Chameleon - Part Two

# Hold Your Position

## (Judges 6-7)

We are continuing with part two of our message series entitled “Chameleon” and we’ve been talking about the perils of living our lives in limbo. This is an important reminder for us as the body of Christ, because the Lord has called us to be the “salt of the earth”. He said, “You are the light of the world, a city on a hill”, and yet way too often we find ourselves living our lives as chameleons, just blending into our surroundings (Matthew 5:14-16). And so, today I want to encourage you to fight the urge to fit in, not wavering, not unsettled like the waves of the sea blown and tossed by the wind, but holding to your convictions, standing firm and letting nothing move you.

You see, as followers of Jesus, we’ve been called to be different from our neighbors because this world is not our home. We’re just passing through, this isn’t our final dwelling place, and so it stands to reason that we would be different from the world. As we’re living our lives, passing through this world, we’re demonstrating our faith, because it’s our faith in a holy God that causes us to stand out and have different priorities, different values, and different morals. It’s our faith in the living God that causes us to live as salt and light in this world, fighting the urge to fit in, instead of blending in like chameleons.

Two weeks ago, as we began this series in part one, we read about Joshua challenging the people of God. He says, listen, you’ve got to make a choice, you can serve the gods you served in Egypt, you can serve the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live right now, but I’ll tell you what I’m going to do, as for me and my house we’re going to serve the Lord. And so, it was a great speech, it was very inspirational, and you would think that everything would go well from here on out, but as we turn to the word of God, we discover that it just wasn’t so.

If you’re following along in your Bible, we’re going to be in the Old Testament book of Judges beginning in chapter 6. And to set the stage, I want to give you a little bit of context, verse one says,

“Again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help” (Judges 6:1-6).

And so, in part one, Joshua had presented the people of God with a choice, he told them to choose between serving themselves and the worship of idols or serving the Living God. And wisely they chose to serve God, following Joshua’s leadership, but as time went on, once again they began to do whatever they wanted to do. Verse one said, “Again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord.” In other words, they rejected him, no longer serving him, and so God pulled back and removed his hand of protection from them.

The Bible says that for seven years the Midianites ravaged the Israelite’s land, burning their homes, and leaving them fearful for their lives. Having lost all hope because of Midian, the Israelites cried out to the Lord in verse seven, and he sent them a prophet who said,

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. I said to you, 'I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me" (Judges 6:7-10).

And so, God heard their cries, and this unnamed prophet gave them a message that was very similar to the message that Joshua had given them. He reminded the people of the faithfulness of God in spite of their rebellion and their unbelief. God says, “You have not listened to me” and yet he loves them enough not to let them wander too far away. And so, we see here in this passage that God uses the Midianites like a shepherd dog to turn the Israelites back to himself.

Once God has their attention, in verse11, we discover God reaching out once again, and he’s going to have a face-to-face encounter with a man named Gideon. The Bible says, “The angel of the Lord came and sat down,” in other words, the Lord came down in verse 11, he shows up physically,

“Under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites” (Judges 6:11).

In other words, he was harvesting the wheat in hiding, trying to keep it from the Midianites, because it wasn’t the season for grapes. You see, Gideon had lost hope, he didn’t believe that he had what it takes to defend his family and protect their crops. And so, Gideon had an encounter with God in the place where he was hiding, and I love that because God meets us in that place. God meets us in the valley, God meets us in that place where we don’t think we could go any lower, and he takes us by the hand.

The Scripture says, he lifts us up, “The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down” (Psalm 145:14).

And verse 12 says, it was at this moment, “when the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon.” He was in hiding, fearful, wavering in his faith, very much acting out of cowardice. And like a chameleon he was trying to blend into his surroundings, trying to escape from the threat of his enemies, when the angel of the Lord said,

“The Lord is with you, mighty warrior” (Judges 6:12).

And so, it was in spite of what he felt about himself, in spite of his insecurities, his inner fear, and his lack of confidence, that the Lord reminds Gideon that he’s a mighty warrior.

I wonder if there are some of you today who feel like Gideon, you’re in hiding, hesitating, and fighting the fear of confrontation or the fear of failure, when God has called you a “mighty warrior”?

Today I want to encourage you that God sees more in you than you see in yourself. You see, Gideon was in hiding because he didn’t recognize who God had called him to be. And so, instead of saying, “Yes Lord, I know that you’re with me,” he says what many of us say in verse 13. “But Sir,” and he begins to make excuses for why he’s afraid and in hiding. He says,

"If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian" (Judges 6:13).

The Lord turned to him in verse 14 and said,

“Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" (Judges 6:14).

In other words, God says, “you may feel unprepared, you may be fearful, you may be lacking confidence, but go in the strength you have, because I have prepared you. You are equipped for battle; you are a mighty warrior.” But Gideon continues making excuses saying, “But Lord,” in verse 15,

"How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (Judges 6:15).

Now, doesn’t that sound a little bit familiar? Isn’t that the same thing that many of us do as followers of Christ? The Lord gives us the Holy Spirit, his power within us, committing to us the ministry of reconciliation, sending us to go and make disciples, and he says, “Am I not sending you?” But instead of going, instead of standing out as salt and light, instead of being that city on a hill, we say, “But Lord, how can I?” And like Gideon, we hide in the winepress, we hide in our homes, our communities, and our workplace. We just blend into our surroundings like chameleons.

Some of you, even though you sense God leading you to share the gospel, to do something, anything to advance his kingdom, you waver and hesitate, and so instead of standing out you do nothing and look like the rest of the world around you. And so, even though you really believe that you’ve been called to serve and to witness to what Jesus has done in your life, you shrink back, and you hide. But God says, “You have the heart of a warrior, I’ve given you the strength that you need, because you have a battle to win.” And I believe the Lord’s words to Gideon were meant to be an encouragement to him as well as to us.

Gideon says, “But Lord, how can I?” And the Lord answered him in verse 16,

“I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together" (Judges 6:16).

The Lord wants to remind you that you’re not on your own, you have everything you need to fight and to win the battles before you. And so, I wonder what it is today that has caused you to be fearful? The Lord said,

“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

And if you’re a believer in Christ, if Christ is in you, his Spirit is dwelling in you, you have the resources, the power of God within your grasp, because in Christ you’re strong; you’re a mighty warrior, and you have everything that you need.

Today I want to encourage you, provoking you and inspiring you with this message, grounding you in your convictions, because if you and I want the privileges of being a follower of Jesus Christ, if you and I want the benefits of the kingdom of God, it doesn’t come with a wishy-washy wavering part-time commitment. To be a Christian requires a full-time commitment and so when we waver in our commitment, taking our eyes off of Christ, and just blending into our surroundings like a chameleon, we will fall apart because of our own insecurities.

This is what we see happening with Gideon, and so turning to him, the Lord said,

"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand" (Judges 6:14).

In other words, I’m with you, don’t hesitate any longer, don’t cower and hide, because I’m all you need to engage in battle and defeat them. But Gideon just doesn’t get it, he’s still uncertain and unbelieving, and so he tests God and asks for a sign. He offers a sacrifice and fire comes down from heaven consuming the sacrifice and verse 22 says then he finally believes. Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord and exclaimed,

“Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!" (Judges 6:22).

And that very night the Lord told him to tear down the idols and the altars of false worship in his community. Gideon obeyed but still being fearful of what the people would say and do, he destroyed their idols and altars of worship during the night. And so, when the people got up the next morning, they were enraged that Gideon had torn down their altars. However, Gideon’s father reasoned with the people saying,

“Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar" (Judges 6:31).

And so, sounding a bit like the prophet Elijah, Joash confronts the people with their idolatry saying, “If Baal really is a god?” And he calls them to repent, to come out of their sin, out of their idolatry, because they’d been unfaithful to the Lord. Like chameleons they had blended into their culture, choosing to worship the gods of the people around them.

Meanwhile, as this was going on in town, the Midianites, Amalekites and other people from the east joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. When the Israelites noticed the enemy gathering, the Bible says,

“The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him” (Judges 6:34).

And so, Gideon called the people of God to join him in battle, and as they gathered together opposite the camp of the Midianites, he begins counting the fighting men. Discovering that he only has 32,000 warriors he becomes fearful that they would be able to conquer such a great enemy. He can see the armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the East camped in the valley and he’s concerned that he just doesn’t have enough warriors. But in spite of his fears, the Lord said to Gideon in chapter 7,

“You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her” (Judges 7:2).

And so, God tells Gideon, “Announce now to the people,” in verse three, “Tell them that anyone who’s afraid to fight, anyone who trembles with fear should go home.” And the Bible says,

“Twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained” (Judges 7:3).

As you could imagine, Gideon is really getting concerned now, because he was fearful with 32,000 men, and now he’s down to 10,000 men. But then the Lord said to Gideon in verse four,

“There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there…” (Judges 7:4).

And so, Gideon took the men down to the water and the Lord told him in verse five,

“Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink."

Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink” (Judges 7:5-6).

And so, the Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place” (Judges 7:7).

And so, here’s Gideon already lacking confidence, gathering this army together, trying to trust God, wanting to step forward into what God had called him to do, when God tells him to take a giant step backwards.

Gideon thought he didn’t have enough men with 32,000 warriors, he knew he didn’t have enough with 10,000, and now after this simple exercise at the water God had created an impossible scenario, a strategic absurdity, leaving him with only 300 men who were qualified for battle. Then he tells Gideon, “Take your 300 warriors and go out to battle with trumpets and empty jars with torches inside.” And suddenly it’s beginning to sound a whole lot like a repeat of Joshua marching around Jericho with the praise team blowing horns, but nonetheless Gideon does what God tells him to do. He says to this little 300-man army in verse 17,

“Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon” (Judges 7:17-18).

And so, they marched out and verse 20 says,

“The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled” (Judges 7:20-21).

In the confusion, the Lord caused the Midianites to fight against each other, it was a great massacre and a great victory for the Lord and for Gideon.

Today, I want you to understand that I’m only using Gideon as an example to encourage you to fight the urge to fit in. Verse 21 says, “Each man held his position” in other words, they stood their ground, they didn’t run, they didn’t hide, but they held fast. And that doesn’t mean that they weren’t afraid, but they had the faith to hold their position and they refused to retreat. In the same way, you and I have to stand up and fight the urge to fit in, because God has chosen us to fight and hold our position.

God has called us as the Church to be his ambassadors, ministers of reconciliation, pleading with those in our circle of influence to be reconciled to God. And so, I want to encourage you not to blend into your surroundings like a chameleon, don’t pull back and hide, don’t disengage and abandon your post, but step into the fight and hold your position. You see, as followers of Christ, you and I have a battle to win, and that’s why the Lord tells us in Ephesians chapter 6, “Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes,” and it will, “that you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand” (Ephesians 6:13).

And so, can I encourage you today not to back down, to hold your position, and refuse to listen to the lies of the enemy. Listen to the Lord, listen to your Commanding Officer, who says that you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. Stand your ground because you are an overcomer by the blood of the Lamb and by the words of your testimony. And even if you have a setback, you just step back in, you hold your position, and you put on the full armor of God and fight like a man or a woman of God.

When you’ve done everything you can, when you feel inadequate, incapable, and afraid, you stand as the Bible says and “Pray in the Spirit,” Ephesians chapter 6, “on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Ephesians 6:18). And when you do, you will step out of your fears, out of your insecurities, and you will step into the authority of God. You’ll step out of the fear of failure, and step into the fight, stepping into his anointing, stepping into his power, stepping into his strength, because you have everything you need to fight every battle you’ve been called to fight.

And so, you stand your ground week after week, month after month, year after year, and you just hold your position. And when you feel like you don’t have what it takes, that you’re not good enough, that you’re just going to mess it up, you hold your position, you stand your ground, because the weapons you fight with are not the weapons of this world.

“The Lord is with you” (Judges 6:12).

And your spiritual weapons have divine power to pull down strongholds, and so you put on the armor of God, you hold your position because you have the helmet of salvation. You stand your ground because you know that nothing can separate you from the love of God. You know that if you’re in Christ your name is written in the Lamb’s book of life, and you have the breastplate of righteousness, not your own but the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And you have the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. You have the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. You have the belt of truth, and your feet are fitted and prepared with the gospel. And so, you can pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests, boldly going before the throne of grace, knowing that God hears your prayers, and he will give you grace and mercy to help you in your time of need.

As we close, I want to challenge you to a genuine faith that would cause you to stand out in the way you respond to others, the way you relate to others, and the way that you react to others. And so, don’t abandon your post, hold your position because this fight is worth fighting. Let’s pray together.

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