

Experiencing God **- Crisis Time**

Judges 6:33 - 7:25
John 2:1-11

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Danny Cox, a former jet pilot turned business leader, tells his readers in *Seize the Day* that when jet fighters were first invented, they "flew much faster than their propeller predecessors. So pilot ejection became a more sophisticated process. Theoretically of course, all a pilot needed to do was push a button, clear the plane, then roll forward out of the seat so the parachute would open."

But there was a problem that popped up during testing. Some pilots, instead of letting go, would keep a grip on the seat. The parachute would remain trapped between the seat and the pilot's back.

The engineers went back to the drawing board and came up with a solution. Cox writes:

The new design called for a two-inch webbed strap. One end attached to the front edge of the seat, under the pilot. The other end attached to an electronic take-up reel behind the headrest. Two seconds after ejection, the electric reel would immediately take up the slack, and force the pilot forward out of his seat, thus freeing the parachute.

The pilot needed to be launched right out of his seat.

He had to be forcibly separated from what he'd been hanging on to.

We can't blame these pilots. Their behaviour was superbly and very typically human.

We like to hang on to what we've got and what we know. We like to stay where we are.

Sometimes we need to be launched out of our seats and into new directions.

Those moments - where we're launched off into new directions; where we're forcibly ejected from the seat in which we've been sitting quite comfortably just a moment before - are known as *crisis moments*.

Crisis moments...

Crisis comes from an old Greek word that means *judgement*.

It means a point where a decision has to be made.

You can't remain complacent.

No decision is no option.

Crisis moments are

judgement moments;

moments of choice-making.

Gideon was placed into a crisis situation by God.

A judgement situation.

Gideon was put into a situation where he was forced to make a very conscious decision.

He HAD to decide just how much he was going to rely on the promised guidance and power of the Holy One who had appeared to him. He feels inside himself a deep, unshakable compulsion to rally the troops of Israel and fight against this huge military threat. He tests that compulsion by laying out the fleece. It is confirmed.

So off he goes.
But it is as if God says, "*Not so fast, Gideon.*"
And the crisis develops.

Going into God's service was already a significant event. Gideon was stepping into a very public spot. There was a lot on the line.

However -

If victory came, there was still the chance that it could be attributed to his own bravado, or military skill, or just plain dumb luck. Which would mean that at the end of the day not much would have changed among the people of Israel as far as their relationship with God was concerned.

And THAT was simply not an option from God's point of view.

This was crisis time -

decision time

time to come clean about who these people were depending on.

time not only to make the decision,

but to show that decision in very clear, public, tangible ways.

No waffling.

No hanging on to the seat in mid-air.

Which is why the number of troops had to be whittled down to this ridiculously small number.

Faced with that little band of militiamen Gideon has to decide -

Will he carry on, or not?

Will he fight, or run?

Notice that God doesn't hang him out to dry.

The Holy One, who answered the sincere prayer by dealing twice with the fleece, sends Gideon affirmation by way of a dream and a conversation.

But then,

still,

at the end of the day,

it was Gideon who had to get up in the middle of the night

muster the troops

finalize the battle plan

and smash his jar on the rocks.

There was absolutely no way around stepping out in faith

with no certainty about the outcome

step out in faith and take a risk for God.

This was the space of total commitment.
Crisis space.
Totally God space.

Friends - somewhere along the way, you and I and every other believer will be drawn into that same space.

It may look different for every one of us.

In fact, it probably will.

Just like, as we said last week, the way that God chooses to reveal Himself and speak to us may and probably will look substantially different from one person to the next.

Because He has created each of us unique - with unique minds and personalities and bodies that respond in unique ways to unique stimuli.

We are, to use an electronics image, wired up differently from each other. We are certainly NOT all products of one uniform cookie punch and factory.

So - God will deal with each of us differently.

But count on this much -

- somewhere along the way He will draw you into the crisis zone.
- in fact, He will probably do that more than once
- perhaps even regularly!

God will launch us out of our seats and into a life zone where we'll have to either go public and act on our faith, or give it up.

The one thing He doesn't want, you see, is complacent believers.

A few weeks ago we began to consider seven statements which can be applied as basic truths of Christian living. They are:

1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit in various ways.
5. God's invitation into your life often leads to a crisis of belief requiring faith and action.
6. God's invitation often calls for major adjustments in our life that we may join in His work.
7. God is known by us, experientially, as we obey Him and He does His work through us.

It's point 5 that we're dealing with today.

You know how to boil a frog, don't you?

Don't, whatever you do, heat up the water and then drop the critter in there.

He'll just jump right out. Instead, put the frog in tepid water, and slowly, ever so slowly, increase the temperature of the water. He'll keep adjusting his body temperature to the water temp. By the time he figures out that there's a problem, it's too late. His complacency will kill him.

People aren't much different from frogs, you know.

Ask any princess!

Seriously, we are remarkably adaptable and can justify staying in our present situation without changing or moving or jumping out. By the time we figure out that it's not a good or healthy zone to be in, we're in so far that it's too late to get out.

So - God is in the habit of poking his people.

He'll shake them up.

He'll knock the support struts out from under us.

He'll challenge us to make what sometimes seem to be like insane decisions.

He'll call us to step into very open and public space of commitment and action for Him.

He prod us into a crisis zone of one sort or another.

You see that illustrated again and again throughout the Bible.

Gideon is just one.

Abraham had his moment - called right to the brink of sacrificing his own son. Would he obey, or would he not?

Moses faced these moments - strike the rock in front of all the people and water would come out. Talk about pressure - what if the water didn't come? What if he had simply been in the desert heat too long?

Joshua led the people of Israel right to the Jordan River, ready to cross into Palestine.

The priests had to go first, right to the river that was at flood stage. They had to walk right into it. And only AFTER they took that public step did God cause the water flow to stop and a dry path to appear for the people to cross on.

Want a New Testament account?

John 2 - Jesus is at a wedding where the wine order had fallen way short. He commands the servants - fill the jars with water. Draw some out and take it to the master of ceremonies. What are they? Dumbies? The man needed wine. But only AFTER they make the decision to obey Jesus, and actually draw it out and bring the liquid to the Master of Ceremonies does it become apparent that it was now wine.

You could talk about Peter - called to make a decision and step out of the boat to walk across open water towards Jesus.

God challenges believers to step out in faith, with no human, visible, logical guarantee of the result.

They had to make a decision to trust God.

And they had to go public with that decision.
They had to act, publically, on that decision.
And God responded to their decision in great and gracious ways.

Would you be surprised to know that things haven't changed?
It's still the same today.

God doesn't want frog-like believers, lounging in complacency.
He doesn't want us grabbing to the arms of our chairs, refusing to get out.
He wants us to get up, get going, and get active in a way that demonstrates our trust in His ability
to work,
to provide,
and to communicate His will and direction into our lives.

He wants us to live in a way that demonstrates our faith in Him to be a living, vital, active relationship.

He'll call us to commit,
consciously commit,
actively commit,
to that relationship with Him.

He'll call us to that commitment again.
And again.
And again.

If He needs to, He'll strip our life of comforts, props,
of whatever
He'll knock it away until we get to the point where we have no choice but to confront the blunt reality of just how much we really trust Him,
and how willing we are to put that trust into action,
to move it beyond comfortable Sunday morning theory.

A relationship with God is not something we can agree to, and then stuff into a back corner.

Commitment.
Public commitment.
And willingness to clearly do something about it.
He will settle for no less.

Which is why Paul and Kim made a restatement of their Christian commitment before the baptism of Lennea.

Someone might ask - "*Haven't they publically stated their belief in Jesus before? Why are they doing it again?*"

We talked about this, actually, as elders and deacons in a recent Ministry Board meeting. Came to realize that we can never be too public about our commitment to Jesus. We can never affirm it too often.

Baptism, today, was more than just a nice sentimental ceremony.
Baptism is a crisis ceremony.

It is a sacrament of decision, of commitment, of judgement.

Marvelous decision.

Amazing commitment.

Wonderful judgement.

Baptism is a public commitment that says, *This baby belongs to God. Jesus is the master of this child's future. And we - parents and congregational family - are going to act on that. We're going to raise the child in that way.*

Paul and Kim have made this step today deliberately.

In faith.

And with great joy.

I must also affirm other crisis steps you've made as a couple.

Your work, Paul - for one.

A trained educator and school administrator – tell me, what on earth are you doing working in a religious day school earning far less than you could earn in a public or separate school?

You've stepped out in faith -

- faith that God will provide for the needs of your home.

- faith that God calls you to educate young minds in a Christ-centred environment, preparing them to be effective agents for the Kingdom of the Lord.

You act on that faith every time you head down Woodroffe Ave and enter your office.

And I know that as parents you are committed to a Christian education for your daughter. From a human perspective that's a rather dumb thing to do. Do you have any idea how many ten's of thousands of dollars this decision will cost you? Do you have *any idea* what you could do with that money? Huh? Yet you are committed to training Lennea in the way of the Lord when she is young, so that it will be deeply ingrained in her, strengthening the likelihood that when she is old she will not depart from it.

We celebrate this crisis, this choice in your family.

Paul & Kim - you stand in a long, long line of believers who have gone public with their faith and then demonstrated that public commitment with real action.

You will be called to reaffirm that again and again with the future.

But today we celebrate this step.

And pray for God's grace as you move forward to the next step.

And we will also pray for grace as **we** move forward.

For **we too**

ALL OF US

are challenged to concrete, visible, real demonstrations of our faith,
dependence and trust in Jesus.

And the Lord may call us to crisis moments, too -

- Will we say something when a moment appears where we may witness to another person about Christ?

- When our moral principles are challenged in the workplace

- To open our home up enough to invite someone new over after church,
someone we're not sure we'll be comfortable with

- To pure behaviour in the middle of all the pressures of the dating scene

- To support of a particular cause or agency that we sense God may be calling
us to volunteer for or financially support, even when we're not sure where the time or
money will logically come from.

May God grant us the courage and the desire to make those steps.

To make the right decisions.

Clear decisions.

Public decisions without shame.

For Christ's sake.

Amen.