

JUDGES 8:22-35
BE CAREFUL!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Judges chapter 8 as we continue our study through the book of Judges. And, as you have seen, we have been taking our time going through this book because there is so much that the Lord has for us, lessons He wants to show us here in Judges.

And I realize it is not an easy book to go through, but the treasures that God has for us make it so important for us to search and dig out these treasures.

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the Judge, Gideon. And we saw Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress when the Lord called him to deliver the children of Israel from the hands of the Midianites.

Gideon was afraid, hiding from the enemy and trying to thresh wheat where there was no wind to carry the chaff away and separate it from the wheat.

And yet, God saw Gideon as a “**mighty man of valor!**” Judges 6:12.

And yes, Gideon had all kinds of excuses why he couldn't do this work, but God was patient with Gideon and continued to work with Gideon, drawing out his faith, and in the end, we see that Gideon did deliver the children of Israel from the bondage that they were in by the hands of the Midianites!

And, of course, the Lord delivered the children of Israel, but He worked through Gideon and 300 men to defeat 135,000 Midianites. There is no way in the world that the children of Israel should have won that battle but God was fighting for them and He gave them this victory. All they had to do was walk by faith and trust that what the Lord had promised them, He was more than able to bring to pass, and He did!

And in the end, it was God who received the glory for this victory, as it should be in all we do for the Lord!

Listen to what took place starting in Judges chapter 7, beginning in verse 16, **“Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, ‘Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!””** So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they **blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers - they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing - and they cried, ‘The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!’** And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the Lord set every man’s sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued

the Midianites. Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, ‘Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan.’ Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.” Judges 7:16-25.

What an amazing victory. What a great victory. I am sure Gideon and the children of Israel were so pumped up after this, and that is where the danger can come in and rob us of the victory.

And we see examples of this in the Bible. Let me share this with you and you will see what I mean and what we will be looking at this morning. We are told,

All of us have seen people who started well but finish badly. It’s always sad, and it rarely leaves others unaffected, especially if they have been leaders.

The Old Testament has several examples, most notably King Saul and King Solomon.

Saul crossed a fateful line when he moved into presumption and disobedience and thought that sacrifice and offering could make up for it (1 Samuel 13:8-15a; 15:17-26).

Solomon did likewise when he thought that making marriage alliances with surrounding nations was the way to long-term peace and prosperity for Israel instead of a heart that remained true to the Lord his God (1 Kings 11:1-5).

Gideon perhaps comes less readily to mind in this connection, but unfortunately his life follows a similar pattern.

In the previous chapter of this book we began with Gideon hiding from the enemy and threshing grain in a winepress and watched as his career unfolded step by step like a flower bursting into bloom as confidence in God rather than fear took hold and became the controlling principle of his life.

As that development reached its climax, what we saw was Gideon at his best – the phase of his life that made it most understandable why he turns up in Hebrews 11 as a hero of faith.

In this chapter, however, what develops is something rather different, as we are about to see.

- Barry G. Webb, Judges and Ruth – God in Chaos, p. 149

I have called this study – ***BE CAREFUL!***

And the reason for that is because after God gives to us a great victory in life, whatever that may be, we can lose sight of who gave us the victory and we can take some of that glory away from God. We can, I guess, become ***PRIDEFUL!***

I have broken down the verses we will be looking at this morning here in Judges chapter 8 as follows:

THE RIGHT WORDS – JUDGES 8:22-23

THE WRONG ACTIONS – JUDGES 8:24-27

SPIRITUAL DECAY – JUDGES 8:28-32

APOSTASY – JUDGES 8:33-35

With that as our introduction, let's begin reading in Judges chapter 8, beginning in verse 22 and let's see what the Lord has for us this morning as we look at this topic – ***BE CAREFUL!***

JUDGES 8**VERSES 22-23**

Gideon had just given the children of Israel a great victory over the Midianites, who had them in bondage for seven years. And even though it was only seven years, it was bad, very bad!

Listen to what life was like under the oppression of the Midianites. In Judges 6:2-6 we are told of what they did and how it affected the children of Israel. We are told, **“and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.”**

The children of Israel were hiding out in caves, and dens, in strongholds in the mountains so that the Midianites wouldn't steal away their food once it was harvested. It was so bad that there was no sustenance, no food left for the children of Israel. They even took their sheep and donkey's and thus, the children of Israel were greatly impoverished at the hands of the Midianites!

And now this great victory and what do they want to do with Gideon? They want to make him and the children of Gideon King over them!

And listen carefully to what Gideon tells them here in Judges 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.’”**

Make no mistake about it, Gideon said ***THE RIGHT WORDS!***

We see this with athletes, they have a great game or season, and everyone wants to make that person a superstar. He’s the best, no one else even comes close! And that is what we see here with the people wanting to make Gideon King!

And you can understand how they felt. Those were seven very long years of oppression and now they have been delivered by Gideon and thus, let’s exalt this man!

But Gideon understands that it is the Lord who not only gave them this great victory, but it is the Lord who is the One who rules over the children of Israel!

And I think the people wanted to have a ruler over them like the other nations did. They wanted a King to lead them, someone that they could follow. And, by the time we get to Samuel, they are going to get what they wanted.

In I Samuel we see that they demanded a King just like the other nations had. And what may have started out small here, ended up exploding by the time we get to I Samuel and God gives them what they desire, but that is not always a good thing, unless it is what God desires!

We see this played out for us in I Samuel 8:1-9 where we are told, **“Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.’ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us.’ So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day - with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods - so they are doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.”**

They asked for it and they got it, but in the end, it was not all they thought it would be!

I am not sure why we think that imitating the world is a good thing. It is not and you can read of King Saul and how he brought the nation down by his actions.

And we, like Gideon need to take a stand against that. The church today wants to imitate the world, be like the world, thinking that will make the world like us more, and it won't, and it is only a disaster when we try, when we compromise our faith to fit into the world or look like the world!

Let me show you what I mean and believe me, this is only the tip of the iceberg! Many churches today look like entertainment centers instead of places of worship. We build these buildings where our attention is drawn to the building instead of the Lord.

That was one of the things I appreciated about Pastor Chuck Smith, the sanctuary for Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa did not have anything that would draw your attention from hearing the Word of God being taught. Nothing to look at except the one who was teaching.

I remember some 30 plus years ago I went to Willow Creek and it was a beautiful building. And they had these glass windows from floor to ceiling and you could look out over a pond that they had. And during the service I found myself looking out the window, I was distracted.

And today, it is even worse out there. Let me show you what I mean as we are told, . . . Some of the user-friendly churches offer at least one service a week (often a midweek service) where a spoken message is the centerpiece. But even in those meetings the style is frequently psychological and motivational rather than biblical. Above all, the emphasis is on user-friendliness. I recently read through a stack of newspaper and magazine articles about the user-friendly phenomenon, and a common thread began to emerge. Here are some quotations from clippings describing the preaching in user-friendly churches:

- “There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible-thumping. Just practical, witty messages.”
- “Services at [the church featured in this article] have an informal feeling. You won’t hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners. The goal is to make them feel welcome, not drive them away.”

- “As with all clergymen [this pastor’s] answer is God – but he slips Him in at the end, and even then doesn’t get heavy. No ranting, no raving. No fire, no brimstone. He doesn’t even use the H-word. Call it Light Gospel. It has the same salvation as the Old Time Religion, but with a third less guilt.”
- “The sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short. You won’t hear a lot of preaching about sin and damnation and hell fire. Preaching here doesn’t sound like *preaching*. It is sophisticated, urbane [polished], and friendly talk. It breaks all the stereotypes.”
- “[The pastor] is preaching a very upbeat message. . . . It’s a salvationist message, but the idea is not so much being saved from the fires of hell. Rather, it’s being saved from meaninglessness and aimlessness in this life. It’s more of a soft-sell.” [Then it is not the salvation message. The salvation message is that we are sinners and need a Savior and Jesus came to save us from our sins, not from a meaningless or aimless life!]
- “The idea, [the pastor] says, is to get people through the front doors, then disprove the stereotype of the sweating, loosened necktied, Bible-thumbing preacher who yells and screams about burning in hell for eternity.”

So the new rules may be summed up as follows: *Be clever, informal, positive, brief, and friendly. Never loosen your necktie. Never let them see you sweat. And never use the H-word.*

- John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, p. 47

And let me say this. We not only see this in the user-friendly or seeker-friendly churches. This is the pattern for many, many churches today! We see it in Emergent Churches, the Purpose Driven Churches, liberal churches and-so-on!

What I am going to share with you is from several years ago and what may have been a church here and a church there doing this, now many once again are buying into becoming like the world. We are told,

Just how far will the church go in competing with Hollywood? A large church in the southwestern United States has installed a half-million-dollar special-effects system that can produce smoke, fire, sparks, and laser lights in the auditorium.

The church sent staff members to study live special effects at Bally's Casino in Las Vegas. The pastor ended one service by ascending to "heaven" via invisible wires that drew him up out of sight while the choir and orchestra added a musical accompaniment to the smoke, fire, and light show.

It was just a typical Sunday show for that pastor. "He packs his church with such special effects as . . . cranking up a chain saw and toppling a tree to make a point . . . the biggest Fourth of July fireworks display in town and a Christmas service with a rented elephant, kangaroo and zebra. The Christmas show features 100 clowns with gifts for the congregation's children."

- John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, p. 70

And one last one and then I will show you what one person warned the church, and it is about this very thing. We are told,

One recent best-selling book advocating pragmatic church-growth ideas included this suggestion:

Remember how the corner tavern used to be the place where the men of the neighborhood would congregate to watch major sports events, like the World Series or championship boxing matches? While times have changed, that same concept can still be used to great impact by the Church. Most churches have a large hall or auditorium which could be used for special gatherings built around major media events – sports, political debates, entertainment specials and the like.

- John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, p. 83

I am sorry, but if you are bringing people into the church to watch a football game or whatever, you have missed the point.

This is not what the church is to be about. We are to be about worshiping the Lord, preaching and teaching the Word of God so that we may grow in our relationship with Him and be guided by Him, we are to be equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, building up the body of Christ and not entertaining people!

Remember what we are told in Acts 2:42, this is what the church was and is to be about, **“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”**

They preached and taught the Word of God – the Apostle’s doctrine!

They had fellowship with each other – Koinonia!

They shared in communion together – the breaking of bread!

And they prayed together – corporate prayer!

This is the verse that the Lord had given me when I came up here to be the pastor at Calvary Chapel of Manitowoc. And, it was the first message that I gave on a Sunday morning as the pastor of this church.

And I have not deviated from that over the years. This is what the early church was about, and it is what we are to be about today.

And yet, many have lost sight of this and the church, instead of being a place to come and worship God and hear from Him, the church has become an entertainment center!

And we did not heed the warnings. In fact, the warnings have gone unnoticed or many just don't care. Listen to what one pastor had to say about this. He wrote,

The fact is that many would like to unite church and stage, cards and prayer, dancing and sacraments. If we are powerless to stem this torrent, we can at least warn men of its existence, and entreat them to keep out of it.

When the old faith is gone, and enthusiasm for the gospel is extinct, it is no wonder that people seek something else in the way of delight. Lacking bread, they feed on ashes: rejecting the way of the Lord, they run greedily in the path of folly.

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Another Word Concerning the Down-Grade, The Sword and The Trowel (August 1887), p. 398

He nails that doesn't he! And do you know who wrote this? No, it was not some pastor from our day or even 20, 30 or 40 years ago. That was written by Charles Spurgeon and he wrote that some 133 years ago!

I guess we didn't take heed to the warning and we are now reaping what has been sown! And it all boils down to what Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, that *“in many ways it is the departure of the Church from preaching that is responsible in a large measure for the state of modern society. . . . The Church, having abandoned her real task, has left humanity more or less to its own devices.”*

How true that is. We are to be salt and light in this dark world that is rotting away. And yet, because of compromise, because we want to be like the world, we are not making a difference in this world!

And as you look at all that is going on you wonder what is next and I am almost afraid at what it will be!

Gideon used the right words here and he told the people that they need to have the Lord rule over them, not man. Don't become like the world, focus on the Lord and let Him guide you in all you do, let Him be the King in your life!

Now let me also say this. Yes, there is a lot of good we see in Gideon here as he had ***THE RIGHT WORDS*** for the situation.

And yes, Gideon told the people he did not want to be their King and yet that is not how he lived. His words may have been very humble, but his actions were definitely not!

As we will see, he also will demonstrate ***THE WRONG ACTIONS*** as we read on!

VERSES 24-27

Look at what we see here. Gideon told them, **“I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.”** Judges 8:23.

And right after that, look at what he is doing. He is asking for all this gold and robes and things that were taken from the enemy, and he is going to make them into an ephod!

And when you total it all up, Gideon received over 50 pounds of gold besides the robes of the Kings they killed!

He had amassed quite a fortune here.

And yes, he served the Lord but now he was living at a level he shouldn't have been living.

How can I say that?

Because he was living like a King, the position he said that he didn't want to have because the Lord was to be the King in Israel.

In other words, his words did not match up to his deeds or the things that he was doing!

That is so important for us to understand and apply to our lives. It is easy to talk about the Lord, but how about our walk? Yes, that is a lot harder because self gets in the way.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, spends eleven chapters speaking on doctrine, and then, beginning in Romans chapter 12, and through the rest of the letter Paul speaks about applying that doctrine to our lives or how we are to walk.

In fact, in Romans 12:1-2 Paul wrote, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”**

In other words, since you have all the right doctrine, so you know what God desires, place yourself on the altar of sacrifice and give your life over to God that He may direct you in all the things that you do and say!

We see this in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. He spends three powerful chapters with doctrine, all that God has for us and then, beginning in Ephesians chapter 4 and through the rest of the letter he talks about our walk or the application of these doctrines to our lives.

Paul put it like this in Ephesians 4:1-3, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

And listen to how The Amplified Bible puts these verses here in Ephesians, **“I THEREFORE, the prisoner for the Lord, appeal to and beg you to walk (lead a life) worthy of the [divine] calling to which you have been called [with behavior that is a credit to the summons to God's service, Living as becomes you] with complete lowliness of mind (humility) and meekness (unselfishness, gentleness, mildness), with patience, bearing with one another and making allowances because you love one another. Be eager and strive earnestly to guard and keep the harmony and oneness of [and produced by] the Spirit in the binding power of peace.”**

Just because you have the right information is meaningless if you don't apply that information to your life. I hope that makes sense.

If not or if you are not sure about this, let me give you an illustration to help you understand what I am talking about here.

There have been times, I won't tell you how many, that I have been traveling using my GPS. And I put in the correct address. I have all the right information. There is no problem with the information that I put into my GPS.

And then I start on my journey or maybe I should say adventure, because I never know where I will end up!

And as I am traveling my GPS tells me to take this road. "Take the next exit!" Again, all the right information is in the GPS system.

But, because I know better than my GPS, I refuse to listen, and I go my own way. Now, my older GPS system was patient with me, and it would tell me ***"Recalculating!"***

But I think after about ten times or so of it saying, ***"Recalculating!"*** I think it was getting angry with me. The tone of her voice, the GPS seemed to be getting mad. Maybe it was just me, but I swear if it could slap me, it would have! But that is another story.

Now here's the thing. I know what my GPS is saying, but I again don't agree with it. So I don't listen and I continue on. And, once again I hear that word, ***"Recalculating!"***

Okay, now I am getting irritated with my GPS and I am tired of hearing, ***"Recalculating!"***

So I turn off my GPS and go my own way, the wrong way. There is a way that seems right to Joe, but in the end, it is the way of destruction or getting lost!

Thus, after humbling myself and admitting I was wrong, some 20 miles or so down the road now, I turn back on the GPS and I get the correct directions, which were there all along, I just chose not to listen to them.

Gideon knew what the Lord wanted but instead of listening to the Lord, he went his own way, did his own thing and in the end, it would lead to death and destruction!

Look at what happens here. Gideon makes this ephod and he sets it up in the city of Ophrah.

Now this was not a linen ephod that the priests would wear, but this one was made of gold.

Why did Gideon do this?

We are not sure, but some speculate that the Tabernacle was in Shiloh, which was located in Ephraim, those troublemakers that were complaining before.

And thus, maybe Gideon wanted some prestige, wanted to show the people of Ephraim that he had a gold ephod, and this was not only a snare to him and his family but also the people of Manasseh!

Make no mistake about it, God wants the focus and the worship to be about Him and not the object that was made or the person who made it.

Let me give you an example of what I mean and how people today are still playing the harlot with God.

There is this ancient statue of St. Peter, portrayed as he gives a blessing and preaches, while holding the keys to the kingdom of heaven and this statue is famous throughout the world.

This statue of St. Peter is located at St. Peter's Basilica within the Vatican.

Some scholars have attributed it to Arnolfo di Cambio (1245-1302).

On this ancient bronze statue, St. Peter has his right toes worn down by centuries of pilgrims who traditionally touch the foot.

And look at what we see here with Gideon. This man of faith was leading the children of Israel into idolatry!

Gideon knew what the Lord desired of him, he even told the people what the Lord wanted, but in the end, ***“Recalculating!”*** He did not listen to the Lord, his actions showed that, even though he knew the truth!

Make no mistake about it, this man of faith started out with a humble beginning but now was living a life of a King!

Yes, it is important to start this race of faith well, but it is also important to finish well, and Gideon is not finishing well, not at all.

I have been in enough running races and I have seen this played out many times.

The race begins and there are those runners who start out like they were shot out of a gun. They are far ahead of everyone. But again, the race just started.

And early on in my racing, and even today I have to be careful, I would go with them, or try to go with them. And that is a big mistake. Like I have said, it is important to start out well, but it is also important to finish well.

And as the race continued on, you would see these runners who started out too fast, slowing down and before long, you were passing them by. And many times, they are even walking because they are so out of breath.

The Apostle Paul was a man who started the race strong and throughout the race he was battered, it was tough, but he hung in there and, at the end of his life we see that he finished strong.

Paul reminded Timothy of this, trying to encourage this young pastor as he told him, **“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”** II Timothy 4:6-8

Yes, it is not easy, but we need to follow the direction that the Lord has shown us in His Word. We can't depart from it. It is a battle; it is a fight until the end. And I think we all want to finish that race strong. I think we all want to keep the faith that has been entrusted to us and not give up!

Let me share this with you about finishing strong. We are told,

I always read the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles with a sense of trepidation. I know these historical books fairly well, but every time I read of a new king taking the throne, I dread the inevitable assessment of his reign: Was he faithful or disobedient? Did he follow God or turn aside to false gods?

Asa was one of the good kings. He ruled Judah for 41 years and “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 15:11). His rule was successful, his reign was honoring to God. He fought and won a great war against the Egyptians because he called out to God and had faith in his deliverance: “The LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled” (2 Chronicles 14:12).

He enacted key religious reforms: “He took away the foreign altars and the high places and broke down the pillars and cut down the [wooden images] and commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment” (2 Chronicles 14:3-4).

Perhaps most difficult of all, he removed his [grand]mother from her honorific position because of her stubborn idolatry. He was a good king to the end. Actually, not quite. He was a good king almost to the end.

In the 36th year of his reign, almost 90 percent of the way through, he had new trouble with Baasha, the king of Israel. This time, though, Asa did not rely on God but took matters into his own hands.

Instead of crying out for deliverance as he had done before, he acted on his own, emptying the national treasury to bribe the Syrians to turn on Israel.

Then, when he became ill, he neglected to seek God’s help but relied instead on physicians.

For his lack of reliance upon God, he faced divine anger. Now, he was told, he would have constant warfare until the end of his reign and would also be struck with a crippling disease.

Asa ruled well for so long and then collapsed. For 36 long years he was faithful, for five short years he was not.

As I ponder Asa, I consider the sorrow of finishing poorly and the joy of finishing well. I consider the terrible reality that a man can live a good life almost to the end, then falter, stumble, and even fall.

This is why we so often hear of Christian leaders who had long and faithful ministries, who stood firm in the face of falsehood, who endured trials and persecution, but who then seemed to give way so much in their later years. We also hear of men who remained married to their wives for decades, then walked away near the end.

What a tragedy. My friend, if you are going to run to win, you need to finish strong.

A good long-distance runner knows the importance of planning his race. Even as he crosses the starting line he is already considering how he will cross the finish line.

Even as he takes his first easy step, he has planned how he will take his last grueling step.

A marathon runner may run 25 strong miles, but if he stops before his 26th, what good does that do him? Anyone can start a race, but only training and planning can prepare him to finish it. There are no prizes for almost crossing the finish line.

In that sense, the final mile is the most important of all, the last steps are even more important than the first. A strong finish can make up for a weak start, but dropping out before the finish line negates even the most amazing early progress. Any imposter can start a race, but only a true athlete will finish it.

As a Christian man, you are already running the race of life, and I trust you are running in such a way that you will be victorious. Paul says, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it" (1 Corinthians 9:24). To obtain that prize, you will need to run to the very end. You will need to cross that finish line.

And to do that, you will need to plan your race. You will need to plan the ways you will run today so you can continue to run in the difficult days ahead. Far better a weak start with a strong finish than a strong start followed by a complete collapse. No runner regrets finishing too strong, but many regret finishing too weak.

You are not competing against other people in this race but against the deadly enemies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. . . .

- <https://bit.ly/2LDnoSn>

For Gideon, he started strong, but here, in the end we see that he is not finishing strong. Because of his actions, the things he was doing, “**. . . all Israel played the harlot with it [the ephod] there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.**” Judges 8:27.

So Gideon had ***THE RIGHT WORDS***, but then he had ***THE WRONG ACTIONS!***

And that leads us to the next point, ***SPIRITUAL DECAY!***

VERSES 28-32

Now, as you read this you may be thinking, “***What in the world is he talking about, spiritual decay? It says here that the land had rest for forty years in the days of Gideon. So how is there this spiritual decay?***”

Again, remember what we read in Judges 8:27, “**. . . all Israel played the harlot with it [the ephod] there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.**”

Then what about this rest for forty years?

Yes, the land had rest during the days of Gideon for forty years, physical rest! But spiritually speaking, he was a failure as he was leading his people away from the Lord by his actions. They were watching him and following his example as their Judge.

Not only was this gold ephod a problem but he had a harem, many wives.

The ideal, the rule is one man married to one woman and that is established for us in the book of Genesis!

And in the New Testament Jesus expounds on this as He tells us, **“And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”** Matthew 19:4-6.

Jesus takes us back to Genesis to show us what marriage is all about, one man and one woman!

And with all these women that he married, were born seventy children!

And he also had one son by a concubine in Shechem and as we read on in Judges, we will see that this one son will kill all the sons of Gideon!

Now, remember we talked about Gideon saying he did not want to be King and yet, his actions spoke otherwise.

This son he has with this concubine is called ***“Abimelech”*** and it means, ***“My father, a King.”***

Hey, I thought Gideon didn’t want to be King?

Yes, like I have said, he did say those words, but his actions spoke contrary to what he said!

Again, when people look at our lives may they see our words and deeds working together to glorify God!

Make no mistake about it, Gideon was a man used mightily by God but over time, he let success, he let riches, he let prominence bring him down.

I think Cundall put it correctly when he wrote, “Perhaps it is easier to honour God in some courageous action in the limelight of a time of national emergency than it is to honour Him consistently in the ordinary, everyday life, which requires a different kind of courage.”

Let me give to you this insight on Gideon that Warren Wiersbe shares with us. He wrote, Gideon missed a great opportunity to bring reformation and perhaps revival to the land. He had torn down his father’s idols, but there were many households in Israel that were still devoted to Baal, and those idols needed to be destroyed as well.

The great victory over Midian gave Gideon good reason to call the nation back to the Lord and obedience to His law. But instead of using the occasion for God’s glory, he used it for his own profit, and the nation eventually lapsed into sin once again.

With his vast wealth and his great national reputation, Gideon probably thought that his children were well provided for, but just the opposite proved true.

Sixty-nine of his seventy sons were killed by their half-brother who himself was slain by a woman dropping a stone on his head.

There is no security apart from the will of God. Had Gideon practiced Matthew 6:33, subsequent events might have been radically different.

[But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.]

What caused Gideon’s spiritual decline? I think it was pride. Before the battle against Midian, Gideon humbly depended on the Lord.

During the “mopping up” operations, however, he became authoritative and vindictive. When he refused the kingship, he sounded pious (“the Lord shall rule over you”), but I have a suspicion that he had a hidden agenda in his heart.

You don't find Gideon honoring the Lord or calling the people together to make a new covenant to obey the Lord.

Gideon started out as a servant, but now he was an important celebrity. The result was decline for him, his family, and his nation.

- Warren Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – OT, p. 450

May we not only start out strong, but also finish the race strong because people are watching us and as we compromise our faith, we are leading them down that dangerous path as well.

If you don't agree with that or don't believe it, then just look at our next point –

APOSTASY!

VERSES 33-35

After the death of Gideon, the people fell back into idolatry and into confusion.

In fact, Gideon and his children, the ones they wanted to make as their King, they could care less about.

Listen again to what we read here, **“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; nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.”** Judges 8:34-35.

Interesting how the hearts of the people can change so quickly.

And what a sad picture we see here. They made Baal-Berith their god.

This name means ***“Baal of the Covenant.”***

Wow, how far they have fallen. Instead of God being their covenant God, they looked to this pagan god, this worthless idol.

What a tragic ending but the people were only following Gideon who went after money and success and women, and thus, the children of Israel went after Baal!

Before the victory, Gideon was humble, he was meek. After the victory, it seems that pride brought him down.

Andrew Bonar put it like this, "Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle." And sometimes even more so after the victory because we can become prideful and pride will bring us down.

We need to not only start well, but we need to finish well this race of faith! We need to keep our eyes upon Jesus, who is the Author and the Finisher of our faith.

And I am so thankful that Jesus is not only the Author of my faith, writing the book about my life since He knows all that I will do, but He is also the One who will see me home, He is the Finisher of my faith!

Look at what we have seen this morning here in Judges chapter 8.

We have seen Gideon use ***THE RIGHT WORDS!*** He understood that the Lord was the one on the throne and as much as the people wanted to make him King, he refused their offer and told them to let the Lord be the One to rule their lives. That was good! But those were just words!

But words are empty if they are not based in what we do or our actions and thus, we see here with Gideon, that he had ***THE WRONG ACTIONS!*** Yes, Gideon said the right words, but his actions showed that he wanted the glory, he wanted the riches, he wanted the women, he wanted to be like a King and by his actions, making this gold ephod, he lead the people away from God, including his own family!

Thus, we see the ***SPIRITUAL DECAY*** that takes place next. Yes, physically the land had rest from their enemies for forty years but spiritually speaking, they were empty! And we see this reflected in all his actions.

And that, in the end, after Gideon's death, lead the people into full blown ***APOSTASY!***

When the Lord is no longer on the throne of a person's heart, or a nations heart, there will be a falling away from the truths of God found in the Word of God and there will be darkness in the life of the individual and in the nation, as we are seeing today!

May we be a light in this dark world and may we finish the race of faith strong, looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith!