

American Gods (And How to Beat Them)

Judges 6-7

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Prayer

Lord, with this message we praise you—our Maker. Would you cause us to preach your Word regardless of the consequences? In Jesus' name, Amen.

Message

Judges¹ 6:1-2 (over 3000 years ago)

The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord [What do you suppose they did?], and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds².

Midianites were nomadic people from the East. Along with the Amelekites, they would raid Israel during planting and harvest times. Together with others they worshipped the gods of the Amorites, who were Canaanites—the people that God told Israel to drive from their land.

Modern people often refer to the conquest of Canaan as “genocide.” And in a way I suppose it was—God commanded the death of thousands.

At first that sounds horrific, yet we believe that God has commanded the death of all.

- If you believe that God will then torment these people endlessly—Scripture becomes unconscionable, and God appears to be infinitely more horrific than Hitler.
- If, on the other hand, you believe that these people will stand before God, be judged by Him and redeemed by Him (like all must be redeemed and judged by Him), the stories take on an entirely different meaning.
 - ✓ Then, God is not delivering people *into* torment.
 - ✓ He is delivering people *from* torment.

¹ The book of Judges is the history of Israel, after the time of Joshua and the conquest of the Holy Land and before the time of the Kings, over 3000 years ago. It's ancient.

If you don't believe in the authority of Scripture, it may seem utterly bizarre and absurd.

But if, like me, you believe that Scripture is inspired by God, you'll find Jesus everywhere—along with yourself and your world.

² Because they did what was evil, the Lord handed them over to Midian for seven years, like the seven days of creation, the days of time before the consummation of all things.

And I believe the Canaanites were in torment, for they worshipped gods that led them into the most horrific of evils—child sacrifice, cult prostitution, demonic possession, and torture. God is a Father who disciplines very severely, but He does not torture.

Our Father in Heaven is into discipline—but never torture.
Judges 6:7

When the people of Israel cried out to the Lord on account of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery. And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. And I said to you, ‘I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.’ But you have not obeyed my voice.”

That’s God’s Word³

So the evil that Israel did was that she did not trust God’s Word.
And so, she feared the gods of the Amorites.
And so, she suffered from Amorites, Midianites and Amalekites

So here’s a practical application point:
If you don’t want to live in bondage to Amorites,
Don’t worship their gods—don’t fear them.

“Thou shalt have no other God’s before me.”
It’s the first of the Ten Commandments.

It’s the same as the great commandment:
“You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.”

Israel’s problem was the she feared the gods of the Amorites...
And we know who some of them were:

This is an artist’s depiction of the worship of Baal.

³ God’s voice is His Word. And God’s Word can be terrifying, but it’s always Good. We know it’s Good because it became flesh and dwelt among us. We wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, placed Him in a manger and crucified Him on a tree.

[Image of a priest and people worshiping a statue of Baal]

- Baal can also be translated husband or possessor or ruler.
- Baal was a fertility god, a storm god and a war god, much like Odin in Norse mythology.
- He was often pictured as a bull, which was a symbol of virility.
- The worship of Baal, sometimes involved the sacrifice of children and babies.

This is an Asherah, which is a representation of the goddess Asherah.

[Image of a clay statue of Ashera]

This one is from the Israeli Maritime museum.

- Asherim, or Asherah poles, were common in Canaanite worship.
[Image of a stone figure accentuating fertility]
- They were often a cone of stone, or a tree trunk-possibly carved into the image of the goddess.
- Asherah was a fertility goddess—sometimes a rival to Baal and sometimes his consort.
- Her worship was cultic prostitution (1 Kings 14:23-24). She promises to give life, but she takes life.
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In fearful devotion people would sacrifice to Asherah, Baal and other Canaanite gods in order to feel safe and in order to prosper. Of course, people also sacrificed to Yahweh. But as we now know, Yahweh has very different intentions.

Scripture refers to these lesser gods as idols.

Isaiah 44:16 *Half of [a tree] [a man] burns in the fire. Over [that] half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me [that is ‘save me’], for you are my god!”*

Isaiah is amazed at the way in which men create something, then look to it for salvation and even creation—the thing they created. “*Shall I fall down before a block of wood?*” asks Isaiah.

An idol can’t create a person, but maybe it can *desecrate* a person.

In 1 Corinthians Paul writes that when Gentiles sacrifice to idols, they are really sacrificing to demons (1 Cor. 10:19-20).

In Ephesians he writes that we battle not against flesh and blood but “principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12) ⁴.

Fifty years ago, the Dutch theologian Hendrikus Berkhof wrote a seminal book titled *Christ and the Powers*, in which he unwrapped Paul’s meaning in the phrase, “the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness.”

- Berkhof points out that Paul is referring to social institutions and systems of thought—psychologies, sociologies, and ideologies . . . but not just inanimate systems.
- He’s also referring to demonic or spiritual realities that inhabit and influence those systems.

Some of you have had encounters with demonic entities and learned to call on the name of Jesus.

- But according to Scripture, rebellious spiritual entities don’t just show up to freak you out in the middle of the night; they also inhabit governments and institutions.
- They appear to have been created by the Creator to govern His creation, but like us, they have fallen into rebellion.
- In the Old Testament, different nations had different gods, just as they had different patterns of thought.
- And some of those gods were war gods, fertility gods, economic gods etc. etc.

In Colossians Paul writes that on the cross, Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers—he took away their bullets (so to speak) and exposed them as a lie.

Well anyway,

Israel did evil, by *fearing* the gods of the land that they had come to inhabit.

So maybe we should ask:

What are the gods of the land that we have come to inhabit?

What are the American gods?

What do you think? Try to think of some ideas.

Here are a few that came to my mind:

This is the Wall Street bull found in the financial district in New York.

[Image of a modern bronze statue of a bull]

It’s come to symbolize the stock market and American prosperity . . . American virility . . . (If you look at the backside of this bull, you realize that it has huge virility)

Well, I’m not arguing that the stock market is evil.

I’m just pointing out that it’s something made by man.

And it can’t truly make you prosper—not the way that God wants you to prosper.

It cannot make you fruitful in the image of God.

This is the Statue of Liberty. In the background you can see the World Trade Center.

⁴ *el* or *elohim* which is the plural, means “ruler,” and it’s the word translated god or gods in Judges 6.

[Image of the Statue of Liberty]

Lady Liberty was a gift from France and is a representation of the Roman and pagan goddess, *Libertas*.

This is what immigrants meet in the New York Harbor—not a statue of Jesus, but a pagan goddess, holding the Declaration of Independence.

Now I'm not arguing that we should tear down the Statue of Liberty.

But I would question the idea that the US Government could set anyone free.

The US Government is a system of laws made by man . . .

And it *cannot* set you free.

Well those are just a couple of American gods.

We could literally point them out for hours and days, leave, come back, and discover more.

- Recently my daughter read this best-selling book titled *American Gods*.
- Then Susan began to read it as well.
- And then we started watching the recent television show, based on the book.

Listen carefully: It's *NOT* family viewing. It's incredibly graphic... but it's graphic in the way the bible is graphic, and it's depiction of the gods, so far, seems to be *awfully* biblical.

Clip 1 from *American Gods*

[Men strive on a ship that is traveling on the sea.]

Narrator: *To a man they were expert seamen, yet no expertise can surmount a sea that does not wish you to reach shore.* [In the background the shout of a captain is heard and chants of heave, hoe, hum as men row through the sea on an old Viking type ship.]

Narrator: *Until finally . . .* [The chants continue, "Heave ho heave, Heave ho hum."] *Celebration was cut short, the land reached was barren, rocky, no food, no shelter, only biting insects and snakes.* [Men are shown struggling on land.] *It was time to leave this accursed land. But their sails hung flabby and the wind did not wish them to leave; they were becalmed astride hell. But luckily they knew that wind can be reasoned with.* [Men carve wood and form it into an idol.]

Narrator: *The All-Father could intercede with the wind on their behalf, but they feared that he would not know to look this far from home. They would have to make him look. It was obvious now what was required. After all, their God was a war god.* [The men face each other, raise their weapons, and begin to attack each other. The screen turns to shadows and blood red. Sacrifices are made.]

Narrator: *They left in a hurry not bothers to sew their wounds or burn their dead. And when they reached their home shores, not one of them ever set foot in a boat or spoke of that new world ever again. Over one hundred years later, when Leif the Fortunate, son of Erik the Red, would rediscover that land, he found his god waiting, along with his war.* [The chant of "Heave, ho, hum" sounds in the background.]

Their god reminds me of Baal...

In the show this god turns out to be Odin, and he's still hanging out in America.

This is Odin explaining things to a fellow sitting next to him on a plane.

Clip 2 from *American Gods*

[Two men (Odin and Shadow) are traveling on an airplane.]

Odin: *It's all about getting people to believe in you. It's not their cash, it's their faith. [A man listens carefully, contemplating what he is being told. Well, take this plane for example, this 80-ton chub of metal, seat cushion and Bloody Mary mix has no right to be soaring through the sky, but along comes Newton explaining something about the airflow over the wing creating a uplift or some sort of sh*t, none of which makes a lick of sense, but you've got eighty-two passengers back there who believe it so fiercely the plane continues it's journey safely. Now, what's keeping us aloft . . . faith or Newton?*

Odin and the other gods want faith, for if people stop believing in the gods, they'll cease to exist... even physicists now argue that reality is somehow dependent on our faith. Well, the gods want faith—or at least devotion—but ultimately, they can only get it through fear, and that looks like sacrifice... The gods feed on people, like you feed on bread and wine— body broken and blood shed.

Clip 3 from *American Gods*

[Odin and ... enter into another deep conversation.]

Shadow: *Sacrifice . . . like what, for god?*

Odin: *What's a god? Can we even know they exist? People believe things, which means they're real. That means we know they exist. [...looks puzzled and contemplative.] So what came first, gods or the people who believed in them?*

Shadow: *Alright, so where was all this before I met you?*

Odin: *On the periphery, just outside, there's always a window, but people are frightened to look through it . . . safer in a prison cell.*

Shadow: *We're not safe now.*

Odin: *No, we're not.*

Shadow: *Who are you?*

Odin: *If I told you, you wouldn't believe me. [Odin walks away.]*

Once after a truly amazing encounter with Jesus and the devil,
My wife heard Jesus say, "With fear you put flesh on the evil one."⁵

See, I don't think the evil one has the power to murder six million Jews.
But through fear he can take on flesh and get people to do it for him.

⁵ I know this is weird and you don't have to believe me, but years ago, praying for a friend who had been ritually wed to satan and oppressed by demons, my friend and wife watched satan shrink to a little man screaming on her coffee table. We prayed to Jesus. Then Jesus walked into the room, smiled, picked him up and put him in a pocket in His robe. Then they both heard him say, "With fear you put flesh on the evil one."

- Well Odin is an old god and he's trying to enlist other old gods—like Vulcan who runs an armament factory manufacturing Vulcan bullets somewhere in the Midwest.
- There's also a goddess, who acts just like Asherah:
She doesn't produce life through sexuality. She consumes it.
- Odin is trying to enlist some of the old gods to battle the new gods, who are competing for the devotion of Americans like beasts compete with each other for food.

These are some of the new gods we meet:

[Image of Mr. World, who represents world trade and globalization]

[Image of his consort is a woman that looks like Marilyn Monroe and Lucille Ball; she's like the media.]

[Image of their unruly son, who is technology.]

It's not just a TV show, according to Scripture.

There *actually are* American gods.

They compete for your devotion, demanding sacrifice—

Even human sacrifice and prostitution.

And if you're a believer, you are battling against them—right now.

I asked you to think of some American gods.

And now I'll ask you to think of some American fears—maybe your fears.

✓ What are you afraid of? _____

Answer that question in your own heart.

✓ What are your fears and could they be related to some of those gods?

If you're afraid of a stock market collapse, maybe you're worshipping the wrong god.

If you're afraid of losing your liberty, maybe you're devoted to the wrong deity.

If you're afraid of Midianites, maybe you've been serving their idols—like Israel.

And if you're afraid of God, the Lord God—maybe you don't know Him...

Or you don't know Him well.

Maybe the God you know is largely a god of your own construction... an idol.⁶

Scripture says, "God is Love," and then it says: "Perfect Love casts out fear."

So fear is the beginning of Wisdom, but Perfect Love is the end of fear.

God is Perfect Love and God is our Father...

⁶ Maybe your Jesus is a Jesus that you have constructed in your own image.

It was Israel's idolatrous idea of the Messiah that got the real Messiah crucified.

It was the *false* Christ, the *anti*-christ, Israel's *conception* of the Christ, that led their rulers to nail Him to a tree.

So God is a Father that says to His child:

“Don’t you fear the kids on the bus! Don’t you fear what other people think!
You fear only me! You look only at me. You focus only on me.
Now listen to me. I love you. Now, no more fear.”

- If you truly know Perfect Love, who is God and your Father, you will have no fear.
- *But*, every one that I know has plenty of fear, *even if* they deny the fear, hide the fear, sublimate the fear and lie about their obvious imprisonment to fear.
- In other words everyone I know, at least in part, is an idolater.

But you see? Your fears can teach you something.
Israel’s fear revealed that she was serving idols.

- So when you become aware of fear, don’t run from the fear, bury the fear or hide from the fear; don’t fear the fear, which is just more fear and more idolatry.
- Stare at the fear and learn from the fear; ask yourself, “*Why am I so afraid?*”
It will lead you to an idol, like Baal, Asherah, the stock market, the US government or maybe one that’s even worse than all of those.

But when you find the idol, how do you destroy the idol without creating more idols?
Well... I’m not so sure that *YOU* can.

Next verse Judges 6:11-12

Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth [tree] at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite [that’s a family descended from Joseph], while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.

Now you’d normally thresh wheat on a hill in the wind.
But Gideon is threshing in a winepress so Midianites won’t see the dust.
Karl Wheeler pointed out that Gideon is literally choking on fear.

[Next verses]

“And the angel,” which means messenger...
The Angel [singular] *of the Lord*...

[If you’re unfamiliar with the Old Testament, The Messenger of the Lord is this wild character that shows up in the most outrageous situations. He’s actually addressed as *Yahweh*, and yet He’s a man, who is God’s Word—in flesh.]

The Angel of the Lord appeared to [Gideon, choking on his own fear] *and said to him . . .*

“The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.”

And Gideon said to him [hiding in a wine press], "Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"

Do you ever feel like Gideon?

"Lord, all these miracles happened in the past, but where are they now?"

"And were do you get off calling me a man of Valor?"

"Can't you see that I'm literally choking on my own fear?"

(v.12-13) ... Gideon said to him,

"Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."

Is that true?

Had the Lord given them into the hand of Midian? YES we read that in verse one.

But has the Lord forsaken them? Well... NO. No, no, no!

The God-man is standing right in front of Gideon under a tree, as Gideon chokes on fear—surrounded by the components necessary for the manufacture of bread and wine. The Lord is with him: "God with us." *Emmanuel* is how you say that in Hebrew.

He is so "with us," that He even knows just what it's like, to cry out in fear,

"My God my god, why have you forsaken me?"

(v. 14-16)

And the Lord (Yahweh) turned to [Gideon] and said, "Go in this might of yours... [What might is that?] "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."⁷

But Gideon still doubts and he's still afraid. So in (verses 17-14) . . .

- Gideon asks the God man to wait while he runs to his house, prepares some meat and bread, and then brings it back to the God-man under the tree.
- He puts the meat and bread on a rock. The God-man touches it with His staff—and fire springs from the rock entirely consuming the sacrifice.
- And then, the God-man vanishes, as if He also, is consumed by the fire... as if Gideon sacrifices and the God-man sacrifices Himself in the fire or maybe He *is* the Fire.

(v. 22)

⁷ What "one man," one Adam, do you suppose that is?

*Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face." But the Lord said to him, "Peace be to you. **Do not fear**; you shall not die."*

(v. 25)

That night the Lord said to Gideon, "Take your father's bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal [and remember Baal is a bull—this is a lot of bull, and a God joke on Baal] "Take your father's bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order. Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah that you shall cut down." So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night.

In the morning the men of the town want to kill Gideon, but his father defends him saying, *"If Baal is a god, let Baal contend against him."* That becomes Gideon's nickname, Jerubbaal, meaning, "Let Baal contend against him."

Well, in the next verse, Baal *DOES* contend against him.

Do not think that obedience to the Lord means that things will get easier It means that you're more of a threat to *"The principalities and powers."* *"The world rulers of this present darkness."*⁸

So, just when Gideon thinks that he's got the victory, Baal contends against him.

(v. 33)

Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.

Next the Spirit of the Lord clothes Gideon, Gideon sounds the trumpet and gathers 32,000 Israelite warriors—And yet, he's still afraid.

That's when he sets out his fleece and subjects the Lord to empirical scientific testing in a controlled environment. Amazingly, the Lord complies. (You know science is not a new god; it's very old.)

(Judges 7:1-2)

Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. The Lord said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand... [into Israel's hand]."

⁸ If you see godliness as a means of gain—I bet you're serving the wrong god.

That's crazy. It's just like saying:

- You have too much knowledge to ever get wisdom... or
- You have too much money, to ever know prosperity... or
- You have too much power, to ever experience freedom.
- You have too many soldiers to win the war, Gideon, too many soldiers to win the war . . . Not the war with Midian . . . the war with *fear*... fear and the last idol.

The Lord said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'"

"...lest Israel boast over me..." ...So what's the idol?
In the New Testament Israel, is also called

Israel
The Church

Did you know that this could be an idol?

[Image of the flag of Israel]

And did you know that this could also be an idol?

[Image of a church]

If you think that that saves you . . . it's an idol.⁹
And what is that? It is us.

Listen closely: (7:1-2)

*"The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My **own hand** has saved me.'"*

The idol behind every idol, that inflicts you with fear and traps you in darkness . . .
The idol behind every idol . . . is you. When you make an idol, you try to create your creator, which makes you the uncreated creator—so the ultimate idol is always you.

That's why you can't deliver yourself from idolatry, because the last idol is *you*.
That's why you can't save yourself from sin, because the cause of sin is *you*.
That's why you can't deliver yourself from bondage, because the bondage is *you*.
That's why you can't rid yourself of fear, because the source of all your fears is *you*.

- You are afraid that *you* (the idol—the "American idol") will fail.

⁹ The church is "us" and even more specifically . . . a bunch of "me"s.

- You are afraid that you will not be able to make yourself in the image of God with your knowledge of good and evil.
- You are afraid ...and mostly afraid of not being afraid because if you're not motivated by fear, you're afraid that you won't be motivated at all.
- You are afraid, because you think "*fear* is Salvation" and that fear will save you.

You think, "If I'm not afraid, I'll die." And actually that may be true.

But Scripture teaches: "If you are afraid, you're already dead..."

"Dead in your trespasses and sins." "For the day you eat of it you will die."

John writes, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear for fear has to do with punishment*" or better as some translate it, "fear is it's own punishment." Fear is not salvation. God is salvation, which means Love is salvation. (1 Cor. 13:8) Love does not fail.

"The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'"

Lest they think, "My self is Salvation."

You know the name Jesus means "God is Salvation," "*Yahweh* is Salvation," *yehoshua*, *yeshua*, and in English: Jesus.

About twenty years ago, I began to see, and even believe, that Jesus always wins . . .

Even when He loses, *especially* when He loses, He wins.

And He came to seek and to save the lost . . . and so He will save the lost, *ALL* the lost.

It doesn't mean that none are lost, now—in fact Scripture reveals that many sons of the Kingdom are lost, and will *weep and gnash their teeth in outer darkness*—they just won't stay lost forever without end because Jesus *is* the End.

I learned that this was the dominant belief in the early church.

I read it in the greatest theologians.

I had it confirmed in some miraculous ways.

And over and over and over, I found it in Scripture.

And yet the more I preached, "Good news, God saves."

The more some people got frightened and, then, really angry.

I was genuinely bewildered . . . wondering, "What are they so afraid of?"

I was genuinely bewildered . . .

Until the day I realized that the more I preached, "God is Salvation,"

The more I also preached, "And you... are not."

“You and your fear . . . are not.”¹⁰

The more I preached the success of *Jesus*.

The more I preached the failure of “*me*”-sus.

That’s what I call Him—the false God that is “me.”

We have a lot of names for the false god “me,”

But in America a very popular one is “choice...”

We even say things like “Salvation is *your* choice,” (Do you hear it?)

“*Your choice*” is salvation instead of “God is Salvation,”

Which is so true in one way and so wrong in another.

We say things like, “God will not violate your free-will.”

“Your free-will is undetermined . . . that’s why it’s free!”

I sometimes ask people, “Is your free-will a thing?” “Yes,” will be the reply.

“Well if it’s a thing, did God create it?” That’s harder for most Americans to answer.

- If God created it, then surely He somehow determines it.
- But if God didn’t create it, it is obviously the uncreated creator—and you are “God” . . . And no wonder you’re afraid, cause you’re *NOT* doing a very good job of being God.
- If God didn’t create it it’s the uncreated creator OR it’s God Himself at work in you to will and to work for His good pleasure—So you can’t be proud or your good will, but only grateful. You must give the glory to Jesus and not “me”-sus.

Now you may not have followed all of that, but you can follow this:

- If you give the glory to “Jesus,” which means “God saves,” you will be most happy when He’s done the most saving.
- But if you give the glory to “me”-sus, which means “me saves,” you will secretly resent the salvation of all others, except those you think saved and of course didn’t save. And you will be a prisoner of fear, unable to love, and on your way to outer darkness... where “*sons of the kingdom weep and gnash their teeth, as they see throngs of people come from east and west to sit at table in the Kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*” (Matt. 8:11 Luke 13:28)—just as Jesus said.

If you worship the false god “me”-sus... it’s no wonder you’re terrified!

It’s no wonder Americans are terrified, for we worship American gods.

And it’s no wonder American Christians are really neurotic, for we often refer to our American gods as if they were Jesus.... When in fact they’re all a form of “me”-sus—*my* fear, *my* choice, *my* will that I call “Jesus.”

You see? It’s not just an obscure theological issue...

¹⁰ In fact, all must be lost at some point if all are saved in the End.

I think it's every issue; it's your every issue and my every issue
Whether or not we have faith in "me"-sus or Jesus.
Whether we live by the flesh or the Spirit—a Fire burning in our earthen vessel.

Ten years ago, I came to believe that I was called to do battle against the last idol
And I figured that you were probably called to do battle with me . . .
And so the story of Gideon was the first or second message I preached in the
Sanctuary...
And I wasn't, and still am not, quite sure what it all means . . .

I'm called to battle fear, and yet I am often so afraid...
I'm afraid that there are too few of us, and I don't know what I'm doing.
I'm afraid that we don't have the strength or the knowledge.

Next verse: (7:2)

*The Lord said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the
Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has
saved me.' Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is
fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.' "*
Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.

That's nuts! . . . and yet that's what Israel is commanded to do every time they go to
war. Deuteronomy 20:8 the General is to stand in front of the army and say, and I quote:
*"Is there any man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go back to his house, lest he
make the heart of his fellow melt like his own."*

Can you imagine if we did that at the start of every battle?

"Listen you Marines, if you're scared go home."

We do just the opposite: "If you go home, we'll find you and then, you will really be
scared."

We manage fear with more fear, both in the army and in the Church.
But you can't defeat fear with fear, just as you can't defeat idols with more idols, or sin
with more sin or flesh with more flesh¹¹.

"If you're afraid go home" and 32, 000 is reduced to 10,000.

God takes away what we would call *strength*.

And that makes some sense, but what happens next makes no sense.

(7:4)

¹¹ "True, fear deceptively offers to help us," writes Kierkegaard. "Yet the one who strives in fear never becomes God's friend. Fear is a deceitful aid. It can sour your delight, make life arduous and miserable, make you old and decrepit; but it is never able to help you toward the Good. The Good will not tolerate any alien helper. Those who live in fear may indeed desire heaven but not for itself. . . . Only one thing can help us to will the Good in truth: the Good itself." God is good and God is Love.

And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home." So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley...

Commentators go nuts trying to explain why 300 men that chose to lap water with their hands were better than 9,700 men that choose to bend all the way over. But it makes no sense. But isn't that the last idol—our sense? I mean, the idol is our "knowledge of good and evil" and the strength of our own will. The false god is "me."

Well, God drastically reduces Israel's strength.

Then, He makes the remainder surrender their knowledge and strength.

Then, through that remnant, God defeats Baal, Asherah, the Midianites, and fear.

Paul says that there is *an immeasurable greatness of power in us who have faith...*

Well, God is an immeasurable greatness of power; He is Eternal Fire in jars of clay.

- And that's how the 300 defeat the Midianites, Amalekites, and Amorites.
- And that's how God defeats the world rulers of this present darkness.
- And that's next week's sermon, for which, this is the introduction.

- But, before we end, let me just say, there are some of you that to the best of your ability

have really given yourself to God.

- And for a time, you grew in strength and knowledge, and you saw miracles...

- But there came another time, when it felt like God took your strength away, all your knowledge failed, and now you cannot figure out what God is doing.

The gods of this world will tell you that you've failed . . .

And in a sense, maybe you have . . .

And yet, you've never been closer to victory—a victory greater than you are able to imagine.

Well, Gideon tasted victory, but it was just an appetizer.

After Gideon died, Israel reverts to idolatry and fear, which by the way is the ultimate surrender of strength and knowledge.

If you know your Bible, you know that God begins with humanity, and then whittles humanity down to Israel, and then Israel down Judah, and then Judah down to Jesus...

And He is a radically different kind of Man—from all other men.
And He is a radically different kind of god—He is the one true God.

Now, I have very little hope in the theology of the TV show *American Gods*, but in the last episode, they introduced Jesus. And even the folks at Starz Entertainment couldn't ignore the fact that He is a radically different kind of god.

He doesn't exist because we believe in Him.
We exist because He believes in us—He literally thinks us into existence.

He doesn't need to feed on us . . .
But He tells us to feed on *Him*—body broken and blood shed: bread and wine.

He doesn't demand that we sacrifice to Him in fear.
But He has arranged all things that we could see Him sacrifice *Himself* to us . . . and *for* us in Love—He is Love, and He longs for us to love like Him—in freedom.

In this scene some illegal immigrants are swimming across the Rio Grande when one begins to drown . . .

Clip 4 from *American Idols*

[A hand reaches down and lifts up a person who is drowning in the depths of the river. The drowning man reaches the surface and begins to breathe. He pants in relief as he looks up at the Man who saved him. He then climbs on to dry land. He looks puzzled, amazed, and relieved. Then he looks back. A Man is walking on the water. Others are standing waste deep and reverently look on as the Man walks by them.

In Spanish, the rescued man, now on land (still breathing heavily in relief), looks at the Man who saved him and says, "*You saved me. Thank you. What's your name?*" The Man—Jesus replies, "*You already know my name.*" A light illuminates behind Jesus. Several pickup trucks race toward the shore. The immigrants look on with concern. Border patrol officers exit their vehicles and begin shooting at the immigrants.

A woman calls out a warning to everyone; she is shot and falls to the ground as the others run for the river [screams and gunshots]. Jesus runs towards the bullets coming from the border patrol officers who are shooting at the immigrants. He extends His hands and begins to shield the immigrants with His own body and blood. Bullets pierce His body. Jesus collapses to the ground as a family is reunited and embraces each other in safety. The camera scrolls back to show Jesus on the ground, arms extended with blood flowing from His hands and heart.

Did you notice that the bullet was imprinted with the word "Vulcan?"

That's how Jesus disarms the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness.

God whittled Adam down to the Last Adam, Jesus . . .
And whittled Jesus down until He's utterly depleted of strength,
And He doesn't know why . . .
Nailed to the tree in the Garden, He cries, "My God my God, why... ?"
And He still chooses to say, "Father forgive..." and "Into your hands I commit my Spirit."

When all "the rulers of this present darkness" conspire against Him and try to determine Him . . . try to make Him in their image
He still chooses to Love.
He is God's Free Will.
He is God's Good Choice *given* to us.

His earthen vessel is broken and He bleeds . . . Fire.
And in this Way God makes *ALL* things new.

Communion

[Peter goes over to the communion table, breaks the bread, and pours out the wine.
"This is my body..." Jesus says, "given to you." And "This cup is the covenant in my blood. Drink of it, all of you."

Worship

[Several worship songs are sung.]

Benediction

And the Lord turned to Gideon and said, "*Go in this might of yours and save Israel. . .*"
He didn't say, "Go in this might of yours and save some headhunters in a far off land."
He said, "...Save Israel—The *Ecclesia*" "*from the hand of the enemy do not I send you?*"
He said that to Gideon, and He says that to you. And I know what you think, "*This might of mine? What are you talking about? What is it, and how do I get it?*" That's what we'll talk about next week.

And check this out: it's already in you. The Lord says this to Gideon when he is choking in fear in the bottom of a winepress. And next week, we'll talk about how it gets out of you and into the world.

So, in Jesus' name, believe the Gospel!

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio or video version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.

