

## **“Gideon Who Has Nothing?”**

Judges 6:1–15

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### **Judges 6:1–15 (PowerPoint)**

#### **Preface**

Since this morning is Gideon Worship, I was made to think that, taking this opportunity, I would like to reflect on the Word recorded about the judge Gideon.

As we read just now in Judges, the condition of God's people Israel is, as it says in verse 1 and verse 6, that because they did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, they became very weak spiritually, physically, and socially.

It was as if they were abandoning the blessing that comes from knowing, believing, and being guided by the one true God, and instead they did what was right in their own eyes, though it was evil in the eyes of the LORD.

In such a situation, one person is called forth by the LORD.

That is Gideon, just an ordinary citizen.

As I ruminated several times over this passage, I felt not only Gideon's mindset and heart condition here, but also in Gideon's words the projected heart condition of the people of Israel.

It is a thought like this: “I have nothing. I do not have the conditions, abilities, or qualifications. Compared with this person or that person, I have nothing”—a self-deprecating feeling that comes from a consciousness of comparison with others.

In verse 15 Gideon says:

### **Judges 6:15 (PowerPoint)**

**My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my family.**

Thus he laments while comparing himself with the family status of others.

Also, he even brings up his age, which he need not have brought up, and compares himself with others, speaking as if it were natural the reasons why he cannot and should give up.

Of course, depending on the matter, there are things where one should consider age and what is appropriate for age, but Gideon's words here do not seem to be about that. It seems rather like a figure tormented by a consciousness of comparison, ruled by that consciousness, and as if he has indeed lost sight of the LORD God, who never demands comparison with others.

#### **Part One**

Looking at the Bible, it is recorded frankly that since man's relationship with God was broken and man came to sin before God, people came to live within comparisons with others.

They came to live in the midst of a competitive comparison of "Compared with this person, how much do I have? Compared with that person, how superior am I, or inferior am I?"

The man Adam, who first sinned, compared himself with his wife—the beloved wife Eve, who should have been his own self—and shamelessly, no, rather with a sense of righteousness, claimed before God and before the whole creation, "I, myself, am more right than this woman."

As we keep reading the Word of God recorded in the Bible, it depicts how this world unfolds and is pervaded by the bloody world of comparison—feelings of inferiority and superiority that come from comparing with others, looking down and looking up, being looked down upon and looked up to, and the quarrels, divisions, and factions that begin from such things and seem never to end.

I myself also feel that from my childhood I have been made to live always within comparison.

Even now, the first comparative consciousness that remains in me like a trauma is: "Are my grades better than that child's? Are my scores better than this child's? Did I enter a higher-level school than that person, or not?"

My father, who if he were alive would be 99 this year, as one who had his Japanese nationality stripped and lived in Japanese society as a Korean/Chosŏn person in Japan, was always made to feel, in the comparison of not being Japanese, a burden, a sense of inferiority.

As I myself grew up, had a family, and lived in society, I came to a point of feeling that I could understand that pain.

The condition that my father wanted me, his young son, to have without fail in order to survive in Japanese society was educational background.

In order that his child might feel as little as possible the burden and discrimination of not being Japanese while living in this country, what he wanted me to gain was better scores, better schools—that is, educational background.

So, from third grade in elementary school I was sent to cram school, and from fourth grade, six or seven days a week, even Sundays going to two cram schools, in order to enter a so-called good middle school, I spent my days dragged along within the value standard of comparison.

In the rough waves of the times of war and invasion, what my father himself had not been able to gain, he wanted to give his child. Looking back now, I can think it was truly

parental love, out of deep concern for me. But to me as a child at that time, it was hard, it was frightening, and I was terrified that the results of tests would sway my father's mood.

So within me, who from childhood had lived by the measure of comparison with others, the superiority complex built up from comparison was made clear when I met Jesus: it was simply because I was, from birth, by nature, a proud person.

And the inferiority complex, too, if anything, made me base, unable to hide it, exposed as it were, because I was from birth a cunning sinner. I was made to realize this unwillingly.

That cunningness, that pride, that baseness—these do not just disappear immediately because one becomes a Christian. Borrowing the words of the apostle Paul, “Wretched man that I am!” (Romans 7:24). Gratefully, within grace, I was made to realize that.

Why can it be said grace and thanksgiving, though I am a truly “wretched man”? Again in the words of the apostle Paul: “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” (2 Corinthians 6:10).

“As having nothing, yet possessing everything”—to know the true God, to be made one who believes in the one true God, and because of Jesus Christ to be made a child of God and an heir of the Kingdom of God—this privilege, this blessing, is the special right given from God. This is truly the blessing that never disappears.

The more I know my own wretchedness before God, the more I can realize how great is what I have received, how much blessing, how much grace, how much thanksgiving. Wretchedness of having nothing—realizing that wretchedness is itself a blessing.

The more I realize the wretchedness of adorning myself with what is nothing and striving to stand above in comparison, the more I can live striving to let go of attachment to wretched things that disappear. Thus comes release, freedom from the bondage of comparison with someone, and only remembering grace and thanksgiving.

Yet sadly, as we live in a world that unceasingly shouts comparison, every day we are tormented and captured by comparative consciousness. It is as if we forget Jesus, who has nothing to do with measuring human worth by comparison, as if we forget God the Father, and fall into a spiral, a chain, a way of life of comparison.

Now Gideon, I think, is fallen into just such a negative spiral.

No matter how much God says to him, “I brought you out. I helped you. I gave you that land. Mighty warrior. The LORD is with you,” or “With that strength of yours, you will save the people. Am I not the one sending you?”—those words do not at all enter him. The people of Israel probably felt the same way.

The thoughts that come to mind are only: "I have no strength. I have no family status. I have no experience. I have no money. People will despise me, people will look down on me, only failure comes to mind."

It is only voices heard from being captured by comparative consciousness.

## **Part Two**

The one who makes people fall into the vicious cycle of comparative consciousness, who lures so that within that comparative consciousness everything may move, who builds up this world with comparison, who grasps human hearts with comparison, and still further seeks to grasp them, is indeed Satan, the devil, I think.

Looking at Genesis chapter 3, the devil disguised as a serpent, with what words does he tempt humans and press them into comparison? He says, "You will be like God"—boldly, audaciously, fearfully—pressing humans into comparison with God.

As if to make them forget that man, the human being, is a created being made by God, the Creator who made heaven and earth and all things, he approaches humans with comparison to God, tempts humans, and humans, neatly accepting that temptation, fall into the delusion and illusion of "I want to become like God. I want not to be the one created, but the one creating; I can become so."

As a result, whoever makes the more stimulating, the more eccentric, the (in fact not at all new, yet) the more new-seeming appearance, the one that seems superior, or whoever creates all sorts of standards and goals that determine superiority and inferiority—thus has been built up this world full of things that make it look as if this is the way of life for humans, tangled and muddled with comparison, and still, in the world of comparison, they continue stubbornly insisting on trying to produce some result.

Of course, the ability to create something, which is given to humans, is surely because they were made in the image of God. But, going too far, it has become a world as if by what they themselves have made they strangle their own necks, as if they have made what they created into idols in the place of God. That may be this present world.

According to the indicator "Doomsday Clock" announced by an American scientific journal, as of January 2025, the remaining time of this world is 89 seconds.

Because of the risk of nuclear weapons, the worsening of climate change, the expansion of disinformation and misinformation, technological threats, and pathogens that, because of human error, newly appear or reappear, the remaining time is said to be 89 seconds.

Having forgotten God, as people have kept on comparing with one another, they have ended up strangling their own necks.

The term “church growth” once took the Christian church by storm, also in the world of theology.

Even now, perhaps we remain under the influence of that term. But the very word “growth” spoken here is itself something born out of the value system of economic activity, which in this world is most respected—even to the point of demanding that one sacrifice even life for it. And easily, without caution, that word was applied to the precious church, brought forth by the price of Christ. This, with feelings of repentance, has in recent times come to be pointed out.

Before we knew it, the church also, riding on the principle of economy, came to use the word “church growth” in order to compare itself with other churches.

A certain professor of Fuller Theological Seminary likened this to McDonald’s, the global corporation that built a business model of growth while franchising worldwide, and called it “McDonald’s-style church growth.”

The church, too, before we knew it, came to boast of its scale, boast of its economic power, boast of its number of people, and through that to feel superiority or to harbor inferiority. We Christians must soberly discern this and repent.

Our goal, our prayer, what is expected of us by the Lord, is that, as the body of Christ with Christ as head, we grow together toward Christ, to the measure of Christ, in Christ, as one.

Not growth that is, by comparison with someone, “I am making more effort, I am working more, I am more devout, I am more excellent”—but together, in Christ, mutually, to grow together.

### **Part Three**

The people of Israel who appear in the Old Testament, the nation called Israel, were people who received from God such a blessed privilege, such a grace, as no other people or nation until then had ever experienced.

They were given a blank land, they were given a blank opportunity, from a blank state liberated from things like past, tradition, and culture—that mixture of both good and bad made up by humans—they were given the chance to build up a nation, to form a people, to fulfill the figure of humans free from being bound by anything, unrelated to comparison, and they were given the mission to show to the world the original human-like figure of being kept alive by God—the people uniquely entrusted with this in all history.

The people who had the privilege to begin from a blank state the way of life of serving only the one true God, the loving God who made heaven and earth and all things, who has nothing to do with deciding value by comparing, and of not making any other thing into god—that was the people of Israel who appear in the Old Testament.

However, shall I say as expected, or shall I say regrettably, the unmanageable nature of sin again made them forget God, made them rely on human words more than God's word, made them treat money, which is not God, as god, and also immersed them into the world of comparison, wanting to make themselves like God.

Thus, losing sight of God, society was thrown into disorder, and they built up a nation, a people who in name only were "God's people," but who, when compared with other nations, were in no way different, doing what was evil in God's eyes, each doing what seemed good in their own eyes.

As a result, only what they did not have came to stand out before their eyes, and because they thought they did not have, they came to feel pitiful about not having the things that other people possessed.

And the words that came forth were, I suppose, the self-depreciating words spoken by Gideon: "That I don't have this, I don't have that, I don't have anything."

The world seen in God, which the Apostle Paul said as "as if having nothing, yet possessing everything," completely disappeared from their sight.

#### **Part Four**

When the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, God who took on human form, was born upon this earth, he was born as one who had nothing.

As if to embody that all things of this world are in God's sight no more than dust and ashes, he was born in such a figure.

The people who awaited the Savior, the Messiah, were waiting for the coming of a Messiah who was more splendid than any king in history, who could boast of military power, boast of wealth, boast of family lineage. But Jesus, as if to deal a blow to those people's mistaken, vain, comparison-conscious expectations, was born.

In other words, he was born in the figure of having nothing, possessing nothing, in order to shine light into our sinners' stagnant, murky spiritual vision, which tries to fill life, to fill one's existence with things like dust and ashes, so that we may see the real, the true.

In order to lead us to that confession, that truth, that realization, "as if having nothing, yet possessing everything," he was born deliberately with no form to look at, no splendor.

The Israelites, who had been rescued, led out, and delivered from the slavery of comparison, even though at great pains, yet once again gave themselves over to the idol of comparison. To them, God raised up one man, Gideon, to again save them into ones living by absolute value. I think that is one of the things this passage about Gideon is trying to say.

The Bible speaks to us:

“That to us humans, under heaven, there is no other name given by which we must be saved except Jesus Christ. This one is the only God, who appeared in human form, and the relation with this one is everything for humans, the most important thing, the incomparable treasure.”

For us living in this society, money is important, people are important, and our own self is important.

But if money is made into god in place of God, if people are made into god in place of God, if oneself is made into god in place of God, then there is only thirst.

It can be likened to trying to fill a bottomless jar that can never be full no matter how much is poured in.

In Isaiah, God speaks as follows:

### **Isaiah 31:1–3, 6 (PowerPoint)**

That “all who rely on Egypt, which is the symbol of wealth not God, who rely on Egyptians, who are mere humans, who rely on weapons like horses and chariots, who rely on humans, and who think their own judgment of relying on such things is right—all of them, helpers and helped alike, will perish completely.”

He speaks to us seriously: “Return to God.”

One more place:

### **Isaiah 55:1–3 (PowerPoint)**

That “your biggest problem, and your greatest solution, is that you fix your eyes only on things that, no matter how much you drink, cannot quench your thirst, no matter how much you eat, cannot satisfy your belly, and that you do not listen to God’s word, which truly quenches us and satisfies us, nor try to live by God’s word.”

For us living in this world, I think the greatest idol is money.

No one hates money. Everyone likes money.

We think that if we have money, we will be enriched, if we have money, we will be satisfied.

We often pray to God for the sake of money, but we hesitate to use money for the sake of God.

We think that if we have money, we can be happy, and we think that if we are unhappy, it is because we don’t have money.

Of course, to live in this society, money is necessary.

Even Jesus did not deny that.

But money cannot quench our thirst.

Money is not God.

The words of humans also cannot quench us.

Much less can the truly miserable self, no matter how much we adorn, equip, and clothe it, bring satisfaction.

There is only comparison there.

Comparing with others, being tossed about in the waves of comparison, buried, and before we know it, only perishing.

### **Conclusion**

Do you have a thirst like Gideon, a state of heart like Gideon, self-depreciation like Gideon, the thought "I don't have this, I don't have that," like Gideon?

If so, then now what we must do is return to the Lord.

It is not to take the word of the Lord, the word of the Bible, lightly.

It is to make listening to God's word the most important thing in daily life.

Then you will live, and because you have eaten that good thing, you will be strengthened by fat.

Into that word you have eaten, the Holy Spirit, God himself, will kindle a holy lamp within us by his own fire.

If you sense a thirst like Gideon, it is a chance.

It is a chance to be filled by God.

Let us pray.

Benediction: Isaiah 55:3