Finish The Course

Judges 8:1-23

Introduction:

I. Gideon Finished the Job – 8:10-12

A. He Used The Same Men.

“Don’t change horses in the middle of the stream”

In 1944 the Democrats used that slogan. Dewey and the Republicans countered with,

“We are not amphibious, we want to get across”

Gideon stayed with the same tried and true group. They had passed the original tests. They had followed orders to do some strange things and then they stood still, watched and didn’t get in the way.

B. He Remembered God’s Plan – Judges 7:14

“Don’t try to improve on God”

“This *is* nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand ﻿﻿God has delivered Midian and the whole camp.”

C. He Used the Same Basic Strategy

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”

First he followed the Lord. The plan changed somewhat. They didn’t use pitchers, trumpets and torches. They did sneak up in the middle of the night. He routed the whole army and captured their two kings.

Well, that was easy! No, that was hard. Gideon finished in spite of some great obstacles.

II. He Finished in Spite of Criticism - 8:1-3

A. Ephraim Was Selfish – 8:1

“Then the Ephraimites said to him, “What have you done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against the Midianites?”

Ephraim was a proud tribe. Joshua was from Ephraim. Gideon was of the tribe of Manasseh. There was a great rivalry between them.

Background:

These are the sons of Joseph. In Genesis 49 Jacob adopted his two grandsons and gave them equal rights with his other sons. Manasseh was the older grandson, Ephraim the younger. When Jacob (Israel) (legally blind) was ready to bless them, Joseph (their father) put Manasseh opposite Jacob’s right hand, to receive the greater blessing. Jacob crossed his hands and gave the greater blessing to Ephraim.

Facts about the Call:

They knew of the impending invasion and of the army that was being assembled. Why didn’t they volunteer? Truth is they didn’t show up.

Psalm 78:9 says,

“The Ephraimites, armed with﻿﻿ the bow, turned back on the day of battle.”

This is probably a reference to the time of Eli when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines.

Gideon didn’t need selfishness, especially at a time like this.

B. Gideon was Selfless – 8:2-3

Gideon could have started another fight.

Instead, tried diplomacy:

“What have I done now in comparison with you? (8:2a)

“Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? (8:2b)

Meaning:

The vintage of Abiezer -- the 1st attack of Gideon.

The gleanings of Ephraim -- capturing of the the Midian captains, Oreb and Zeeb.

With that he calmed their anger and preserved the victory. Gideon understood that a ﻿﻿soft answer turns away wrath,

But ﻿﻿a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1)

Satan tries to sow discord among the brethren. Divisions can come because of pride, hurt feelings, differences - economically, socially or educationally. It could be personalities or differences in minor doctrines.

Whatever it is, his purpose is to drive a wedge between us. We need to understand that a wedge will not work if one of the parties just moves over a little.

III. He Finished in Spite of Fatigue - 8:4-

“When Gideon came ﻿﻿to the Jordan, he and ﻿﻿the three hundred men who *were* with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit.”

Exhaustion is the enemy of any protracted enterprise. Early on, the initial excitement carries you through, but later, fatigue sets in.

So what kept Gideon on task?

A. The Voice of the Past – Judges 6:14

These words of the Lord must have been ringing in his ears continually: “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.”

“Have I not sent you?” - He knew that God had sent him.

Chuck Swindoll in his book, *Growing strong in the Seasons of Life*, writes:

“A backwoods preacher was not very eloquent, but often he was right on the mark. God stepped into his life, and though he was not very educated, he was devoted to his heavenly calling. He listened on day to a proud young preacher – well educated but overly impressed with his own background and skills, showing little power of God in his life. When the sermon was over and most of the people had left, the old preacher walked up to him and said, “Young man, was you sent or did you just went?”

It will make a difference in the dark days!

Gideon knew that he was sent, he didn’t just went.

B. The Victory of the Present

Remember how Gideon’s men had obeyed the word from the Lord?

They broke their jars, blew their trumpets and shouted. Then they all stood in their places and watched the Lord work. That victory gave Gideon and his men the courage and the stamina to keep on going until the final victory was won.

“Count your blessings, name them one by one. It will surprise you what the Lord has done.”

C. The Vision of the Future

If God said, “defeat the Midianites”, He commanded a 100% defeat:

* There were 135,000 at the beginning.
* 120,000 (89%) were killed in the first battle.
* Now there are 15,000 (11%) still remain.
* He did not intend for him to leave even 11% still alive. God expects 100% completion. That’s what Gideon was aiming for.

That’s what Paul meant when he said, “I have finished my course”

IV. He Finished in Spite of Indifference – 8:5-7

“Then he said to the men of ﻿﻿Succoth, “Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. And the leaders of Succoth said, ﻿﻿“*Are* ﻿﻿the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that ﻿﻿we should give bread to your army?”

A. The Indifference of Succoth – 8:5-6

Gideon reasoned:

I have been delivering Israel from the enemy. Therefore, I have the right to be fed by the citizens.

The people of Succoth reasoned:

You don’t have those kings in hand yet. If you miss, we will be in trouble for helping you.

“So Gideon said, ‘For this cause, when the Lord has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, ﻿﻿then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers!” (8:7)

B. The Indifference of Penuel – 8:8-9

“Then he went up from there ﻿﻿to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way. And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered.”

Gideon answered them: “When I ﻿﻿come back in peace, ﻿﻿I will tear down this tower!”

It was probably a place of refuge in case of attack.

C. The Cost of Indifference – 8:15-17

“Then he came to the men of Succoth and said, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you ﻿﻿ridiculed me, saying, ‘*Are* the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your weary men?’ ”And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he ﻿﻿taught the men of Succoth. Then he tore down the tower of ﻿﻿Penuel and killed the men of the city.”

V. He Finished in Spite of Temptation – 8:18-23?

“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.” (8:22)

A. They Offered Him the Throne and a Dynasty

There are two mistakes here:

1. They Gave Gideon Credit he did not Deserve.

They said, “You have delivered us,”

God had delivered them. They should have known that. Gideon certainly knew that. Nowhere in this chapter does anyone express that.

2. They Made an Offer they had No Right to Make.

Israel was a Theocracy, not a democracy.

God is their king and their kingmaker.

To Gideon’s credit he declined both.

B. He Declined Both

“But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; ﻿﻿the Lord shall rule over you.” (8:23)

However, a seed may have been sown, a seed of personal worth, self importance, independence.

When he was behind the winepress, hiding from the Midianites, God could call him, “a mighty man of valor”.

He has finished that work God gave him to do, but he has not finished his race.

Neither have we.

As long as there is a pulse, there is a purpose.

Conclusion