

**“Finishing Well”
Judges 8v22 – 35**

So this morning we come to the end Gideon’s account in the book of Judges.

To recap when we first meet Gideon, he is in a winepress, threshing so that the Midianites don’t get their hands on the much needed food.

It’s there that Gideon receives his call from God to deliver the Israelites from their enemies.

But his first assignment is to destroy the altars to Baal and Asherah in his own home town and use them as firewood in a sacrifice to the Yahweh, the Lord.

Though frightened, Gideon comes through.

The Spirit of the Lord then falls on Gideon and he calls together the surrounding tribes to go to battle.

Though heavily outnumbered the Lord whittles down Gideon’s men to a mere 300 against a force of 120,000.

But Gideon trusts God’s sifting process.

With 300 Gideon launches a surprise attack at night but it is the Lord who actually causes chaos in the camp resulting on the Midianites attacking each other.

And the battle is won.

The Midianite forces of decimated.

Those hiding in the hills and mountains can return to flocks and fields and farm in peace.

The story could have ended there.

But it doesn’t.

And as I said last week, after all the good that has been achieved, at this point *Gideon loses the plot.*

He pushes his exhausted, hungry men on in pursuit of the Midianite leaders Zebah and Zalmunna.

Gideon’s requests aid from the people of Succoth and Peniel (who are Israelites) but they rebuff him – so Gideon destroys Peniel’s tower and kills all the men and then flays the elders of Succoth briers and thorns.

In his treatment of his fellow countrymen Gideon breaks God’s law found the forbids taking revenge against fellow Israelite.

Gideon also kills two Midianite leaders, not as act of war or in some perverted sense to glorify God but purely as an act of retribution for killing his own brothers.

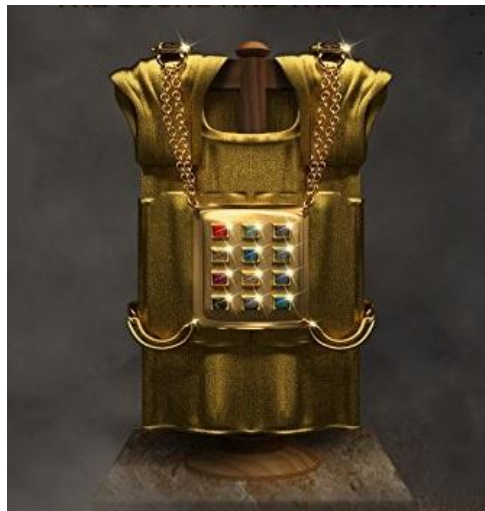
With victory won the people want to make him their king; Gideon says no but asks for a gift instead – their gold earrings, 20 kilograms worth.

He then creates a gold ephod.

You may be wondering what an ephod actually is.

Well an ephod is an apron like garment wore by priests and at times used to seek God's guidance.

It may have looked something like this:



Gideon creates his own version with the gold he's been given, perhaps as a memorial to victory over the Midianites or even as a garment to wear to glorify himself.

However when it is not being worn or used it becomes an idol drawing the Israelites away from worshipping Yahweh, their true Lord and God.

Then we read some personal details.

He has seventy-one sons and many wives and a concubine.

The thing is, despite what Gideon has said, the only people to have a harem are... kings.

He also amasses a fortune and royal robes.

Finally he dies at a "good old age."

So at this point, you have to ask the question:

"Does Gideon finish well?"

Yes?

No?

Tell the person beside you.

Gideon does have a good beginning.

The first part of his life was great but the second half was not good.

Gideon commits grievous acts of violence, is driven by revenge, acts like a king and leads the nation into apostasy.

I don't think Gideon finishes well.

And you know, he's not alone.

I mean, in recent years there have been a number of high profile people who have either blow up their faith or left the faith altogether.

And when I say high profile I mean people that if I said their names, you'd probably recognise at least one of them.

You know, there was is a prominent and very popular Christian author known for exploring themes of faith, suffering, and grace. He was so popular that his books have sold over 15 million copies worldwide – I've read many of his books and I have a number of his books on my bookshelf.

However, in January of this year, at age 76, he announced his immediate retirement from ministry and public life.

Why? He confessed to a 8 year long extramarital affair with a married woman. It caused immense pain and shame to their families and his actions "defied everything that I believe about marriage" and were "totally inconsistent with my faith and my writings."

One was a leader of leaders; someone who spoke to literally hundreds of thousands of other leaders on a regular basis. He planted a church with one thought in mind – reaching the lost people of the planet. And God was at work in his ministry. At one point the church was adding one thousand members to its number a year.

But then sadly, in recent times, stories began to surface of inappropriate conduct and sexual harassment. And as these stories were investigated

they were found to be true and this leader had to resign six months out from his retirement.

Then another well known, high influential and bestselling author, selling books in the millions worldwide. He pastored a mega church for 11 years.

And then recently he said, I'm done – I'm done, not just with church but with the whole Christian faith.

He said, "By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian."

Again another well known figure in the Christian world of worship music song writing publicly announced that was he was losing his faith. This is someone, that if you enjoy contemporary music, you probably listened to and sung songs he wrote. He's said that it doesn't bother him and he's happy and the Christian faith isn't for him anymore.

Their stories aren't over yet, but at this stage in life, they haven't finished well.

But I say we have to ask, what happened to these people who were so prominent and influential in the Christian world, and does Gideon's story help us?

Conversely, you can also think of other people who were still going strong at the end.

I mean Billy Graham was someone who finished with a clear-eyed hope and faith in Jesus at the age of ninety-nine.

In more recent times Timothy Keller had a huge positive influence through his preaching ministry, leadership and books. Just before he died in 2023 at age 76 he said:

"There is no downside for me leaving, not in the slightest."

"I'm thankful for the time God has given me, but I'm ready to see Jesus."

"I'm thankful for all the people who've prayed for me over the years."

"I'm thankful for my family, that loves me."

Or Charlie Kirk who was debating, defending and answering questions about the Christian faith and life right up until the point he was assassinated. He died a faithful husband, father and follower of Jesus.

But it's not only with the end of your life.

It could be a *stage* of life.

A season of life.

Going from employment to retirement. From education to employment.

Leaving one job for another. Leaving one location to another.

So here's my question:

"What do you think is the key to finishing well?"

What do you reckon?

Again, tell the person next to you?

Well, to answer the question, let me tell you about Bob Ebeling.

Bob was one of five booster rocket engineers at NASA during the lead up to the Challenger space shuttle launch. As Bob worked on this project he came to a horrifying realisation; rubber seals that prevented rocket fuel from leaking out and igniting were prone to stiffening in freezing conditions.

If the seals failed the shuttle would explode.

So on the morning of the launch day Bob pleaded with NASA executives and officials, asking that the launch be delayed. He presented all the data and explained both in and out of detail.

Yet the officials ignored Bob and pushed on... and 7 people were killed on lift off as the seals failed and the rockets exploded. ¹

Bob did the right thing.

He said here is an issue that must be addressed; we cannot afford to ignore it!

So I think one of the keys to finishing well is this: when an issue arises in our hearts and lives we address.

We face it.

We attend to it.

What you often discover with people who don't finish well, is that there is an area of life or the heart that has been left unattended, overlooked or ignored.

There is an area of literally of his own making that Gideon didn't attend to – what was it?

¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/03/21/470870426/challenger-engineer-who-warned-of-shuttle-disaster-dies>

Gideon saw that the ephod became an idol he should have immediately responded by what?

By destroying it.

But Gideon doesn't address this and we're told that even he and his whole family was ensnared by it.

Do we see this anywhere else in Scripture?

Yes. Jesus he tells a parable about a farmer sowing seed.

Some falls of hard ground, some of rocky dirt, some on thorny ground and some of good soil.

He explains the seed is God's word, and the various grounds are people's hearts and lives.

Jesus further explains that the reason why some people are unreceptive to God's Word is because the contents of their hearts have been neglected.

Jesus also said that out of the mouth the heart speaks and that out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²

And what you find with those who don't finish well is there is stuff like that in their lives they've never faced up to.

It could be a grudge and a desire for revenge.

It could be anger, an habitual anger.

It could be jealousy.

It could be screen time.

It could be porn.

It could be worry.

It could be a niggling, worrying doubt, an unanswered question or a painful life event that has left you anxious and scared.

So the first point I want to make is a simple one: if there is stuff in our lives we need to attend to it; address it; face it.

Don't let it fester; don't let linger.

And in that hold to the promise of 1 John 1:9:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

² Matthew 12:34; 15:19.

That was my first point.

What I also felt to say this morning, there was something else going on behind the scenes in Gideon's life.

Gideon never attended to the most important aspect of his life – his connection with God.

When you think about Abraham or Moses or David, there is a richness in their relationship with God.

When you read the story of Gideon's life, God's relationship with Gideon was rarely reciprocal; it was never mutual.

I mean, the Lord is always reaching out to Gideon, but you seldom see Gideon ever reaching out to the Lord.

I think that's the saddest part of Gideon's life, that it didn't finish well with God.

Jesus says that at the end of age he will say to some people, you called me Lord, Lord but I never knew you.
You never let me in; you never let me get close.

I mean, Jesus has such affection for you and me.
He does.

What Gideon needed to finish well was *coram Deo* – it's a Latin phrase which means "before the face of God."

It's awareness that every step is taken under the watchful gaze of the Lord. And not as a divine policeman but as divine helper – an ever-present help in times of trouble.

The Lord wants us to finish well.

Gideon often lived as if God was absent forgetting or not knowing that He is always present.

Whatever else happens, finish well with God.

Live before the face of God.

Stay close to him.

Let's pray.