

Sermon before Salvation

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Date: 30 May 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening and welcome to a service from Beglew, Free Church. We're going to begin a four-week study on Gideon, one of the famous judges that we find in the Old Testament.

But before we get to Judges chapter 6, I want to read a short section from Ephesians chapter 2 and then we'll pray. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. Let's pray together. Lord, our God, we thank you that your word contains that word of saving grace that we discover in the Bible.

[1 : 20] How despite our sin and rebellion, despite the fact that by nature we are spiritually dead because of our transgression and our sin against you, despite our slavery to evil forces, to the devil and to sin, despite our desire to satisfy our own flesh, that because of your great love, because of your great mercy, you sent your son Jesus to be that saviour that we need, to make us alive with him and to save us by your grace, to raise us up with Christ and to give us every spiritual blessing in him.

Lord, we need your word in our life. We need your word to convict and challenge us. We need your word to teach us, to humble us, to encourage us.

We need your word in order that we might be saved. And so as we come to consider your word together, may you send your spirit to give light and to give life to us, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. So we'll be in Judges chapter 6 together. It's a lengthy chapter, but with lots going on and hopefully lots that we can learn from also.

So, Judges chapter 6. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.

[3 : 13] Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys.

They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels. They invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.

When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, he sent them a prophet who said, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them out before you and gave you their land. I said to you, I am the Lord your God.

Do not worship the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live, but you have not listened to me.

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak and opra that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

[4 : 22] When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, The Lord is with you, mighty warrior. Pardon me, my Lord, Gideon replied, but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?

But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian. The Lord turned to him and said, Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you? Pardon me, my Lord, Gideon replied, but how can I save Israel?

My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family. The Lord answered, I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive. Gideon replied, If now I have found favour in your eyes, give me a sign that it's really you talking to me.

Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you. And the Lord said, I will wait until you return. Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast.

Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak. The angel of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock and pour out the broth.

[5 : 38] And Gideon did so. Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread.

And the angel of the Lord disappeared. When Gideon realised that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, Alas, Sovereign Lord, I've seen the angel of the Lord face to face. But the Lord said to him, Peace, do not be afraid.

You are not going to die. 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. That same night the Lord said to him, Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old.

Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of 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 bull as a burnt offering.

So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime. In the morning when the people of the town got up, there was Baal's altar demolished with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar.

[6 : 48] They asked each other, Who did this? When they carefully investigated, they were told Gideon, son of Joash, did it. The people of the town demanded of Joash, Bring out your son. He must die because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.

But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning. If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.

So because Gideon broke down Baal's altar, they gave him the name Jerob Baal that day, saying, Let Baal contend with him. Now all the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the valley of Jezreel.

Then the spirit of the Lord came on Gideon and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

Gideon said to God, If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised, look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand as you said.

[7 : 54] And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day. He squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request.

Allow me one more test with this fleece. But this time, make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew. That night, God did so. Only the fleece was dry.

All the ground was covered with dew. Amen. This is God's word. Now, today we're thinking about the fact that this sermon, we find it, comes before salvation.

Sermon before salvation. I wonder, have you ever found yourself saying to another person, I don't need a lecture right now. Or sometimes you might say that.

Well, we could perhaps imagine if someone's walking too close to the edge of a riverside and they happen to stumble and fall into the river, that person doesn't need a lecture.

[8 : 55] They just need pulled out. Or if you're stranded in your car by the roadside, when your mechanic comes and he comes with a list of wise sayings on car care, you might find, I don't need a

lecture right now.

I just need to get moving. Sometimes the problem seems obvious. The need seems urgent. So therefore we think this is the time for help.

Now, I wonder if Gideon and his generation thought that. Here they are, seven years of misery at the hands of the people of Midian.

And then they cry out in pain to God. But what's God's response? First he sends them a preacher, not the freedom fighter they're hoping for.

Now, why is that? It's a really important question that we'll think about today. The answer is that God wants to tackle the root problem in their heart.

[9 : 58] He wants to get to the heart of the matter, which is far deeper than temporary social distress. And what we need to understand is that God's desire and God's design, they don't change.

God would want us to see, just as he wanted Gideon's generation, to see the danger of sin. So that we see, when he extends salvation from spiritual death as a gift, that we see that as good news. And God will still use his word in order to convict people, to convict us of our sin, to show us our forgetfulness of him, to expose our idolatry that goes on in our hearts, in order, ultimately, that we would turn to Jesus.

So today, as we think about Judges 6, God would use this story in the life of Gideon in order to reveal to you and to me today our own sin and weakness and our need of the Saviour.

And he would also, with the help of the Spirit, reveal Jesus as the greater deliverer than Gideon, so that we might trust him, that our trust for him and our love of him would grow.

[11 : 16] So there's a big chapter, lots to cover, so let's dive in. And let's think, first of all, of God's criticism. That's what we focus on in the first 10 verses.

Remember, verse 7 onwards, we see sermon before salvation because God wants their hearts.

Their immediate problem, their being oppressed and impoverished, but God probes deeper.

And that's his kindness. To his own people, to expose the deeper spiritual problem that lurks within, so that true healing might come.

We might think, perhaps, of visiting a GP. We have a presenting problem. But then the doctor begins to ask some questions and then sends us away and runs some tests.

And between those questions and those tests, it reveals a deeper problem, perhaps a problem that requires surgery. It is a kindness to probe beyond the surface.

[12 : 24] And God uses his word in particular to his people through his prophet, his preacher, to probe forgetfulness and idolatry.

So let's look at what they have forgotten. Verse 8, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says. I brought you up out of Egypt. I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians.

I delivered you from all your oppressors. I drove them out and gave you your land. I wonder just as

Israel had forgotten God do we forget God as our creator that God has made us in his image that

we might know him enjoy him and love him and that we would show loyalty and obedience to him I

wonder too if we forget God is our provider and just as a Gideon or Gideon's generation was

reminded that God had provided rescue and a land for them every good gift that we enjoy today

and every day of our life comes from our God but when we forget that what follows is a loss of

gratitude to God we think well this is all my stuff and do we forget God as saviour in which case we

become cold to Jesus he doesn't seem like good news we don't need him and his salvation or as

Christians we can become complacent we can lose sight of the wonder of the fact that as Paul said

in Ephesians that though we were spiritually dead and spiritually slaves to sin and heading for for

destruction God in mercy and love sent Jesus and Jesus has rescued us we need to be reminded

about our forgetfulness what about our heart idols you know for for them it's

Baal and Asherah but what about us what are the what are the heart idols in my life and in your life

they can be anything that we look to for our source of identity our source of salvation our source of

comfort there is not God for example money is recognized by Jesus as perhaps the dominant idol

and isn't it easy for us to think that money makes us somebody I am what I own or I am because I

consume because I have all this stuff then I am a somebody this is me we can also look to our

money to give us salvation that we can buy our way so we think to security to prosperity or buy our

way out of trouble we can look to money to provide comfort for us now like the parable Jesus told of

of the rich fool who said take life easy eat drink and be merry not recognizing that his his life would

be taken from him that very night see we are made in the image of God and we are to find our identity from him

God has sent Jesus to be our savior and we are to look to him for salvation God sends the spirit to be our comforter and he is to be our comfort but we can so easily put God to one side in order to place our hope in an idol often in in Israel they had a a sort of a God plus and the other idols theology kind of um well we'll worship God but we'll also worship these uh false gods just in case or they just in case they they work and we can do that we can find ourselves running to created things placing our hope and our value our sense of significance or on another person or or another thing you and I we were made to find our identity salvation and comfort from God to look vertically to look up but when we forget it's when we look around we look horizontally for them to gods that are too small that cannot save and so God's word comes to this people who are suffering misery and God's word goes deeper and God's word cuts deep and that's a kindness as God looks to bring repentance they would turn away from sin and self back to God that he would that they would um then be restored into fellowship with him that there'd be renewal in their hearts true spiritual worship going on and that's his desire for each one of us also so that was God's criticism but then um verses 11 to 24 let's think about God's deliverer perhaps we can imagine Gideon we can imagine the nation perhaps asking this question over the seven years of misery where is God when you need him maybe you find yourself asking the same question some unexpected circumstance some difficulty in your life perhaps even a traumatic event and you can find yourself asking where is God when you need him well what we'll see in this section of God's word is that God gives Gideon a really precious gift he gives him a promise and that promise is this one I am with you the point being that we can deal with a lot but we know that to be true in our own experience and that's a promise that God would give to each one of us as we're trusting in Jesus so this section deals with the call of Gideon to be the next judge and the the commissioning of Gideon giving him his task and I want us to recognize this how surprising this moment is this is surprising grace because remember here's the people who've forgotten God here's a group of people who are turning to idols here's a group of people with no sign of repentance and yet God in his grace shows that he wants to save a people for himself and for his glory but let's see how that promise I am with you sort of features throughout this text so look at the greeting in verse 12 the angel of the lord it said the lord is with you mighty warrior the lord is with you there's the promise right there in the greeting and that prompts the question from Gideon that question where is God when we need him why this crisis we've heard about all that God did in the past but why is God not with us now

[19:37] Gideon at this point is failing to see that God actually was with him he was with them in exposing their sin exposing their idolatry and calling them back but he's not seen that yet verse 14 here's his task the lord turned to him and said go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand am I not sending you so there's that call and there's God saying I'm sending you how does Gideon respond he responds a lot like Moses focusing on his own personal weakness you're my my my nation is weak my family is weak and I'm the weakest of the weak but the response verse 16 I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites here's a reminder it's in God's power that he is the mighty warrior in God's provision God's strength and God's presence but then verse 17 we see Gideon a couple of times we see Gideon seeking assurance for his faith and here's the first time Gideon replied if now I have found favor in your eyes give me a sign that it's really you talking to me and so what he says is God let me go and prepare an offering and bring it back he wants assurance of God's favor and God's presence with him and the response of God is dramatic so he brings back some food verse 21 the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff fire flared from the rock consuming the meat and the bread and the angel of the Lord disappeared there is his question answered God is powerful God is present God consumes the meal by way of answering Gideon is is weak his faith is weak but God is strong and God is with him and God will work through him it's good news isn't it good news for us in our weakness perhaps we can think of young children if you have young children you can think back to when your children were younger and they are at times able to do hard things that they didn't think they were able to do so long as their parent is with them perhaps holding their hand perhaps giving them reassurance giving them strength

God's I am with you is intended to be a source of salvation and strength for God's people in every generation it was true in the life of Jesus remember the time when he and his disciples were in a raging storm and they woke Jesus up don't you care if we drown and Jesus spoke to the wind and

the waves another time when they were out in a storm and Jesus came walking on the water and then he came into the the point was they did not need to fear because Jesus the I am the I am God Jesus who is God was with them he was the answer to their fear the story of Gideon is a reminder to to you and to me today that to trust in Jesus is to know God's favour in our lives that we enjoy God's grace God's kindness God's love as a free gift that we don't deserve but we receive by faith to trust in Jesus is to enjoy his presence that those words that Jesus said to his disciples are just as true for us I am with you always to the end of the age Jesus sends the spirit to dwell in our hearts so God comes to dwell in our hearts through faith and when we're trusting in Jesus we know his peace just as verse 22 Gideon realised our last sovereign Lord I've seen the angel of the Lord face to face the Lord said to him peace do not be afraid you're not going to die Gideon built an altar called the Lord is peace knowing Jesus can can speak peace to our troubled hearts so today are we resting him are we trusting in Jesus as Lord and are we trusting him for our salvation is he our hope in life and death in our trouble that we find ourselves today are we trusting in Jesus the one who said I am with you always

God's grace now let's move from God's deliverer to think about God's mission now picture the scene and this nation has been in trouble and it's been in trouble for seven years they're struggling to have enough to survive they're they're under the oppression of the Midianites and the reasons have been declared their forgetfulness their idolatry but now as an act of grace the deliverer is on the scene what would we expect the first task to be what would we expect probably sound that the trumpet let's go into battle let's call the army together for a council of war but Gideon's first task is to deal with the problem in his own back garden verse 25 that same night the Lord said to him take the second bull from your father's herd the one seven years old tear down your father's altar to bail and cut down the Asherah pole beside it why start there why start so local when there's this great big national problem well doesn't it go back to the sermon that came before the promised salvation it goes to the root of the problem the problem of of idolatry of forgetfulness of placing hope and offering worship to things other than God God desires national repentance he's not just after their comfort and their political peace so part one of God's mission for Gideon is about the battle for true worship in verse 25 to 32 he is to tear down the the false worship then the Asherah pole the the altar to bail he's to build an altar to the one true God and he's to sacrifice there that's a reminder that God is a jealous God he is jealous for our love he's jealous for the loyalty of people's hearts it's a reminder that there's only one throne in our hearts and God will not share it and Jesus said you cannot serve God and money it's also a reminder that there is only one true and powerful God the story brings a wonderful defense from from Gideon's dad so the people who are obviously their hearts are turned to idols actually want to kill Gideon because he deals with idolatry so the flip side of what God would want but but Gideon's dad in verse 31 are you going to plead Baal's cause are you going to try are you trying to save him if Baal really is a God he can defend himself if you need to save your God if your God can be knocked over if your God can be ripped from you your God is too small think about that in our own experience it's a reminder too that their major problem was spiritual not social it's about a lack of love not a lack of grain they needed peace with God more than they needed peace from Midianite battles

God wants true worship God would have us then examine our hearts and our lives to think about what we are concerned about concerned about for our family of our nation God would have true worship the greatest problem we face is is spiritual not social do our prayers do our concerns reflect that what is it that that I am trusting in really can I say that Jesus has first place in my heart and my life do I depend on him as I'm working through the day and a difficulty comes am I praying to him and asking him for his wisdom and his peace and his guidance am I choosing loyalty to him so Gideon's first battle is a battle for true worship but then in verse 33 to 35 there's also a battle against the enemies so the Midianites and Malachites and other eastern peoples they join forces against God's people verse 34 then this the spirit of Lord came on Gideon and he blew a trumpet and he summons the people to follow

Gideon is the spirit-filled deliverer and the people rallied to him in order to carry out God's plan question is though why come to Gideon in his weakness he's confessed he's weak people know he's weak they come because of God's spirit they come because here is the answer to God's promise here is his power with and for Gideon here is his presence with and for Gideon and so the people rally to the spirit-filled deliverer and when we think about this happening we fast forward to the New Testament we see don't we Gideon anticipates the work of Jesus in the gospel Jesus who as he is baptized is filled with the spirit without measure Jesus who from the beginning goes into

battle against the forces of evil we see it as he confronts the forces of demons and evil spirits and we see it ultimately as he goes to the cross waging war against the forces of Satan and sin and death and he triumphs over them at the cross and we see that in his resurrection and he breaks the power of sin so that as we are trusting in Jesus we are able to truly love God again to truly worship God again if our faith is in him the great battle that Jesus has won is a spiritual battle against those enemies that stand opposed to us and that would lead us away from God and towards destruction but God in his love and grace and mercy sent Jesus so that by faith in him we might be made alive so that's the mission that Gideon is on it's a big mission isn't it and so perhaps in a sense it's not surprising that we see in our closing verses God's assurance to Gideon verse 36 to 40

[30 : 35] Gideon said to God if you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised look I'll place a wool fleece on the threshing floor if there's dew on the fleece and all the ground is dry I'll know that you'll save Israel by my hand as you said now there's the question of the testing of God here the question of what's going on with these fleeces what do we do with this what does it have to teach us a couple of things I would say that it's not I don't think Gideon here is being disobedient you know as he looks for assurance for his faith and I think we can say that because God answers by miracle not just once but twice it's a good indication that he's not being disobedient this isn't also these fleeces aren't about am I going to choose plan A or choose plan B he's not testing God he's not demanding signs to aid decision making sometimes I think we can sort of place that kind of burden we can test God in that way well if I'm supposed to do this then make this and this and this happen and we need to be careful about testing God in that way and that's not what Gideon is doing but it is certainly is a reassuring

I do know isn't it a wonderful reminder here is Gideon who knows his own weakness being asked to do a huge task and he's trusting that God is powerful enough to answer by miracle and he's seeking reassurance and God what does he do he stoops down to Gideon's level he stoops down to answer him and to meet his need God is willing to reassure his anxious children to say in another way I am with you and I will help you God is our father and he loves us and he understands and he wants to to care for and to protect our faith and to reassure our faith and God gives these two signs to strengthen faith one time where the fleece is wet and the ground is dry the other time where the ground is dry and the fleece is wet I don't know if I can say that right and those signs then stand as assurance for Gideon in our day where do we look for this assurance of God's presence God's favour God being with us we don't look to fleeces we look to Jesus we have questions does God love me is he for me is he with me faith looks to Jesus this morning last Sunday of every month in our church we share the Lord's Supper we share a sign from God to strengthen our faith the Lord's Supper that reminder that God sent Jesus Jesus gave his broken body and his shed blood that we might be forgiven that we might have eternal life that we might be part of his kingdom that we might know his love and communion and enjoyment of his presence forever God sent his son to deliver us and since he has done that we can know that he is with us and that he is for us so we're invited like Gideon to trust to trust him even when we feel our faith is weak to recognise that we trust in a strong an infinitely strong saviour so the people in Gideon's day they got a sermon before salvation in our story

God sent his word to convict the people to cut them to the heart to expose their sin and their idolatry with the aim that they would repent they would turn away from those things and turn back to the living God that they would be restored into fellowship with him is that a message that you need to hear today do you need to be restored to God do you need to repent of sin and idolatry to have faith in God to have faith in Jesus his son and then God in his grace sent his deliverer sent his saviour promised his salvation anticipating the work of Jesus the greater deliverer the greater saviour are you trusting him today are you trusting Jesus as saviour are you resting in his presence with you do you know his strength made perfect in your weakness are you taking heart from that promise I am with you always God's word convicts but God's word also speaks that wonderful promise of gospel salvation in Jesus let's pray dear God we thank you for your word that word that convicts that word that also points us away from ourself and our sin towards Jesus and your plan of salvation may we be looking to him in faith may we rest in trust in that promise that you're the God who says I am with you I am with you always may we be enabled to live by faith knowing the strength and the help that you provide we pray in Jesus name Amen Now as we close our time we'll sing first of all we'll sing Christ the sure and steady anchor and then we will sing version A of Psalm 1

[36 : 50] Christ the sure and steady anchor in the fury of the storm when the winds of doubt blow through me and my sails have all been torn in the suffering in the sorrow when my sinking hopes are few I will hold fast to the anchor it shall never be renewed Christ the sure and steady anchor while while the tempest rages on when temptation claims the battle and it seems the night has won deeper still then goes the anchor though

I justly stand accused I will hold fast to the anchor, it shall never be removed.

Christ the sure and steady anchor through the floods of unbelief. Hopeless somehow, O my soul now, lift your eyes to Calvary.

This my ballast of assurance, see his love forever proved. I will hold fast to the anchor, it shall never be removed.

Christ the sure and steady anchor as we face the wave of death.

[39 : 24] When these trials give way to glory, and we draw our final breath.

We will cross that great horizon, clouds behind and life secured. And the calm will be the better for the storms that we endure.

Christ the sure of our salvation, ever faithful, ever true. We will hold fast to the anchor, it shall never be removed.

Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk.

Instead he finds God's holy law, his joy and great delight.

[41 : 10] He makes the precepts of the Lord, his study day and night.

He prospers ever like a tree that's planted by a stream.

And in Jew season yields its fruit, its leaves are always green.

Not so the wicked they are like the chaff that's blown away.

They will not stand when judgment comes or with the righteous stay.

[42 : 24] It is the Lord who sees and knows the way the righteous go.

But those who live an evil life, the Lord will overthrow.

J transplant in■■■■ Glory to palms with reward.

filled in and hard ray day. In other words of a stunning art pocket. Ph■■■.