically that we should never do that
 - Jesus even quotes those exact words in **Matt 4:7** when He is confronting satan in the desert
 - Or is Gideon simply acting in a way that reflects the very human nature that we all deal with?
 - Self-doubt, uncertainty that at times requires external confirmation
 - Are we any different than Gideon when considering the divine mission God has appointed for each of us?
 - We should also recognize that this was not only a desire for personal vindication
 - Gideon was going to be leading the nation into war
 - The great military leaders of the Bible always sought God's favor and assurances before going into battle
 - And the times they did not were catastrophic
 - Remember Joshua and the little town of Ai
 - After conquering Jericho he did not seek God's assurance before attacking, and they were defeated (**Josh 7**)
 - Gideon was going to present that assurance from God to the people to unite them to what God had called them to do
- This encounter between Gideon and God also speaks to the incredible and wonderful patience God has with us
 - Rather than chastising Gideon for His requests, God accommodated him
 - God's answer served as a beacon to not only Gideon but to all the people
 - It spotlighted God's loving plan, His patience, reliability and unfaltering perfection of purpose
- We must remember that these same attributes are available today
 - That was not who God was then, but He is different now
 - Hebrews tells us that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever
 - Meaning God does not change
 - His patience, love and power are just as true and relevant today as they were in the time of Gideon

Second, because of God's affirmation and assurance, Gideon went from doubt to courage

- He was given an assignment and he had to hold firm to his conviction of God's presence
 - True conviction to God's purpose in your life will always be met with opposition
 - Expect it, and be ready for it!

- That is certainly true today
 - In this age of digital and instant information, one comment can release a firestorm of criticism, hatred, and even violence
 - The relentless lens of social media has no filter and certainly nothing to hold it in a place of understanding, compassion or even common sense.
 - Yet we are called not to back down, and courage, like that acquired by Gideon, is necessary to do that today
- Gideon demonstrated his courage when he acted against the pagan idols
 - **Judges 6:25-27** - *That same night the LORD said to him, Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering. So, Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.*
 - Notice that Gideon was still developing as a leader (did this at night)
 - Gideon knew that he was placing himself in direct opposition to the people and the belief of the culture
 - Yet he was willing to do that, demonstrating the transformative power of faith
 - Courage is demonstrated through action

On June 5, 1989, a day after the Chinese government's violent crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, a lone man stood in defiance in front of a column of tanks. This unidentified man, carrying just two shopping bags, positioned himself to block the tanks' progress. The leading tank tried to maneuver around him, but he stepped to the side, placing himself as an obstacle. The image of this unarmed man standing resolutely in front of a convoy of tanks has become an iconic representation of courage and resistance.

- That was what Gideon did then, and it is what we are called to do today
- Tearing down the altar of Baal was not just a physical act of bravery on Gideon's part; it was a spiritual declaration of his standing on the side of God
 - Are you capable of such acts that require you to make a clear stand?
 - You have the assurance of God's presence for when we stand for God, He stands with us

Finally, the assurance of God took Gideon from doubt to determination

- Doubt can be described in many ways as it impacts our lives
 - It can be seen as the reflection of our need to understand, comprehend, and make sense of the world around us
 - And when we cannot, doubt is raised
 - It can, however, be a shortcoming if it cripples us and prevents us from acting in a way that we should
 - *Consider a tightrope walker teetering high above the ground. While he has practiced and prepared for this moment, a flicker of doubt may cross his mind, asking, "Can I really do this?" That momentary uncertainty isn't*

indicative of his level of skill or dedication but is a natural response to the gravity of the situation and the unknown of the outcome.

- In that same way, a moment of doubt or hesitancy does not necessarily mean there is a weak foundation of faith
 - It can often be a part of the process that helps our faith to grow
 - We so often envision every great biblical figure, from Moses to Peter, to being an unshakable, unwavering mighty pillar of faith
 - Y'er every one of them had their moments of doubt
 - But that moment did not prevent them from acting, in faith, to accomplish their assignment, their mission, their call
 - Gideon is a perfect example of that very human response encountering the power of a divine call and, in that call, encountering the presence of Almighty God

When Gideon laid that fleece out, not once, but twice, that was not a brazen test of God's authority

- It was a humble and very human plea for assurance
- His actions were not driven by disbelief but by a desire to fortify his own uncertainty

Let's go back to the tightrope walker as we close our time together

- Imagine he is preparing to cross a thin wire suspended high above a bustling city street.
 - This isn't the first time he's undertaken such a feat
 - But this time, the wire is longer, the height is greater, and the winds are stronger.
 - Plus, there is now a large crowd below, eyes fixed upward, full of anticipation.
- And so, before taking that first step, the tightrope walker tests the wire's tension with his foot, feels the balance of the pole in his hands, and maybe even tugs on the safety harness to ensure it is secure.
 - *These actions aren't indicative of the walker doubting his skills or the equipment's integrity. Instead, they highlight a genuine respect for the enormity of the task, a deep understanding of the risks involved, and an earnest desire to ensure everything is as it should be before embarking on the journey across.*
 - Much like Gideon's request for a sign, the tightrope walker's pre-walk checks are about seeking reassurance.

Gideon had a lot of self-doubt and needed assurances:

- He sought them from God
- God answered
- And Gideon obeyed in victory to the glory of God
- God is still providing assurances
- We may, at times, feel like an uncertain Gideon
 - But God is always present along your spiritual journey
 - And His love, patience, and power will transform you into a mighty warrior to accomplish the tasks and weather the storms along the way
 - All to His glory and honor