

## Judges 8b Gideon part 6

One of my favourite parts of history is the French Revolution. It was a time of noble aims and ambitions – liberty, equality, fraternity – but also a time of shocking violence and betrayal. It is possibly the `Revolution` that most encapsulates what the word `revolution` means – to go round in a circle. Louis XVI and the monarchy may have been disposed of but the revolution brought in instead a megalomaniac Emperor in Napoleon. Alas, in the end, little really changed within France.

Verse 27 “Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.” The story of Gideon starts with the people of Israel worshipping foreign gods and ends with Gideon leading them astray in the worship of the true God. The ephod he made was a priestly garment to help determine what God wanted his people to do but Jerusalem was the place and centre of worship, not Ophrah. Gideon, sadly, moved away from what God wanted. The end of this story is a case of what could have been, with so many `what ifs`...

What if Gideon hadn't got greedy for gold?

What if he'd taken the ephod to Jerusalem, the right place for it to have been?

What if he simply hadn't made it in the first place?

What if he'd stuck with one wife instead of having `many`?

Maybe if those `what ifs` were different then, just maybe, Israel wouldn't have turned back to Baal worship when Gideon died...

The end of this story can only be described as a monumental loss of focus, a taking the eye off the ball. Truth be told, the whole of human history is marked by people losing focus, like Gideon, with various degrees of catastrophic consequences.

Think of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.

David caught up in an affair with Bathsheba.

Solomon, with his wisdom, sidetracked by wealth and prestige.

In our own secular world, one need only say the words, `party-gate` to summon up a collective loss of focus.

Going back a few years, there was the curious case of the high street jewellers, `Ratners`. Overnight, after a disaster of a speech, Gerald Ratner collapsed his business.

In our modern Christian sphere, there has recently been the scandal involving Mike Pilovachi from Soul Survivor Church. A man with a great gifting by God who lost focus, made some terrible errors of judgement and left the church in tatters.

The thing is, all of us have the ability to lose focus and lose focus on God especially. "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). So maybe the questions are: how can we avoid losing focus and what do we do when we do?

Maybe the one thing that stands out for me is the loneliness of position that Gideon found himself in – the sole leader within a godless country. It reminds me of when we were looking at the book of Acts at St. Andrew's. St. Paul was oh so careful to ensure that he was surrounded by others to support and work with him. That level of accountability is so important in the Christian walk. Being with other Christians, being open about our struggles and difficulties and asking for prayer is possibly the biggest first step in maintaining focus.

But when it does go wrong? Swift repentance is the most powerful antidote, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) God is the God of the second chance.

But to finish – how do these final episodes change our view of Gideon? Is he a hero or another epic failure? Maybe either way, the lesson we really need to remember is to keep our focus on God and not man, nor woman. People will always make mistakes but God doesn't. If our eyes are on Him then our paths will be straight and our way sure and we will avoid the circles of `revolution` that only take us back to the bad place we just left.