

## What in the World Am I Doing Here?

### Judges 6:1-16

Gideon The Cowardly Lion

#### **Introduction**

For centuries, people have tried to determine our purpose for being here. I mean, here we are, a tiny speck in a vast universe that cannot even be measured. What significance could we possibly have in such a massive setting? Compared to our surroundings in the cosmos we might seem insignificant indeed. The atheistic evolutionists say that we are just a cosmic accident, the result of an explosion. If that is the case, and we have truly just evolved from a few simple cells in a slime pool, then why do we search for a purpose? Other animals don't do that. They just live to eat, drink, and reproduce. We are different. We are constantly in search of meaning, for purpose. If we are simply the most highly evolved species on this planet, then it would be reasonable that we would have come to grips with our meaningless existence, but instead the opposite is true. We WANT our lives to matter. We are not content to just live and die. We desire that our lives mean something. Where does this desire come from? From our Creator, that's Who.

You see, we are not here by accident or some random occurrence. We have been DESIGNED for a DESTINY. GOD has a plan and a purpose for each of us. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to find just what that plan and purpose is. In his best selling book "The Purpose Driven Life", Pastor Rick Warren teaches that in order to find our purpose we must first realize our place. He begins his book by saying, "It's not about you". This is a very provocative statement with which to begin a book that is intended to help us find our life's true meaning, but it is a true statement nonetheless. If God was truly here before us and has specifically designed us, then it stands to reason that we can only find meaning for our existence by directing our attention to Him, rather than ourselves. He is our "manufacturer" so to speak, and The Bible is our "Instruction Manual". Apart from our Creator and His instructions, we will NEVER find what we were intended for in the first place! Without God, life is empty and meaningless. Oh, you may find some degree of success on this little planet, but when your life comes to an end, you will discover that all your efforts have been in vain. Don't believe me? Then just read the **book of Ecclesiastes** and see what the most powerful and richest man who ever lived had to say about his great success (**Ecclesiastes 1:14**). King Solomon, at the end of his life, realized that a life lived in the pursuit of "stuff", instead of a life lived in the pursuit of God, was as distasteful and unsatisfying as having a mouthful of sand. Jesus promised to satisfy our thirst, if we would only come to Him as our source of life giving water (**John 4:14**). A life apart from Jesus will never satisfy, nor will it have any lasting value. I don't know about you this morning, but I want to live a life of purpose! I don't want to "die thirsty".

Gideon (Pronounce Gid-own in Hebrew, meaning "one who cuts down") was a nobody. At least HE thought so. He was from a poor family and had absolutely no social status among his people whatsoever. No one in his town would have ever had a crisis and asked, "What would Gideon do?". He thought that it was his lot in life to get up each morning and work the fields so his family could eat, and then go to bed that night only to get up and repeat that endless cycle until they lowered him into the ground. Any ambitions or dreams that Gideon may have had for himself had long since been swallowed up by the everyday realities of living in a sinful world. To say he was miserable would have been an understatement. No, after long and grueling hours slaving in the hot sun to provide for his family while being under the constant threat of the Midianite hordes that were sweeping throughout the country stealing everything that they could get their greedy hands on, Gideon was most likely just numb to the idea of life with

a purpose. He was in daily survival mode. If he lived to see the sunrise, it would only bring a new dawn of anxiety. A life lived in this fashion will age a man before his time. Gideon had to have been exhausted when God appeared to him that fateful day. It was a day in which Gideon would find his life's true calling. It was the day that he learned that God was BEFORE him, God was WITH him, and God was FOR him.

## **I AM BEFORE YOU**

The story of Gideon begins with God, as it should. The children of Israel had once again turned their backs on God. Why is it that we think that we can live a meaningful life apart from our Heavenly Father? The Israelites had decided that the gods of their neighbors were good enough for them. After all, if they compromised the way that they worshipped wouldn't that make it easier to fit in with their hostile neighbors? What they did not understand was that God had specifically selected the nation of Israel to bring the Messiah into the world to save the people from sin. God had determined this course of action to save a fallen world before He had even said "Let there be light" in Genesis! Just read Revelation 13:8, and you will see that Jesus coming to die for the sins of mankind was ALWAYS the plan. God foreknew that sin would enter the world through Adam, and yet He created mankind anyway. God was here before the world came into being. He always had a plan, and He would make certain that NOTHING could hinder that plan. If Israel had been allowed to follow after the gods of the Canaanites, then Jesus would have not been able to come into the world as a descendant of Abraham as God had promised (Genesis 12:1-3).

God had no choice but to punish Israel for her "wandering eye". They had forsaken Him, so He withdrew His protection from them and allowed the Midianites to plunder the nation. The Midianites were actually also descendants of Abraham. Apparently, after Abraham's wife Sarah died, he became quite the ladies man at the ripe old age of 140! He took a wife named Keturah (along with a few girlfriends) and fathered some kids. Midian was one of those boys. Poor old Abe didn't have a lot of success at raising sons with the exception of Isaac. Of course, when you're 140 years old, who feels like being a parent? I'm 53, and I'm pretty sure I'd lose it, if Sandi were to hand me another "bundle of joy"! But I digress. The Midianites were a ruthless bunch of nomadic raiders who wandered around like locust, destroying what others had worked for. After seven years of their torture, the Israelites started redirecting their prayers to The One who could actually ANSWER them. God heard their cries and sent a prophet to warn them to return to the One True God (vs. 7-10).

This would be a good time to draw a clear distinction between the judgement of God and the discipline of God. When God sends judgment, it is the final payment for sin, but when God sends discipline, it is intended to get His people to turn from their sins. God allowed the Midianites to run roughshod over Israel so that Israel would remember Him and turn back to Him. The Bible teaches us that Christ disciplines those that He loves (Hebrews 12:6). If you are only sorry for your sins after you get caught and not when The Holy Spirit convicts and disciplines you, then I hate to tell you this, but you might NOT be a child of God! Those who belong to God will feel His discomfort long before anyone else knows that there is a problem. Godly sorrow comes from being disciplined by God, and it will bring us to repentance. If you are only sorry when you get caught, then you are not being led by The Holy Spirit of God (2 Corinthians 7:10). If God doesn't correct you when you do wrong, it is a very serious indicator that you do not belong to Him. Just as He punished the Israelites for their rebellion, He will punish us to get us back on track as well. God had a plan, and He would see it through to completion. Everything starts with God's plan, or as Pastor Warren would say, "It's not about you".

## **I AM WITH YOU**

When The Angel of The LORD first appeared to Gideon, the poor farmer was hiding in a wine press threshing wheat in hopes the Midianites wouldn't see him and steal his crop (**vs.11**). In those days, if you wanted to thresh wheat, you would go to a hilltop and throw the wheat into the air so that the wind would catch it and blow away the chaff. Grapes were always taken to a wine press usually located at the bottom of a hill. No one wants to carry heavy grapes up a hill. Gideon was basically down in a hole in the lowest part of the farm, hoping that no one would see him there. Why? Because he was afraid, that's why! It's almost impossible to sift wheat down in a hole like that by the way, because there's no wind down there! When Gideon threw that wheat into the air, the chaff would separate and get all over him, down the back of his shirt, in his hair, nose and mouth. It must have been completely miserable. That is what life is like when you are not living according to God's purpose. Miserable. Poor Gideon had no earthly idea of the greatness that was his destiny if he would only surrender himself to the ONE who created him!

If you don't believe that The Lord has a sense of humor, then just look at what He says when he sees Gideon down in that hole. **"The Lord is with you mighty warrior!"** Now you gotta admit that THAT is hilarious. Here is this coward down in a hole, and God appears and greets him like a war hero! In the Old Testament, when you see the words, "The Angel of The Lord" what you actually have is called a "Theophany" (Manifestation of God). The word Malak in Hebrew used here for "angel" is actually messenger. Jesus came to earth as a "messenger" from God. In fact He WAS God. The Angel of The Lord who appears in the Old Testament is none other than Christ Himself! It is important not to miss the fact that Jesus came to Gideon and called him a mighty warrior. Of course anyone could see that Gideon was not at the time anything but a frightened farmer, but God saw Gideon as who he would become, not as who he was! God looks at us much the same way. If God is with us, then the possibilities are endless. The God who made us knows EXACTLY what we were made to be. He did not make Gideon to be a cowardly farmer. He made him to be the commander of a fearless army. God looks beyond what we have "settled for" and sees the potential that He has placed in us. Before Gideon had ever been born, God had predestined him to be in the right place, at the right time. You see, it was never about Gideon, it was about God!

The Bible teaches us that God sees us and has a plan for us before we are ever born (**Psalms 139:16-18**). Therefore, there are no "accidents" on this earth. If you are here, it is because God planned for you to be here, and that He has a purpose for your life. He sees you as what you can become not as what you are. Just as He spoke to Gideon and showed that He was with Him, He will be WITH you if you will only surrender your life to His will. One of the many names of Christ is "Emmanuel" meaning GOD with US! Not only was God BEFORE you, but He will be WITH you, if you are willing to let Him lead.

## **I AM FOR YOU**

Gideon was a man of many fears, questions, and doubts, and yet The Lord chose him and was incredibly patient with him. He could not understand how God would choose a nobody like him to fight on behalf of the people. After all he was the "least of his family" which was "the least of its tribe" (his words not mine - **vs. 15**). The Lord told Gideon to **"Go in the strength that he had"** and deliver the Israelite from the evil Midianites. But what strength did Gideon have? The full force and power of ALMIGHTY GOD, that's the power that he had! God was about to show Gideon just what one simple man could do when God was FOR him. I believe that it was Martin Luther who once said "One plus God is a majority". Truer words were never spoken. As the Bible says, **"If God is for us, then who can stand"**

**against us?" (Romans 8:31).** I have some wonderful news to tell you this morning. GOD IS FOR YOU! Don't be afraid. Go in His might.

The night before Jesus died upon the cross, He told His disciples that He was going away. Thomas became especially upset that evening and much like Gideon, he had lots of questions for the Lord. He wanted to know exactly where Jesus was going, and how could they possibly know how to get there. You see, Thomas wanted step by step directions that would lead him to where Jesus was going. Jesus calmly looked at Thomas and said "**I AM the Way...**". You see, Thomas was so caught up in knowing all the details, that he had failed to realize that all he needed to reach his destination was CHRIST. Do you want to find your life's true purpose and safely arrive at every destination that God has foreordained for you? Then repent of your sins and turn to Jesus. He will do the rest. You needn't worry about finding your way, for He IS YOUR WAY!

Do you feel like Gideon this morning? No matter what you do or how hard you try, this world seems to swallow up all your dreams and crush your hopes. Stop trying to find your purpose apart from Christ. Turn to Him and see what you were designed to be. You are not some insignificant speck in a vast universe. You were specifically designed by a Creator who loves you and longs to give you a purpose. You too can be a "mighty man" (or woman) of valor today. You just have to be willing to give up your plans for God's plan. Trust me, it's a good trade! God is BEFORE you, God is WITH you, and God is FOR you. And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!