

# Judges 6:25-40

Intro February 11, 2007 Knowing God's Will

While the contributions of John Wesley to Christianity are legion and his intensity to serve Christ attested, he struggled with knowing God's will when it came to romance. As a member of the Holiness Club, John, his brother Charles and friend Charles Delamotte took vows to remain single so as to better serve Christ.

Their single status opened doors of opportunity, such as serving as missionaries to Savannah in the Georgia colony, and so they set sail in 1735. John, already in his early thirties was hired to tutor a young teen girl aboard the ship's four month journey. Sophia Hopkey was a good natured girl, pretty, intelligent and soon John feel head over heels in love with her.

Wesley was on the horns of a dilemma: marriage or missions, what was God's will?

John turned to his friend, Charles Delamotte for advice and they decided that in order to discern God's will they should draw lots, so on three pieces of paper they wrote the following messages:

*"Marry," "Think not of it this year," and "Think of it no more."* They placed the pieces in a container. Delamotte closed his eyes and drew out: *"Think of it no more."*

Wesley was brokenhearted, but he concluded to marry would be to sin. He abruptly ended the courtship, believing God's will was that he spread the gospel among the native peoples. Yet the turmoil of love lost was too great and soon he set sail back to England.

While in England serving as an evangelist some years later, John became ill and was tended to by a devote Methodist who was kind, peaceful and very capable. Grace Murray was clearly the ideal wife and John decided to marry her, but, in light of the previously failed relationship, this time he consulted his brother Charles for advice on what to do. Seeking Godly counsel appeared more prudent than drawing lots to discern God's will.

Brother Charles would hear no talk of marriage to Grace. She came from a poor family, had once worked as a domestic servant, so a marriage would ruin John's ministry and bring discredit to the gospel. Such a marriage could not be God's will, Charles was confident. While John considered his brother's advice, Charles rode out to meet Grace, convinced her that marriage to John Wesley was unwise, but there was another preacher, John Bennet, whom she knew. Charles and Grace traveled to Newcastle to meet Rev. Bennet. The following morning they were wed. Strike two for Mr. Wesley. So much for friends and brothers when trying to discern God's will.

Wondering if marriage would always evade his grasp, John did finally meet a wealthy widow named Mary Vazeille who would be a valuable partner in ministry. We know not whether he drew lots, but we do know his brother, Charles, heartedly disapproved once again. But John did not listen this time. In 1751 he hastily married Mary. In what may be the first pre-nup agreement, John refused to take any of her money and she could not prevent his traveling ministry.

Four months into the marriage John admitted a terrible mistake. Her harangues were, as John wrote, "like tearing flesh off my bones." She became jealous, sending out spies and reading his correspondence. More than once she left him; twenty years later she left him for good. His entry in his journal read: "I did not desert her, I did not send her away, I will not recall her!"

What are we to think of poor John Wesley's desire to discern God's will for his life? By lots, by advice, by sheer force of determined will – they all failed. Are we left in a lurch when talking about knowing God's will for our life? How many here have struggled with a decision in the past six months regarding marriage, job, career, education, relocation ... we all are faced with such momentous decisions.

Our passage this morning is one to which people have often turned to discuss how we can know God's will, for here we read of Gideon laying out the fleece so as to know if God was with him. What are we to make of this passage? Is this to be our standard? If not, what should we learn? READ Judges 6:25-40. Here we see how we can have confidence when we worship according to God's will, when we are empowered to do God's will and when we rest in God's will.

Of the events leading up to this decision making event we looked at last week. Gideon, the fearful farmer, was hailed by God as a valiant warrior. He had reason to fear and doubt, but God's prophet reminded the people of God's promise and the angel demonstrated to Gideon God's peace. God would be present, for that reason alone, Gideon should have confidence  
How can you have confidence of God's will in your life?

**God wills we worship him alone**

As soon as Gideon erects the altar *The Lord is Peace* (24) to celebrate his acceptance by God, God will not let Gideon be syncretistic in his worship. Worshipping our right standing before God demands we worship him rightly. Gideon asked for a sign from the Angel of the Lord under the oak tree by the wine press. The sign was the accepted peace offering of a goat, bread and broth. Gideon wanted to know God's design for his life and in vv25ff it is spelled out in no uncertain terms – destroy the altar of Baal ... on his father's property.

This is no minor house cleaning, just a few trinkets in the corner. It is the eradication of paganism from his clan. It affects not just Gideon, or his father, but the village. With his father's own oxen, which were in short supply due to the Midianite invaders, he pulled down Baal's altar. Archeologists have recently unearthed an altar not far from this location in the valley of Jezreel, measuring 26 ft<sup>2</sup> by 4 feet high. The stones were plastered together, so it would take a bull and ten men to dismantle this under the cover of night. The Asherah poles, the phallic symbols of Baalism, were likewise to be cut down. Then he was to build an altar to God. The second bull was then to be sacrificed and the wood from the Asherah poles were to be used for the fire.

This eradication of pagan worship immediately on the heels of God promising to be with Gideon should not escape our notice. We may desire God's peace, but on our terms. We want to know God will guide us, but what we really seek is his stamp of approval on our plans. The first step in knowing God's will is tearing down the idols in our lives, discerning what, when and where we seek to promote our agenda and so force God to serve us.

Joash's response is perplexing. I'm not sure if he was convicted by his son's zeal or was a pragmatic parent, willing to stand by his son, even when he went wild. Yet he's clear minded as to the nature of this worship – if Baal is a god, let him settle the score.

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 Rome. 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 judgment 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. In time the reformation came to Scotland under Knox.

**God's will is revealed in worship**

The recurring acts of worship which surround this story serve as the backdrop to how we can have confidence in knowing what God wants us to do. If you desire confidence that God is guiding you, that the choices you are about to make are in his will, the starting point is always worship.

This is not to say the Sunday service is a form of divination, but first and foremost God's revealed will is seen in the context of the covenant community as we confess our sins and look to the work of Christ for our peace. Before we look to God to guide us in the mundane, we need to know his will for us as we relate to him. If you want to know God's will for your life ... look to the cross, the empty tomb. That is where your focus is to be.

The heart of pagan worship, then and today, is the discernment of the secret things of God. Paganism wants to read the blueprint of the gods' plan for our lives or sway the deity's desires to conform to our own. Baal worship sought to know the secret things of God, to manipulate God for our desires. Remember how Baal worshipped worked – when we seek pleasure for ourselves, we encourage Baal and Asarte to pleasure themselves and so rain down more pleasure on us. The will of the gods is manipulated of our wills, our desires, our lusts. No wonder it was so popular.

When talking about the will of God we have a problem of confused terms

What do we mean by God's will? A verse that helps is Deuteronomy 29:29. The secret things belong to the Lord our God ... sounds rather prosaic. If they are secret, they're not known; you can't find them out. Theologians call this the decretive will of God. This has to do with the plan. Easy example – it was God's secret plan for Judas to betray Jesus. But this is true of all those aspects which people so much want to know.

Then there is the revealed will in the next part of v29. This will belongs to us. His revealed will is what is written on these pages, summarized in the 10 Commandments, what he exhorts us to do. In this will, what he reveals, one should not betray Jesus. Judas broke God's will in one sense but he also fulfilled it in another sense. God's will is revealed in God's Word as we see in Ephesians 5:17 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3

When people speak of discerning the will of God by going into a pietistic search through signs, feelings, confirmations ... so that they may have joy, peace, and contentment; that is Baalism, what Gideon was to tear down. What was God's will for Gideon? What did God direct him to do? Worship God alone (a clear command) and remove false worship.

So when Christians talk knowing God's will about what choices to make beyond what is revealed in God's Word – be very, very careful. If God has addressed an issue, we should do as he has commanded.

"I wonder if it God's will to stay with my spouse? Should I pray about cheating on this exam?" God has already addressed that issue and we should do what he has instructed. It is not up for a vote or discussion. You need not pray about something that God has already spoken.

When people speak of seeking God's will apart from what Scriptures, they reject the revealed authority in search for the secret authority, whereby placing authority where it must not exist. Usually, they baptize their desires and demonize the other choices.

You have two colleges you want to decide between. Nothing wrong with either and as far as you can tell, your motives are just fine. What will you do? Sometimes well meaning believers say, "One is God's will and the other one is not God's will!" So people suffer from choice paralysis, "Oh, no! One of these is not God's will. If I go down the wrong path I will be evil and out of God's will."

God's will is found between these covers, it is best understood in the community of believers we call church, it is experienced when we gather for worship. Where else can we have confidence? When we are empowered to do God's will.

## **WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE WHEN WE ARE EMPOWERED TO DO GOD'S WILL**

33-35

### **God's will is seen when God empowers us to obey**

As soon as Gideon obeys God's revealed will, his secret will is now made known. If being in the center of God's should be all sweetness– Gideon would have reason to be upset. No sooner does he obey, but do the Midianites show up for dinner. And they are hungry!

Knowing and doing God's revealed will never guarantee us protection from pain. Doing what God commands protects us from our own stupid decisions, but it is no guarantee that you'll be protected from other people's sin.

But notice what does happen. As Gideon worships according to God's revealed will, troubles come, but so does God's empowerment to do what he commands.

"Give what you command," Augustine wrote, "and command what you will." We need not fear God's revealed will when we know that he empowers us to obey it. That is what happened with Gideon, the Spirit of the Lord clothed Himself with Gideon and he sounded the trumpet

When the Midianites came for lunch, Israel left the kitchen. Worse than being descended upon by a gaggle of hungry teens, when the people from the east came like locusts on the land, the children of Israel headed for the hills. This time, under the power of God, Gideon sounded the trumpet. He called people to battle. That is a gutsy move, but one that shows God empowering timid Gideon to do what God had commanded him to do.

### **God's will is seen when God's people follow**

Amazingly, the people listened. This nobody from a nowhere clan in a nothing tribe calls people to an impossible task and people follow him? It must be a God thing.

If you need more assurance, sometimes God is gracious enough to bring along side friends who will say yes or no. Hopefully, not a brother like Charles Wesley. The trouble there is his reasoning about Grace Murray were not biblically based while perhaps correct about Mary Vazeille.

We have a picture here of God's will unfolded in our lives both as an internal and external call.

Gideon personally believed God was with him and by God's power; he took a courageous step and blew the trumpet. What happened next is confirmation – people listened. There should be

confirmation to what you think God's will is by the response of others. That is not always the case. But when it is gone, think long and hard.

## **WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE WHEN WE REST IN GOD'S WILL**

36-40

### **Resting in God's will is never easy**

This brings us to the place where so many Christians get goofy. Is this a paradigm for us today? Try it if you like, but I seriously doubt it is here for our encouragement to do it, but a reminder of how God responds to our feeble faith, even after he has been so good to guide us.

I find it interesting that Gideon, filled by the Spirit of the Lord, summoned all these people, they came at his call and **then** he questions his calling. Sound familiar? Trusting God's commands are never easy.

Gideon asks for extra confirmation. Put the wool on the threshing floor, a rocky surface and in the morning as the dew evaporated from the rock, let the wool, which naturally holds moisture, let it be wet. The next morning comes and he wrings out a bowl of water from the wool.

Not a really big confirmation. Pretty much what you would expect. It is the next sign that is the clincher. But for all his protestations, don't be fooled. He sounds gracious, but he is a doubter, needing God's assurance. This time let the ground be wet and the wool dry. Now that is amazing. Do you want to know what is really amazing? God did it

### **We rest in a God who knows that suffering is part of his will**

We are all like Gideon – doubting when we have every reason to trust. But to be honest, the reasons to doubt are pretty good ones, for Gideon and for us.

For Gideon God has been faithful, he extended peace to him, protected him when he obeyed, but this is a new set of trials. With the army behind him, he seeks confirmation of what God has already said and proved in the past. But God's will for Gideon is unlike what any of us ever imagine would be God's will – to enter into battle, perhaps even to suffer.

We are the only religion that has a suffering God, we have a religion of a God who got turned down. In the Garden, before his betrayal and death, Jesus says I don't want this cup and the Father says you'll have to drink it anyway. Our Savior had to resign himself to say, "Not my will but your will be done." We are the only religion that has defeat at the heart of victory. No other religion has that. Why should I think I am above my master?

The basic theme of the gospel – he suffers so that we might not suffer ... ? No. He suffered so that when we suffer we may be like him. There will be resurrection on the other side of death. What good is over there? We don't know? My agenda always leaves out death. Never has death and resurrection. Always success.

The events of the past six months have reminded us of the centrality of sin and suffering. For us to be content in God's secret will, I must be satisfied by his revealed will and at ease that his secret will may well involve suffering. God's secret will forces us to turn again to God's revealed will, thus living to honor Him as we rest in Him.

C. S. Lewis said "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'"

Yet when we rest in God's will for our life, we do so not with resignation but rest.

Resignation is surrender to fate; rest is surrender to God.

Resignation lies down quietly in an empty universe. Rest rises up to meet the God who fills that universe with purpose and destiny.

Resignation says, 'It's all over for me.' Rest asks, 'Now that I'm here, Lord, what's next?'

Resignation says, 'What a waste.' Rest says, 'In what way can you use this mess, Lord?'"<sup>1</sup>

We are able to rest not in the strength of our own power, but in knowing that God's will work in and through us, so that nothing: no circumstance, no trouble, no testing - that can ever touch us until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ, right through to us. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which we may not understand at the moment, but as we refuse to become panicky, as we lift up my eyes to him and accept it as coming from the throne of God for some great purpose.

No sorrow will ever disturb me, no trial will ever disarm me, no circumstance will cause me to fret, for I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Elizabeth Elliot, quoted by Jill Briscoe, "In the Father's Arms," Preaching Today, Tape No. 141

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from Alan Redpath, source unknown.