Fear Of Change - Sermon for Sunday, October 20, 2013

Just think about life a moment about life. What is it?

For the average person it’s about 70 years of living,
For some it’s even shorter.
During which time the average person breathes some 30 billion times
Sleeps 250,000 hours,
Eat somewhere in the region of 76,000 meals.
Go to the bathroom 200,000 times

Sounds impressive but not very fulfilling

To many, life is like a touchdown scored after the whistle has blown.

They fight to gain ground.

They struggle to get to the end-zone.

They score that touchdown, achieve their victory in life, only to discover that it doesn’t count.

 Maybe your have felt that--that life is all pushing for yardage but never making a first down, reaching for the long pass but having it intercepted.

It kind of reminds me of the story of a hamster and its owner.

Each morning Sam hits the wheel, stopping only to snatch a bite to eat,
He’s driven by some ingrained belief that all the effort is getting him somewhere.
Trudge, trudge, trudge, nibble, nibble, nibble,
With the only occasional treats to break the monotony.
That’s Sam’s life
And life for Sam’s pet hamster is almost as bad.

How many have changed job’s at least once in their lives?

At least twice?

More than three times?

HUMOR: I remember my first job...

My first job was working in an orange juice factory, but I got canned: couldn't concentrate.

Then I worked in the woods as a lumberjack, but I just couldn't hack it, so they gave me the axe.

Next I tried working in a muffler factory but that was exhausting.

Finally, I attempted to be a deli worker, but any way I sliced it, I couldn't cut the mustard

Sometimes, making a change can be frightening.

There are times when God wants to bring about a change in our situation, but instead of just doing it for us, God wants us to be willing to participate – in faith not fear, to make it happen.

**Today, we will see that illustrated in the story of Gideon in the Bible**

Some of us here are in some pretty bad situations and we want to get out of them, but we are afraid of the price that we might have to pay to move forward.

Some of us are afraid of leaving what’s comfortable and known to risk going through a door, where we are not sure what exactly sure of what is on the other side.

Some of us would like to change our situation and maybe even ourselves but don’t know how, don’t think it’s possible, don’t think it’s in us to change, don’t know that there is something better

Something that God wants for us – something better

**That’s the story of Gideon**

God’s people are in the midst of a crisis.

Their enemies have them terrified.

Each year the Midianites would wait until it was time for the crops of God’s people to be harvested, and then they would invade the land with all of their animals and herds to eat up the crops and destroy whatever food was left.

A whole year of farming was going down the tubes.

Why?

**Judges 6:7-10 (NIV)**
7  When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian,
8  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.
9  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.
**10  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."**

God’s people had rejected God, and so God had left them to their own fate.

Sometimes God will listen to us when we tell God, “I don’t want your help and I don’t need you in my life.”

Well God will wait until we realize that things are not going the way we had planned they would.

We’re not getting what we thought we were going to get.

But now we are afraid of change.

Gideon was one of God’s people who was terrified of the Midianities.

The Midianites and their allies had an army of 135,000 men armed with swords.

 It was easy to understand why everbody was afraid of them and willing to risk starvation rather than having an uprising to be free.

Think of how many people are willing to accept things as they were, because of a fear of what trying to change things might mean.

Gideon is from a former wealthy family because he has more than ten servants at his disposal.

 He is threshing wheat to get some food.

Normally the wheat would be scattered on a floor and rolled over with carriages pulled by oxen.

But Gideon does not want to be discovered by the Midianites, so he goes to a place and beats the wheat with a stick, which is only what a poor person would usually do.

He’s doing this over a hole in the ground, to make sure that nobody can tell what he’s doing.

 He does not want to get caught trying to come up with some food to eat.

He really could have used a change in his circumstances.

Fear had a rich man reduced to living like a very poor one.

The angel of the Lord comes and sits down under the tree where Gideon is trying to get some wheat.

When you see the angel of the Lord in the scriptures, it often refers to God taking on a form that humans can see.

Some think it points to when Jesus will come ,and God takes the form of a human in Jesus.

 Some think it’s an Old Testament appearance of Jesus.

But either way, this Angel of the Lord looks like a man and comes to Gideon who is hiding in fear.

The Angel of the Lord addresses Gideon

**Judges 6:12 (NIV)**
**12  When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."**

Isn’t it strange that whereas we see a cowardly man at worst or simply a scared man at best, God sees a mighty warrior?

Do you realize that who you think you are, and who God sees you as being, may be radically different people?

Nobody was more shocked at this greeting than Gideon was.

**Judges 6:13 (NIV)**
13  "But sir," Gideon replied, "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."

He had to look around for a moment.

 He even says, “pardon me.” “Excuse me, are we talking about me and my situation.

You obviously have the wrong person.

As a matter of fact, I can prove to you that you are wrong.

First of all, look at my circumstances.

Do you really think I would be where I am, if God was with us?

 Do you really think I’d be hiding out her for this little bit of food I’m trying to get if I were a mighty warrior?

 Haven’t you heard of what kind of things God does when God is with someone?

Either you don’t know what’s going on, or you’ve mistaken me for somebody else.”

Haddon Robinson, on Moody Radio made the statement once, “In any situation, what you ARE, determines what you see; what you See determines what you Do.

Gideon didn’t see a mighty warrior with the Lord when looking at himself.

So he tried to redirect the Angel of The Lord to go and find somebody else.

He did not consider the possibility that maybe it might be a time to trade in his fear, for freedom to something greater.

What do you see , when you see you?

Are you going through life as mighty warrior who has the Lord on your side, or are you a victim who really does not have that much power to change anything?

Do you realize, there are people right now, who have far less than you do in life, that in five years, they are going to have you wishing you had been willing to make the sacrifices they made to obtain what they got.

Sometimes God drops opportunities in our laps, and the fear of what we might be giving up, keeps us from making a decision that could propel us forward.

Because the angel of the Lord saw Gideon as a mighty warrior, He kept speaking to Gideon as a mighty warrior.

He did not go through Gideon’s list of objections as to why he had the wrong man.

He continued the conversation right where he left off.

**Judges 6:14 (NIV)**
**14  The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"**

He told Gideon, “Go in the strength you have, and save Israel, out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

The Angel of the Lord wants Gideon to go with the strength he has, not on the strength he wants to have.

 **Judges 6:15 (NIV)**
15  "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

How often have you said, I would do such and such if only I had\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

We all want assurances that everything is going to turn out fine according to the way we can see it, before we actually go ahead and do it, when it’s something God wants us to do.

Okay God, before I make this kind of a commitment, I really want to know it is you telling me to do it.

But have you thought of how blindly we enter into commitments of sin without needing any proof that everything is going to be alright in the end.

The greatest thing you can have is God’s favor upon your life.

Shouldn’t we be more afraid of what’s on the other side of the door of sin, than we are might be on the other side of the door of obedience.

We will blindly enter into commitment with our money to the world, without even asking for proof that things will work out.

We practically beg people to let us make a commitment to turn our future wages over to them.

We will make a five year pledge to pay $300 a month for a car, but tell God I’ll pay a tithe of $30 a week, if I think I might have the money.

What would you banker say if you said in advance,” I pledge to make the payment, if I have the money left over.”

Why do we have little fear over a pledge that satisfies our natural desires, but great fear over a pledge for our spiritual lives.

The angel of the Lord lets Gideon know, “you have what it takes, to do the right thing because I am sending you.”

**Judges 6:16 (NIV)**
**16  The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."**

When God sends us somewhere, it’s God’s responsibility to meet our needs in that situation.

When God sends us, it does not mean its going to be easy.

God sent Jesus into this world and sent him to the cross to die for our sins.

Never once does Jesus say, “Since the Father sent me, no problem, this is going to be easy.”

No we find Jesus in the Garden saying, “Father if you have another plan to get this done without me going to the cross, I’m willing to work with you on it, but if I must go to the cross, then I’m going not because I want to, but because I want to do your will.”

Jesus had a healthy fear of the cross, but he didn’t let his fear paralyze him from going forward with God’s plan.

Even when Gideon was reassured that God was going to be with him, he still tried to get out of it.

He said, “how can I save Israel.

My background is not too impressive.

I’m practically a nobody.”

Gideon was simply looking at what he thought he could do on his own.

God is looking for people, who are willing to say, I know I can’t do it, but I wonder what God could do through me, if I ever tried.

The Angel of the Lord wasn’t going to argue with him over what he could and could not do.

He just told him point blank. “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.”

There is something about the Angel of the Lord that’s getting next to Gideon.

I don’t know if it’s the expression on his face, the tone in his voice, or the way he looks, but Gideon is starting to suspect, this is not just an ordinary guy he’s talking to.

Just hearing the words strike down all the Midianites raised a sense of hope for change that Gideon wanted to see.

But he was still afraid of taking the steps to see what might be on the other side of the door.

Gideon thinks that this whole experience might not be real.

So he says, “look just to make sure, I’m really seeing and hearing what I think I’m seeing and hearing, you wait right here for a moment.

**Judges 6:17-18 (NIV)
17  Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.**18  Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you." And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return."

I’m going to go and get an offering of some meat and broth and bring it back to you.

Let’s go from there.

So he brings back this meat and bread and broth.

The Angel of the Lord has Gideon put the meat and bread on a rock and then poured the broth on it.

The angel of the Lord had a staff in his hand.

The moment he touched the meat with it, fire came out of the rock, burned up the meat and the bread and the angel of the Lord immediately disappeared.

Gideon realized that he really had seen the angel of the Lord.

He cried out, “Oh sovereign Lord, I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.”

Gideon is now terrified because he thinks that God is now going to strike him dead.

No-one was supposed to see God and live.

The bible does not tell us how, but God speaks to Gideon and says, “Peace, do not be afraid, you are not going to die.”

**Judges 6:23-24 (NIV)**
**23  But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die."
24  So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To** this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

We often times think that if God would just show us a sign, we would not be afraid any more.

That’s not how we actually work. God may show us a sign, and then we end up disbelieving it really was a sign.

God calls Gideon to go and make one more change.

He told him to go and tear down two false gods, Baal and Asherah and build the proper kind of altar to God Himself that should have been built.

He is to take two of his father’s bulls to do it.

One bull to tear everything down, and the second bull to offer as a sacrifice.

**Judges 6:25-26 (NIV)**
**25  That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.
26  Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering."**

Now Gideon knows that to be obedient means taking quite a risk.

The people in the town worship the Baal and the Asherah pole.

How long do you think you would last if you were to go into a Moslem mosque, tear down the cresent symbol on the top and replace with a cross and a sign that says, “Jesus is the way”?

Well that’s sort of what God was asking Gideon to do.

Being certain of what God wants us to do, doesn’t necessarily take the fear part of it away.

Gideon knew the people were not going to like the changes he was proposing, and not even his own family would be willing to go along with it.

So he waited until it got dark, snuck in to town with ten of his servants and did what God told him to do, and then snuck back out of town.

When the people saw what had happened they were furious.

They had an investigative team examine the matter and they found it, it was Gideon that had done it.

They immediately sentenced him to the death penalty.

But God had other plans for Gideon.

Of all people, Gideon’s father rose up on his behalf to make sure he got off free.

God can make people who are against you, stand up and protect you when you overcome your fear and step out in faith.

This first step of faith that Gideon took is going to seem very small by comparison of what God is going to ask of Gideon the next time around.

You see God usually gives us a smaller test before the really big one comes along.

**Judges 6:36-40 (NIV)**
36  Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised--
37  look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said."
38  And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew--a bowlful of water.
39  Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew."
40  That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

Later Gideon is going to go against an army of 135,000 armed soldiers.

But Gideon will only be able to raise an army of 30,000.

If you think those odds are bad

**Judges 7:2-8 (NIV)**
**2  The LORD said to Gideon, "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,**3  announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.
4  But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."
5  So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink."
6  Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.
7  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."
8  So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley.

So now its130,000 to 301.

Why does God put us in situations like that?

Because God wants us to learn how to put our trust in Him and not in our ability to make everything work out.

We are all Gideons in one way or another in our lives.

Some of us are denying who we are and won’t leave our circumstances because we don’t want to risk losing the little that we have.

Some of us are only willing to move if we have a sure sign so that we do not have to use our faith.

Some of us are willing to take steps of faith, but only small ones because we are afraid of the consequences.

Some of us have accepted that we are mighty warriors and the Lord is on our side. We don’t mind going into a situation in which the odds are overwhelmingly against us, but we are going to put ourselves totally into the situation because we believe that God said for us to do it.

**Judges 7:9-15 (NIV)**
**9  During that night the LORD said to Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands.
10  If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah
11  and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack** the camp." So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. 12  The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.
13  Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream," he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed."
14  His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands." 15  When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands."

**Judges 7:19-21 (NIV)**
19  Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands.
20  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!"
21  While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

**Application and conclusion**

Some of us here are in some pretty bad situations and we want to get out of them, but we are afraid of the price that we might have to pay to move forward.

Some of us are afraid of leaving what’s comfortable and known to risk going through a door, where we are not sure what exactly sure of what is on the other side.

Some of us would like to change our situation and maybe even ourselves but don’t know how, don’t think it’s possible, don’t think it’s in us to change, don’t know that there is something better

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