

TITLE: Faith. Public or Private?

INTRO:

1. I don't know about you, but I have been brought up all my life to avoid two subjects when getting together with a group of people.
2. Especially if you don't know the beliefs and the views of the group. I have always heard the adage, "Don't talk about religion or politics." Who else besides me has been taught that little life lesson?
3. You know there is some great wisdom there. I am referring to conversations outside of the church, but most group conversations I have ever been a part of that ended in difficulty usually got there because somebody brought up religion or politics.
4. That said. How many know inside the church if you bring up politics that's a good recipe for inviting disaster.
5. I've seen family reunions almost end in fireworks because religion and politics were brought into the picture.
6. Why is that? Because religion and politics are usually subjects that are born out of deep beliefs and convictions. And how many know that everybody in our world doesn't have the same beliefs and convictions.
7. Not all of us here today have the same beliefs and convictions. It's just the way humanity is.
8. So, in our world today if we are wise, we choose to stay away from subjects dealing with religion or politics.
9. But what about faith? Should we stay away from the subject of faith? You might wonder, well pastor I thought that's what religion was. Isn't religion and faith the same thing?
10. Well, I don't believe it is. Religion has been described as a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of people.
11. Religion is made up of beliefs that people generally agree on. Those beliefs don't even have to center around God. That gives us some great insight into why bringing up religion is so dangerous. Because as we said earlier everybody doesn't believe the same thing.
12. Faith however is different. Faith has been described as the trust in God and in His promises as made through Christ and the Scriptures by which humans are justified or saved.
13. I think what makes faith different from religion is the fact that faith is much more personal. My faith, your faith, describes what Jesus Christ has done for us personally by our acceptance of him as Lord and savior.

14. My religion is one thing. Yes I believe that sin is sin and there is a heaven and a hell. I believe that there is a God and that he is awesome and that he is the creator of all the universe.
15. My faith says, this great God loves me and died on the cross for me and lives inside of my heart.
16. How many are beginning to see the difference between religion and faith?
17. So, I go back to our question. If religion is one of those subjects we should avoid then what about faith.
18. You know that this little debate has been going on for several decades in our country. It seems to be a hotter topic in some places than it does in others, but yet it still lives on, and I believe eventually all of us will be faced with the question. Faith. Public or private?
19. Now I am going to grossly understate the position that many in our world have taken. This is an extremely over-simplified statement. But basically, many in our world today believe that it's ok for you to have faith, just don't publicly express your faith.
20. It's ok for all the students in the school to believe in prayer, we just don't want anybody praying out loud or leading students in prayer.
21. It's ok for the vast majority of people in a community to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin and is the messiah, but let's don't put a nativity scene out at the courthouse and express that belief.
22. It's ok for the judge in a courtroom to believe in the Ten Commandments but let's don't put a copy of them up on the wall so that everybody can see.
23. Many will point in the face of Christians and say, it's ok that you have your faith, but keep your faith to yourself. Don't express that faith in public. Keep it private.
24. Now understand I am not advocating we organize a rally and march on city hall tonight. I'm not saying we take on a public debate and stir up the place, but I am asking us to consider this morning where we are when it comes to our faith in Jesus Christ. Our personal faith. Our personal relationship with God.
25. Is it something so private and so personal that we ought to keep it quiet and keep it to ourselves or is it something that deserves to be shouted from the rooftops?
26. How about our expressions of faith? How about praying in public, praying before a meal. How about our worship to God in public? How about the sharing of our faith with others who don't know Jesus?

27. Now I know that as I said that the room probably just divided into two different trains of thought. Those who are more quiet and reserved may have just thought, well faith is something so deep and personal that I definitely am not going to be getting my ladder out and hopping up on any roofs any time soon.
28. And quite possibly at the same time, those who are more vocal and more bold may have thought, well if you don't carry your roof gettin up on ladder around with you all the time then something is wrong.
29. And while it's ok that we have different views on the subject I believe the real authority on the subject of faith and how we are to express that faith is the one who created our faith.
30. I love the fact that this isn't the first time in history that we have faced this question of expressing our faith, nor will it be the last. I'm also thankful we have someone who has walked on before us when it comes to helping us gain insight and wisdom.
31. I want us to learn from Gideon. Gideon was a man who wrestled with expressing his faith.

TEXT: **Judges 6:33-35** Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. **34** Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. **35** He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

1. The Midianites and the Amalekites were the enemies of Israel and basically their formation and movement into the area signified to Israel that they were about to be attacked.
2. And in response to this the bible says that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, we are going to look at the significance of that in just a moment. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Gideon and Gideon get's out a trumpet and blows it as loud as he can, and he starts summoning, that means yelling at the top of his voice for everyone to listen to him.
3. He sends messengers out to some of the other tribes and summons them to come and listen to him.
4. And once he gets them all there he is basically going to tell them about his encounter with the angel of the Lord, and he is going to tell them that he has faith that God can deliver them from the hand of the Midianites and the Amalekites.

5. Basically, the purpose of calling everyone together is to share his faith in God and get people to trust in God.
6. Now I want to be transparent with you, because the truth is I don't identify very well with this Gideon mentioned here.
7. I identify much better with the Gideon mentioned about 15 or 20 verses before this, because the Gideon we're going to look at in just a moment would have never blown a trumpet and shouted and got everybody to look at him on his own. His bold expression of faith was a result of the Spirit of God changing his life.
8. I was a shy kid. If I walked into a room with a bunch of strangers I would literally just want to curl up in a ball.
9. I was deathly afraid of speaking in public. I was afraid everybody was looking at me.
10. I was afraid to worship publicly, even in church. I love to sing, but praising God openly and publicly was a problem for me. Again, I was always so concerned about what everybody else was thinking of me.
11. I sought the lord for the baptism of the Holy Spirit for years. I started seeking when I was seven and wasn't filled until I was almost 18. I believe one of the reasons it took me so long to be filled was because I worried what everybody would think of what came out of my mouth.
12. If it had not been for the persistence of a beautiful young lady I probably would have never met my wife.
13. I saw her and thought she was beautiful, but was too shy to talk to her.
14. She purposely tried to get my attention and I was too chicken to notice.
15. A friend finally told me; hey she likes you. No really?
16. This may sound hard for you to believe but for most of my life if I walked into a room there is no doubt that everybody in the room had more confidence in themselves than I had in myself.
17. That's why I identify more with the Gideon we find in Judges 6 verse 11.
18. The bible says that God sends an angel who meets Gideon while he is threshing wheat in a winepress.
19. A winepress was usually located in an enclosed in area or building. They would put the grapes in a large basin and men would walk on the grapes to extract the juice.
20. Threshing wheat was something normally done out in the open so that all the dust and chaff or waste would blow away. But Gideon is threshing wheat in an enclosed area because he is hiding. He is afraid.

21. The angel of the Lord appears and greets Gideon by saying the Lord is with you might warrior. I can just imagine Gideon looking around. Who are you talking to?
22. The angel then commands Gideon to go and save Israel and promises that God will be with him. And in response we see a transformation begin to take place in Gideon's life as he moves from hiding in a winepress to blowing a trumpet on the hillside.
23. As we consider this idea of whether expressing our faith is public or private I want us to look at two truths we find here in the life of Gideon.

Expressing our faith is about God, not about us.

1. Judges 6: 15-16 "But Lord, " Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." 16 The LORD answered, "I will be with you,
2. The first big obstacle Gideon had to overcome in moving out in his faith was what he thought of himself.
3. God shows up through his angel and says hello mighty warrior. Go and save Israel. You can do it. And the first think Gideon does is to begin making excuses.
4. I believe his encounter with the angel stirred and built his faith. I believe there was an even stronger faith beginning to develop inside of Gideon, but that faith was never going to be all it could be if Gideon didn't step out and express that faith.
5. And the thing that he saw that kept him from expressing that faith and walking in that faith was who he saw himself as. Gideon saw himself as the weakest in his family. He saw his family as the weakest in his clan. He saw his clan as the weakest in his tribe and he saw his tribe as the weakest in the nation.
6. Oh God, how can I save Israel Gideon questions, I don't have what it takes. Just look at me.
7. And I love God's response in verse 16. I will be with you.
8. It's as if God is saying it's not about what you aren't, it's about what I am.
9. Now I know that God isn't asking us to do the same thing that he asked Gideon to do, that is save a nation, but he does ask us to express our faith.
10. How do we express our faith in God? We express faith in God when we worship him. We express faith in God when we live for him. We express faith for God when we serve him in ministry. We express our faith when we tell others about what he has done for us. There are many ways we can express our faith.

11. And for every way we can express our faith the enemy is going to help us come up with an excuse as to why we can't express our faith.
12. Well, I can't worship God expressively because you know I grew up in a church that just didn't do that. That may be true, but worship is about God and not about you.
13. Well, I want to live for God, and I want to be faithful to him but sometimes its just hard and I'm afraid I'll fail. You will fail, but I can assure you God will never fail you. It's about him and not us.
14. Well, I would like to express my faith by serving in ministry, but I just don't feel qualified, join the club. Many don't feel qualified but it's not about our qualifications it's about God's qualifications.
15. I'd like to share my faith with others, but I just don't know what I'd say or do. They might ask me a question I don't know the answer to.
16. Well let me ask a question. Have your kids ever asked you a question you didn't know the answer to? Did you kick them out of the house and stop being a parent just because you didn't know the answer? No.
17. Did you ever take a test in school and not know the answers to all the questions? You didn't wad the test up, throw it in the trash and take a zero just because you didn't know all the answers.
18. None of us know all the answers, but God does.
19. Expressing our faith can be difficult, and I hate to say it but the way our world is changing, it's probably going to get more difficult, but it's not about us, it's about God.
20. A second thing to consider when expressing your faith.

It's not about what people think, it's about what God thinks.

1. Judges 6:24-27 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. 25 That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. [3] Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole [4] beside it. 26 Then build a proper kind of [5] 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 [6] bull as a burnt offering." 27 So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.
2. Gideon's faith is so stirred by what the angel says that he goes and slaughters a young goat, makes some bread, brings it back to the tree by the winepress and under that tree makes an alter to the Lord and he worships there.
3. Gideon gathers some rocks and places the meat and bread on the rocks and the angel reaches out with the tip of his staff and touches the meat and when he did fire shot out and burned up the meat and bread.

4. Gideon looks up and the angel is gone.
5. I bet Gideon went home that night just as thrilled as he could be. He probably had trouble sleeping. In fact, we know he had trouble sleeping because God begins to speak to him again, hey you know that idol your father has set up out there. Tear it down and set up an alter to me.
6. And Gideon is afraid because he realizes he isn't out there under the tree by himself anymore. He realizes that his faith in God is going to be made public.
7. In other words, the expression of his faith is going to a new level. The expression of his faith was asking him to stand out in the crowd.
8. Verse 27 said he did it, but he did it at night because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town.
9. I don't believe we should put Gideon down for being afraid, I believe we ought to praise him for being obedient to God.
10. I want to encourage you to not walk in fear of what those around you may think. Rather be concerned about what God thinks.
11. Maybe you are the first person in your family to accept Jesus. Maybe nobody else at home supports you; don't be afraid to live out your faith.
12. Maybe there are others in your family who are Christians, but you sense God calling you out to use you in a greater way. Don't be afraid.
13. They may say well who do you think you are. I knew you back when you were nothing but a snotty nose kid. You can say that's ok. Now I'm a snotty nose kid for the king.
14. When you're in a worship service and you sense the spirit of God moving upon you and calling you to express your faith to God in a bold way, don't be inhibited just because no one else around you is doing anything.
15. Follow Gideon's example and be obedient to God.
16. When we get our eyes off ourselves and get our eyes off of others, and get them focused on God then and only then does the Spirit show up.

Conclusion:

1. Judges 6:34 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet,
2. I love that. Gideon blew a trumpet. Why in the world would a guy with low self esteem and a fear of everybody else around him blow a trumpet?
3. Because the spirit of God gave him the power to do so.
4. You know Gideon was in bondage, his family was in bondage, his neighbors were in bondage, and his nation was in bondage.

5. But when Gideon began to rise up and express his faith, and let that faith shine the spirit showed up, and not long after the spirit showed up people started being set free of their bondage.
6. But it began with a guy, hiding out in a winepress, threshing wheat, who refused to believe the lie that his faith was something that was to be kept bottled up inside him. He learned that his faith that once expressed liberated him.
7. I believe one of the biggest lies the enemy has brought on our nation is the lie that faith is something that is to be quiet and personal and private.
8. As long as the enemy can keep our faith quiet and personal and private we as a nation will remain bound.
9. But if we as a nation, a nation I will remind you by the way that was founded on religious freedom and expression of faith, if we as a nation will begin to express our faith again, God will set us free again.
10. If we as a church will step to a new level of expressing our faith, through worship, through service, through sharing with others, God will send his Spirit and set this region free of the chains that bind it.
11. If we as believers will step to a new level of expressing our faith, God will send his spirit and set our families free, our neighbors free, our co workers free and our neighborhoods free.
12. And it will begin when we follow the lead of Gideon.
13. Hi. My name is Jeff. And I'm afraid. And I don't think very highly of myself and I don't know what's going to happen, but I know that God is a big God, and I know what he's done in my heart is real, and if he can do it in me he can do it in others.
14. Prayer.
15. Help me to express my faith in new ways of...
 - a. Worship
 - b. Boldness
 - c. Greater effectiveness in ministry.
 - d. Being engaged in ministry.
16. Salvation call.
17. Will you be open to how the Holy Spirit would stir you to express your faith?