

E100 6.1 Gideon (and the Judges)
(Family Service address with PowerPoint)
Judges 6 -- 7. March 2011

When we think of the biblical character of Gideon we tend to focus on the great battle at the end of the story -- where Gideon was told by God to reduce his army from 32,000 to 300 men and use a form of psychological warfare -- with trumpets and torches. These, suddenly revealed at night, convinced the soldiers in the enemy camp that they were surrounded by a far superior number. There was confusion in the camp with the enemy slaying each other.

It was an unusual way to win a battle. Hence when in 1900 a group of American businessmen wanted to do something unusual to spread the gospel, they called themselves The Gideons. Their unusual idea was to place a Bible in every hotel room in the world. So far they have distributed 1.6 billion Bibles!

But back to the biblical Gideon.

I want to focus not on that last battle but on his first conflict -- which was with... his own people.

Gideon was told to cut down the foreign idols in the village temple and replace them with an altar to Yahweh -- the God of Israel.

After all the warnings and instructions which God gave through Moses concerning having no other gods but him, it seems incredible how quickly the Israelites had turned away from Yahweh. This is the sad story of the whole book of Judges. It describes a repeating cycle of events >>>

The people achieve peace and prosperity in the promised land -- -- but they then turn away from God to other gods -- -- God allows their enemies to trouble them -- -- the people repent and call out to God for help -- -- he sends someone to save them -- (Gideon or Samson or Deborah (yes, a woman leader!) are three of the many mentioned in this book) -- -- the people throw off their enemies, all is peaceful again -- -- the people again turn away from God. And so it repeats.

So Gideon's first task is to bring the Israelites back to God. He is called to be "counter cultural" -- to challenge the culture of his time. Not to follow everyone else, not to go along with the flow, but to do what was right in God's eyes.

Britain today has many similarities with Gideon's time. The phrase repeated in Judges that "each man did what was right in his own eyes", could equally apply to our culture. We have turned away from God. We are largely a secular society. And even the secularists cannot deny that our society is going downhill.

The question is -- what are the Christians doing about it?

Jesus told his disciples that they should be "the light of the world". That is they should be a lead to the rest of society. Anticipating our tendencies he also said "no one who has a light puts it under a bucket". The problem is -- we do!

It's been said that many Christians seem to keep their faith in a box marked "Sunday Morning". They don't really see how it should relate to the rest of the week and how it should relate to society around them. I've also read that there is a tendency for many Christians to "view church as a leisure activity rather than a whole life commitment."

As a result we are just not having the impact on society that we should have.

So how do we take our faith out of the box.

Some -- ideas >>>

Do we speak of Christian values only when we are in the company of Christians? Is there sellotape across our lips when we mix with our friends at work or at school or in our leisure activities, clubs and meetings? Do we remain quiet and give our tacit agreement even though what is being said goes against our Christian morality? There was only one Gideon, but there are nearly 2 million churchgoers in this country. So why, for example is it now commonly accepted that living together (instead of marriage) is okay! Why haven't 2 million people repeatedly said that this is wrong, in God's eyes. (quite apart from the statistics that show that it doubles the chance of any future marriage breaking down) PS but remember -- we are not called to judge others -- just to warn them.

Are we concerned what our children are taught, or not taught, at school when it comes to their spiritual and moral education? Do we even know what values they are taught? Have you ever questioned the head or the teachers about this? I checked the other day. Six years after being at one of our church schools, the pupils in the top-class could not tell me more than four of the 10 Commandments.

Are we happy to accept anything that appears on our TV screens? Do we know who to write or e-mail to when sub Christian material is broadcast. We may be indignant but what actual action do we take?

Do we only get involved in politics once every five years, when we vote? Have you considered joining a political party and getting involved in the selection of the candidate and influencing the policies?

You can probably think of many more examples.

The message from Gideon is that he was brave enough to be counter cultural. How brave are we for God?