

A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 8:22-35

Topic

Gideon refuses to be made king, but from the moment he accepts plundered earrings from the men of Israel as tribute, he begins to act as their king

Title

"The Lord of the Earrings: The Resemblance of the King"

Introduction

If you are culturally savvy, and I say, "Who's on first," you'll most likely respond by saying, "Yes," or, "That's right."

It goes back to the classic comedy sketch first performed by Abbott and Costello in the late 1930's.

Lou Costello wanted to know the names of the players on the baseball team. Bud Abbott told him Who was on first; What was on second; and I Don't Know was on third.

The rest of the players were Why in left field; Because in center field; Tomorrow was the pitcher; Today was the catcher; and I Don't Care was at shortstop.

The right fielder was never named, but he has come to be called Nobody.

If I reword the question, and ask "Who's first?," and you're a Christian, you'd most likely answer, "Jesus!"

Having said that, I think we'd admit Jesus is not always first in our actual day-to-day living. It's a biblical fact that we still contend with the flesh, and that we too often yield to our flesh rather than to the Spirit of God.

As we close the book on Gideon, he provides the extreme example of a believer confessing God is first, but making choices that contradict his confession.

Hopefully none of us is as extreme a case as was Gideon. But each one of us will benefit by taking a look at our day-to-day choices.

I'll organize my thoughts around the following two questions: #1 Do You Confess That Jesus Is First?, and #2 Do You Choose As If Jesus Is First?

#1 Do You Confess That Jesus Is First?

(v22-23)

Here are three quick thoughts about Jesus being first.

1. He is first in that He created all things. In Colossians 1:15 we are told that Jesus is "the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15). It means that He is preeminent over creation - not that He is a created being. This can be seen from the verses that follow:

Col 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Col 1:17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

2. In the very next verse, Colossians 1:18, Jesus is called "the firstborn from the dead." Jesus was the first person to come back from the dead never to die again. He is therefore preeminent over the dead and death itself. He has the keys, or the authority, to death and Hades.

3. Jesus is the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (First Corinthians 15:20). His resurrection is the guarantee of the resurrection from the dead, or the rapture, of the church age saints.

Even when the words firstborn, or firstfruits, or first, are not used, it is easy to see that Jesus is preeminent. He said of Himself, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME - IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME - TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD' " (Hebrews 10:7).

It's a quote from the Old Testament, from Psalms 40:7, that gives rise to the much repeated statement that Jesus can be found on every page of the Bible.

He is first whether you acknowledge Him or not. There is coming a time when every knee will bow, and when every tongue will confess, that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:11).

Gideon will make a strong confession that the Lord is first in his life, and in the life of the nation.

It comes in the aftermath of their victory over the mighty Midianites.

Jdg 8:22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian."

The men of Israel were asking Gideon to become their king, and to establish a dynasty of succession in his family.

After seeing what God did, to immediately ask for a king made no sense. If they needed it, God could raise up a Judge, or Judges, at any time from among their ranks. A king was totally unnecessary.

It's important that we be content with the methods and ministries God has established in the church age in which we live. We don't need to borrow any of the world's ideas.

And we don't need to be like other churches, doing what they are doing. It seems there is always a book, or a series, that churches jump on, as the latest must-do in order to keep pace.

Way back in the Book of Deuteronomy, God predicted that Israel would demand a king (17:14-15). After the time of the Judges, the people pressured Samuel to appoint a king.

It was wrong of them. God told Samuel, "it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (First Samuel 8:7).

Later Samuel would say to the men of Israel, "you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king" (First Samuel 12:17).

In another place we're told that their motive for wanting a king was to be like the other nations. God had set them apart, and would rule them Himself. But they felt odd and weird in the world, and wanted to be more mainstream.

There is always a tremendous pressure for you, as a Christian, to conform to the ideas and the practices, to the morals, of the world. If you're raising kids, you feel this acutely, because your kids aren't doing or saying what all the other kids are doing and saying.

Your kids want to fit in, so they put pressure on you to relax your standards. Hold your ground. Being thought of as having high standards is a good thing.

It's not just your kids who want to fit in. You and I do, too. Everywhere we live and work and play, there are opportunities to conform, to compromise - or to communicate something better.

Those are really opportunities to confess that Jesus is first, and because He is, you're not interested in certain things; things that are inherently sinful, or that are not helpful to your Christian walk.

So while we might not clamor for a king, we *can* shrink away from our King, not always wanting to be identified with Him, because we will stand out from the crowd.

The men of Israel thought Gideon qualified because he had "delivered [them] from the hand of Midian."

Gideon had done no such thing. God had made it clear at each step that it was He Who delivered Israel, using Gideon and as few men as possible. He did it precisely so He, and not a man or men, would get the glory. Nevertheless, God's glory was given to Gideon.

Basic principle: Give God the glory. Don't hold up a man, or a woman, who is merely a servant, and give them glory. We can encourage one another; we can be grateful for spiritual people in our lives; we can love them, and show respect.

But in the end, it is Jesus Who began this great work in us, and He is the one bringing it to pass.

Israel had just been blessed with a supernatural victory over the Midianites and their alliance of evil. God had accomplished it in the most odd way possible, starting with His choice of Gideon to be His Judge.

Instead of Israel wanting to be like the other nations, **the other nations ought to have wanted to be like Israel.**

They were missing a chance for evangelism. So do we when we conform while we understand the power to transform.

Jdg 8:23 But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you."

Do we still say, "You go, girl?" If we do, we can say, "You go, Gideon!" Great confession. He immediately, unequivocally, rejected the attempt to enthrone him. Sadly, we're going to see that it was merely lip service.

Before we see that, let's give a little credit. It wasn't easy to say what Gideon said. We've shown that the men of Israel had a strong desire to appoint a king, and a dynasty. This was huge pressure, and it took a lot to make this confession.

If you are a Christian, just letting folks know, even in the most subtle ways, is a confession that He is first in your life. Sure, we can always say more; but anything we say that lifts up Jesus is wonderful.

You can practice passive evangelism by having a Bible out in the open, or displaying Bible verses, or wearing clothing and jewelry that witnesses to others. Do everything you can to say, "I'm a believer, and Jesus is first in my life."

Some who see it will want to know more. Others will try to get you to stop. No matter; just give God the glory, and keep growing in your public confession that He is Lord.

#2 Do You Choose As If Jesus Is First?

(v24-35)

Various internet sources estimate that an adult makes about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day. We make 227 decisions each day on just food alone, this according to researchers at Cornell University.

Whether 35,000 is a real number or not, it's clear that we all have choices, and that many of them have to do with our spiritual lives.

Gideon made a great confession, then demolished it by his subsequent choices. He refused to be appointed king, but immediately began living like one.

Jdg 8:24 Then Gideon said to them, "I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder." For they had golden earrings, because they *were* Ishmaelites.

I thought they were Midianites? They were, but there were other nations and tribes with them, and collectively, according to anthropologists, at that juncture in history, non-Jews could collectively be called Ishmaelites.

Piercings were a big part of Ishmaelite culture. They were especially into earrings.

What about the Israelites? Well, we know that they practiced one type of piercing. If a Jew who had sold himself into servitude to pay off his debt wanted to remain a servant after his time was ended, he'd be taken to the doorpost of his master's house. Using a hammer and an awl, the master would pierce the servant's ear, marking him as a permanent bondservant (Exodus 21:16).

There are other positive references in the Old Testament to Jewish women wearing earrings and nose-rings - although these may not have been piercings. Abraham's servant, on mission to find a wife for Isaac, gives Rebekah a nose-ring.

Go easy on the question of body piercings and tattoos. Be interested in the inner person. Outward things don't defile us.

Gideon didn't want the earrings as a fashion accessory, but as tribute. In the latest *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie, when a young Jack Sparrow becomes captain, his crew file by giving him various objects as tribute, and to suggest their loyalty.

Besides making Gideon rich, it was a very public statement that he was the one responsible for their victory - that he deserved the glory for it.

We can confess all we want that Jesus is first, but it is our choices that reveal who is truly first in our lives.

Commentators make a comparison between Gideon and Abraham. He once led three hundred eighteen men from his household into battle against a coalition of kings who had, among other things, carried off his nephew, Lot. After God gave Abraham the victory, he refused all the spoil, saying, "I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten" (Genesis 14:22).

Gideon and Abraham had solid confessions, but Abraham made choices consistent with his confession, while Gideon did not.

Jdg 8:25 So they answered, "We will gladly give *them*." And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder.

There are times in the Bible when God allowed the Israelites to take the spoils of victory; and there were times He told them to not take anything. We can't say whether taking spoil was good or bad in this case, because there's no record of God permitting it, or prohibiting it.

Taking spoil from the enemy can be a snare; it can be detrimental to our spiritual life.

Thirty years ago, when secular psychology was making an assault on biblical Christianity, its Christian proponents likened it to the Israelites taking spoil from Egypt as they left in the Exodus. They said the theories and the practices of god-hating atheists should be taken from the world and used in the church. One huge problem with that is the kind of psychology they were talking about isn't science; it's philosophy - theories of human behavior that discount the fall of man, and our sin nature.

God would have us not touch upon that kind of spoil. Bringing it into the church has been detrimental, leaving folks in a state of helplessness, when all the while they are indwelt by, and can be infilled by, God Himself, in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Jdg 8:26 Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred *shekels* of gold, besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which *were* on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that *were* around their camels' necks.

By "earrings," Gideon meant earrings **and** crescent ornaments **and** pendants **and** purple robes **and** chains. He wanted it all, and the men of Israel were all too happy to oblige him.

Once you start taking spoil from the world, it's easier to justify more and more.

Let's apply this to our lifestyles in general. We could ask of ourselves, for example, "How many pendants are enough?"

But instead of "pendants," it's something else. With me, let's say it's coffee makers. I'm half-joking, but the point is this: We all need to choose how we will live, and to what standard.

I can't choose for you, and I can't judge your choices - unless they are obviously sin.

But in a wealthy culture like ours, and where there is pressure to keep up with or surpass the mythical Joneses, we need to take inventory of the spoil in our lives versus the spiritual.

I was reading a book a few months ago by a young megachurch pastor who is currently popular. It was about the Lord showing him to simplify his life, materially. To have less, in order to accomplish more.

To help him, God allowed the flood waters of Hurricane Katrina to destroy all his worldly possessions. Ground zero; fresh start.

To his credit, he honestly admitted that within a short period of time, with insurance money, he and his wife had replaced everything. In fact, they had more than before their losses.

It's not easy to quit living large, and to choose living larger spiritually.

Environmentalists talk about your carbon footprint. Maybe we should talk about our carnal-footprint. A believer can, sadly, be carnal - giving in to the flesh. We can be saved but nevertheless live as if we were still dominated by fleshly desires. We need to eradicate our carnal-footprint.

Jdg 8:27 Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.

The original "ephod" was a vest that was worn by Israel's high priest. It had on it twelve precious stones - one for each of the tribes of Israel.

Scholars say it also had pockets within which were the mysterious Urim and Thummim. According to one source, they were "gemstones that were carried by the high priest of Israel on the ephod priestly garments. They were used by the high priest to determine God's will in some situations. Some propose that God would cause the Urim and Thummim to light up in varying patterns to reveal His decision."

Not only was Gideon acting like a king; he was in some sense acting like a priest - or at least someone with authority in discovering the will of God.

Whatever his intention, the Israelites treated it as an idol, and looked to it and not to the prescribed worship of the Lord.

It was an interesting idol in that it resembled something genuine that the Lord had given them. It serves as a reminder to us that we must never think the outward trappings of our walk with the Lord can excuse a heart that is not fixed on Jesus. The disciplines of the Christian life can become shallow, empty rituals.

We used to describe it as going through the motions without the emotions.

Jdg 8:28 Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon.

God is good. Even in the face of Gideon's blatant disregard for putting God first; and even as Israel was committing spiritual adultery with the ephod; God honored His word and gave them peace.

God's graciousness should not be confused with His blessing. I mean, you can be wealthy, and healthy, but not be anywhere near the will of God. The unsaved have wealth and health. His physical or material blessings are not always in synch with your spiritual life.

Jdg 8:29 Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.

Jerubbaal was the name the men of Israel gave Gideon when he destroyed the altar of Baal and its idol in his father's house, right after he was first called into serving the Lord. It was his superhero name, proclaiming that Baal could not contend with Gideon.

The DC movie franchise of superheroes calls them MetaHumans. As Jerubbaal, he was thought of as some sort of MetaHuman.

He chose to live like a king, and like a priest - and like a larger-than-life hero.

Jdg 8:30 Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives.

Gideon was in demand among the ladies - MetaHuman as he was. His "many wives" were certainly not in God's will. He did not need an ephod to determine that.

Jdg 8:31 And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.

Multiple wives were not enough. Gideon needed a girl in Shechem. As a concubine, any children born to her had no legal rights to any inheritance. Nevertheless Gideon named him "Abimelech," which means, *my father is king*.

I'll give you a sneak peek into chapter nine. Abimelech is going to murder sixty-nine of Gideon's other sons, in an attempt to become Israel's sole ruler.

Jdg 8:32 Now Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Jdg 8:33 So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god.

No one is quite sure exactly who or what Baal-Berith was. These people made-up gods, and ways to worship, to suit their lusts.

The point is, God withheld discipline until Gideon was dead, for the sake of His word.

If you are in some sin, be thankful for God's grace. But don't think you are getting away with something. God is graciously giving you time to repent.

Jdg 8:34 Thus the children of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side;

God went to crazy lengths to show it was Him Who had delivered them, for their own good and for His deserved glory. They honored Gideon, and continued in idolatry.

I like the phrasing, "remember the Lord." We need to do it more. If you got saved later in life, do you often "remember the Lord," how He saved you? What He saved you from?

Is it not an incredible thing to be delivered from sin? To be safe from Death and Hell? To know mankind's future, and your own future as a person who will be raised from the dead or raptured to live with the Lord in glory?

Jdg 8:35 nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.

The relationship between Gideon and Israel wasn't genuine. It was tenuous; it was shallow.

In the Lord, we can have deep, genuine relationships. That's because we have within us His Holy Spirit. He unites us; He sheds His love in our hearts, so we love one another.

He also provides us with the power to forgive one another, and to be reconciled with one another, after inevitable faults.

Gideon died, and was buried. He did not end well.

Remember the pizza ads, "What do you want on your Tombstone?" During a public execution, the executioner would ask "What do you want on your tombstone?," and the accused would reply along the lines of "pepperoni and cheese."

A Tombstone pizza would then be summoned.

In Gideon's case, it wasn't pepperoni and cheese. It was earrings and pendants; it was idolatry and polygamy; it would lead to fratricide.

If it weren't for him being mentioned in Hebrews chapter eleven as a member of God's Hall of Faith, I would doubt Gideon was even saved.

He was; but what a terrible legacy.

By nature of my profession I've been to more funerals than most of you. I've heard many, many eulogies. The worldly things some people are remembered for can be so terribly sad, considering they are now passed into eternity.

One such individual, most likely unsaved, was remembered most for having the most meticulously manicured lawn and yard on the block. Once it was mentioned, each subsequent eulogy added to it. How incredibly sad.

So I ask us all: "What do you want on *your* tombstone?"

It's up to you, by your choices, to carve-out your legacy. Let it be spiritual. Remember the Lord, and be remembered as His servant.