

Things That Destroy the Church

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[0:00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading. Josh Johnson is continuing his series through the book of Judges. So please do turn your Bibles to Judges chapter 8. We have a church visitor Bible scattered around.

Judges 8, and we begin at verse 1. Then the men of Ephraim said to Gideon, What is this that you have done to us, not to call us, when you went to fight against Midian?

And they accused him fiercely. And he said to them, What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezah?

God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb, and Zeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you? Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.

And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over. He and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. So he said to the men of Zuccoth, Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted.

[1:35] And I am pursuing after Zeba and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian. And the officials of Zuccoth said, Are the hands of Zeba and Zalmunna already in your hand that we should give bread to your army?

So Gideon said, Well then, when the Lord has given Zeba and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars.

And from there he went up to Peniel and spoke to them in the same way. And the men of Peniel answered him as the men of Zuccoth had answered. And he said to the men of Peniel, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

Now Zeba and Zalmunna were in Karkur with their army. About 15,000 men, all of whom were left of the army of the people of the east. For they had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword.

And Gideon went up by the way of the tent dwellers east of Noba and Jogba. And he attacked the army. And the army felt secure. And Zeba and Zalmunna fled.

[2:42] And he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zeba and Zalmunna. And he threw all the army into a panic. Then Gideon, the son of Jerash, returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres.

And he captured a young man of Zuccoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Zuccoth, 77 men. And he came to the men of Zuccoth and said, Behold, Zeba and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, Are the hands of Zeba and Zalmunna already in your hand that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted?

And he took the elders of the city and took thorns of the wilderness and briars and with them taught the men of Zuccoth a lesson. And he broke down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the city. Then he said to Zeba and Zalmunna, Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor? They answered, As you are, so were they.

Every one of them resembled the son of a king. And he said, They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Lord lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you.

[3:56] So he said to Jethar, his firstborn, Rise and kill them. But the young man did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a young man.

Then Zeba and Zalmunna said, Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as a man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose and killed Zeba and Zalmunna.

And he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of the camels. Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian.

Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you. And Gideon said to them, Let me make a request of you.

Every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil. For they had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites. And they answered, We will willingly give them.

[4:57] And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels.

And Gideon made an ephod of it, and put it in the city of Ophirah. And all Israel hoared after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.

So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest 40 years in the days of Gideon.

Jerubbabel, the son of Jerush, went and lived in his own house. Now Gideon had 70 sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. And his concubine, who was in Shechem, also bore him a son. And he called his name Abimelech. And Gideon, the son of Jerush, died in a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Jerush's father at Ophirah of the Abirazites.

[6:06] As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again, and hoared after the Baals, and made Baal-bereth their god. And the people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbabel, that is, Gideon, in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

Well, amen. May God bless to us his word this morning. Well, good morning. Do open your Bibles once again to Judges chapter 8.

And it's good to see this morning that Paul got my memo about the uniform. So, that's a relief for us all. Judges chapter 8. It's always much, much easier to see the evil that is outside of us.

Many people in recent years have begun to accept that there is real evil in the world. Indeed, some have been driven to consider spiritual things because of it. By nature, we are very good at identifying the problems, the sins, and the evils out there, whether faceless ideologies, or powerful institutions, or opposition with a face and a name.

But far more people are willing to admit that there is evil in the world than that such evil originates and lurks within our own hearts. It's much easier to locate evil elsewhere than to recognize the twistedness within ourselves.

[8:00] And that is what Gideon's third battle exposes. He's fought Baal, the false god who had captured Israel's worship, alluring them to find their security and comfort and hope and identity in something other than the Lord.

He's fought against Midian, the enemy of the Lord's people, who brought strife and suffering upon Israel, the opposition of the world, used by God as a means of discipline.

But Gideon's third battle is with Israel itself. It exposes the evil lurking within the people of God, and increasingly within Gideon himself.

We've been seeing these last few weeks that Gideon stands as the hinge and the heart of the book of Judges, the turning point where we see not only that the judge's deliverance was temporary, but why it could only ever be temporary.

The enemy is not only out there in Midian. The same sin afflicting the Lord's people is present within the Lord's appointed deliverer.

[9:15] Chapter 8 exposes the limitations and contradictions within Gideon's ministry. Gideon accomplished much good for Israel, but he could not give Israel the lasting deliverance they needed.

He could defeat their enemies, but he could not free them from the corruption within their own hearts, because he was not free from that corruption himself. That failure lies at the heart of the book of Judges.

It was written so that the Lord's people would long for and submit to a righteous king. God's appointed king who would gather his people together into one, who would rule them in perfect righteousness, and turn their hearts again and again and again and again to the right worship of God.

Gideon's final battle, the battle against the evil within, gives us an anatomy of the things that destroy a church. Pride that grasps after position, fear that looks to its own protection, and the conflicted

flaws of those appointed to lead.

These are the things that diminish, divide, and destroy the Lord's people. And so we see firstly, in verses 1 to 17, the corrupting flaws among the Lord's people.

[10:44] The corrupting flaws among the Lord's people. When the Lord's people are preoccupied with their own status and security, that is ruinous, ruinous for the church.

Judges began with the tribes of Israel sharing in the conquest of the land, following on from Joshua. But as the book spirals downwards, that unity becomes increasingly fractured.

Turn back to chapter 6, verse 34. Gideon blasts his trumpet to muster soldiers, and he calls out the Abiezrites, his own clan.

And then notice verse 35, messengers go to Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Only four tribes are called.

It's no longer all Israel gathered with one purpose, but fragments of Israel. And that division is displayed here in the foolish pride of Ephraim and in the fearful pragmatism of Sukkoth and Penuel.

[11:56] Two things which spoil the fellowship of God's people. And so the first, in verses 1 to 3, is the twisted concern of having our place. The age-old problem faced by humanity is that ever since our first father Adam, we have grasped for a place that does not belong to us.

Whether reaching for the fruit in the garden that might make us like God, or building the Tower of Babel to reach the heavens and make a name for ourselves. We are much, much more like the egomaniacal King Nebuchadnezzar with his giant statue and fizzing rage when people don't buy down to it.

Much more like that than we'd like to think. It is a perennial problem for the people of God. Do you see this ugly pride rearing its head in verse 1?

Ephraim had not been among the four tribes called out in chapter 6. But at the end of chapter 7, verse 24, they were summoned to mop up the fleeing Midianites and to deal with the princes Oreb and Zeeb.

And now in chapter 8, verse 1, comes the complaint. Why did you not call us when you went out to fight against Midian? We're too late to the fight, claims Ephraim.

[13:17] And notice the language. What is this that you have done to us? The grand tribe of Ephraim have been robbed of glory. That's their gripe.

And notice the characteristics of this grasping for glory. Firstly, it's impetuous, drawing conclusions without first seeking to understand.

When we cling too tightly to our place, we quickly find adversaries where there are none. What is this that you, Gideon, have done to us?

But of course, we know that Gideon acted under God's direction. Far from being free to recruit Ephraim, Gideon had been required to reduce his army to only 300. It's impetuous.

But secondly, it's brazen pride. Back in chapter 7, verse 2, the Lord warned Israel, the Lord warned that Israel would claim the victory as the work of their own hand.

[14:20] And Ephraim is now doing exactly that, seeking glory in battle, but a glory which belongs to the Lord. And where there is pride, there will also be, thirdly, envy.

Notice Gideon's response in verse 2. He downplays his own achievements in comparison with Ephraim's. That's what smooths things over.

And that is why grasping for and guarding our place is so destructive to the church. It creates rivals instead of brothers.

It stops us rejoicing with those who rejoice. And when that happens, we will stop weeping with those who weep. And then notice the fourth characteristic, anger.

The final phrase of verse 1, they accused him fiercely. And we knew that, don't we? We see it in ourselves. We experience it from others.

[15:17] When we feel we're not being given our due, clutching tightly to status and adulation and respect, then along with the Ephraimites, we react disproportionately as those things are chipped away.

Friends, wounded pride is poison to a church. Fixating on our place is toxic to our fellowship. And the New Testament is just as serious about these things.

When Jesus' disciples argued over who was the greatest, he rebuked them. It's the way of the Gentile kings to lord it over their people. But he says, not so with you.

Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest and a leader as one who serves. And the problem lives on. In the church age, in 3 John, we find diatribes. Who must be first? Is that not the bubbling desire that lurks in us all to get our own way, to claim the credit we feel we deserve?

[16:30] Brothers and sisters, I wince as I say these things because I know my own heart. I know my own battles with this. But this was no trifling battle for Gideon.

And it's no small thing in the church today. If someone were to write a manual on how to destroy a church, it would need to have a chapter entitled Guarding My Kingdom.

And that manual would tell us things like resist any change to the ministry we're involved in because change can be implied criticism. And so fight any change to the group you lead.

It's your group, after all. It might say that anyone interested in serving in the same way as us, anyone eyeing up our piano, should be discouraged.

Their attempts met with sneering feedback to kill off any desire to continue. The manual might advise us always to insist that our voice is heard and that any decision we were not party to must be wrong and so must be vocally criticized.

[17:42] The manual would tell us to be on the lookout for any and every slight, whether real or perceived, and to hold on to it. And on and on the manual would go telling us how our desire for place can destroy the church.

But Gideon was a shrewd leader who knew that a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. So in verse 2, he says that Ephraim's exploits exceed his own.

In verse 3, you, Ephraim, have been given the princes of Midian into your hands. What have I done in comparison to you? It's a soft word, but it's not actually a scheming one or a dishonest one.

Later on in Isaiah chapter 10, it tells us that the might of the Lord is seen in striking Midian at the rock of Oreb. Well, that was Ephraim's contribution, a significant, considerable one.

Listen to James Philip. He says, Gideon did not falsely flatter the Ephraimites, but gave praise where praise was due, even if it meant playing down his own distinguished generalship.

[19:00] We could all learn a good deal from Gideon's wisdom here. Friends, what turns away grasping for place? What pours water instead of petrol on a burning anger?

Someone willing to lay aside their own pride. Gideon refuses to answer Ephraim's pride with wounded pride of his own, and their anger subsides.

Friends, how often have we known anger to linger and linger and fester? But notice, here it subsides, and all because Gideon says, you have the praise.

You have the praise. He lays down his own place, his own praise. That was the first thing that spoils fellowship. The second thing that spoils fellowship among the Lord's people is the telling concern of ensuring our own protection in verses 4 to 17.

However much we rationalize our absence from the fight in which the Lord's people are engaged, the reality is that refusing to stand with the Lord and support his people when it may be costly is to act as an enemy of the Lord.

[20:22] That's what we see here. In verse 4, Gideon and his 300 men are pursuing the kings, Ziba and Zalmunna, and his men are exhausted. And so Gideon asks the leaders of Succoth to provide food for his men.

But there was to be new sucker at Succoth. Verse 6 is just a fancy way of saying no. They're calculating and pragmatic.

They say, have you already taken these Midianite kings? If so, we'll help because then we don't need to fear reprisals. If Ephraim was too late to the fight, Succoth is too early.

We'll support you when there's no risk to us. Gideon receives the same response from Peniel in verse 8. And so he promises to discipline both of these towns.

Verse 7, when the Lord has given these kings into my hand, I will flail your flesh. Verse 9, I will break down your tower. All right.

[21:29] Some commentators and the like cast Gideon's promised discipline here as an excess, as the beginning of his downfall. But I don't think that's right.

You see, the Lord has promised to deliver Midian into Gideon's hand, and surely this remains part of that same battle. For the victory to be conclusive, the leaders of the foe and the remaining 15,000 men need to be dealt with lest they rise again to repeat their evil.

And notice, verse 7, Gideon still trusts that the Lord will deliver these kings into his hand. And that's exactly what happens in verses 10 to 17.

Gideon's 300 men catch up with the fleeing forces. Because 120,000 have already fallen, but 15,000 remain. And here comes Gideon with 300 men to take on 15,000.

Outnumbered 50 to 1. But notice verse 10, that little reminder of what happened to the 120,000. They drew their swords.

[22:42] But remember what happened with those swords? The Lord turned them against one another. I think it's very hard not to see this as part of the same promised victory.

Gideon surprises the enemy. He's victorious. He captures the kings as they flee with just 300 men. And having done that, he returns, verse 14, to Succoth.

And he questions a young man to get the names of the elders responsible for refusing help. And as promised, he deals out a very painful discipline. He's gone from threshing in a wine press to thrashing the leaders of Succoth, verse 16, teaching them a lesson.

And in verse 17, Gideon adds the tar of Penuel to the altar that he's already pulled down. And he kills the men of the city. Ephraim received a soft word to turn away wrath because for all their pride, Ephraim had joined the fight.

But by refusing to stand with their brothers, Succoth and Penuel were dealt with as the enemies of Israel were dealt with. They preferred their own safety to sharing in the evident saving work of the Lord.

[24:02] Word would have spread 300 men had toppled 135,000. Listen to Ralph Davis on these towns.

He writes, Prudence, so they held, dictated their opposition to Gideon. Or was it faithlessness? It can be difficult to distinguish between the two.

Must our safety always be the ultimate consideration? Brothers and sisters, the second thing that will be poisoned to a church, poisoned to our church, is an unwillingness to bear the cost of belonging to Jesus.

Think of Peter on the night Jesus was betrayed. For fear of what it might mean for his safety, he was disloyal to the Lord. And his denial is shown alongside Judas' outright betrayal.

Though they're not identical, both were disloyalty and treacherous. And it's easy to imagine that we can remain neutral, isn't it? Perhaps this is not the issue for which to contend.

[25:14] Others are doing it this time. There'll be other opportunities for me to be faithful. I'll contend for a different issue. And however much we rationalize steering clear of the point at which it is most costly to fly the flag for Jesus, avoiding the fight is betrayal.

not standing with and supporting and giving succor to those battling for the Lord, not picking a side when one is clearly the Lord's, that is not neutral.

We see here it is to put ourselves in the place of his enemies. And friends, when we are unwilling to give up our safety, is that not a virus that will spread through the church?

when we know that others are unwilling to bear the cost, we will be inclined to do likewise. But is the opposite not also true?

When our church has instance after instance of young people flying the flag for Jesus in hostile schools and students doing likewise in universities, when we have among us those who forego career advancement because they will not compromise their faith, when we have people willing to bear the scorn of our city, to contend on the streets for the lives of the unborn, will that courage not spread?

[26:45] Few things disrupt, diminish, and destroy the unity of God's Israel, of God's church, like a festering desire to have one's place, and a fearful desire to protect oneself.

Here is one more piercing word from Ralph Davis. He says, here is instruction for us. Sometimes the people of God are a great disappointment. If you don't know that, you may not survive in the church.

Don't allow God's people to disillusion you. At least be prepared for it. And watch out that it is not your passion for status, or your pursuit of security, that disturbs the unity, and saps the energy of the church.

For these things are things that destroy a church. Well, as well as the Lord's people being able to destroy the church, we also see it's possible for God's leaders to do likewise.

And that's what we see secondly in verses 18 to 35, the conflicted flaws of God's appointed servants, the conflicted flaws of God's appointed servants. Those who lead the Lord's people must watch their own hearts, lest their inconsistencies undo much of the good accomplished through their service.

[28:08] From verse 18 onwards, we begin to see a conflicted Gideon, a portrait of ambiguity around his motives and his actions. Those who think Gideon was excessive in dealing with Sukkoth and Peniel, well, they seize on this episode with the same two Midianite kings in verses 18 to 21.

They seize on it as further evidence of power going to his head. I'm not convinced by that reading, but this does raise a striking question about the conclusion of the Gideon cycle.

How do we assess his ministry? It's a complicated picture. It's not easy to draw neat and tidy conclusions in either direction. In verses 18 to 21, these two Midianite kings that have been pursued, they stand before Gideon and he questions them about men that they've killed at Tabor. And it turns out that these men that these kings have murdered were Gideon's brothers. That might lend weight to the argument that Gideon is using as power to settle a personal vendetta, but I don't think that's a fair conclusion.

God's law made provision for an avenger of blood, the nearest relative charged with executing justice against a murderer. And the kings do not protest their innocence, they even seem to gloat.

[29:38] And Gideon identifies himself as a nearest relative, and so their execution need not be read merely as an unfortunate personal vendetta. It can be understood as the work of an avenger of blood, and it is the completion of God's promised victory over Midian.

And so I take the execution of these two murderous and pillaging tyrants as part of Gideon's righteous judgeship. But these verses also introduce the royal theme that dominates the rest of the passage.

Look at verse 18. The Midianite kings say that Gideon's brothers whom they murdered resembled like him the sons of a king. And then verse 21.

Once Gideon killed them, he takes the crescent ornaments from their camels, which were costly emblems of royal splendor. And so the victory God promised and delivered through Gideon concludes with these royal connotations.

And this prepares us for the question of what place Gideon will occupy now that the Midianite crisis is over. Look at verse 22, what follows.

[30:56] The men of Israel say, rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also. You have saved us from the hand of Midian. You see, for once the men of Israel speak with one voice.

There is a picture of unity here, but it's not a straightforward unity, is it? They unite around Gideon, but credit him with the salvation that the Lord has accomplished through him.

You have saved us from the hand of Midian. And they ask Gideon to be their king and establish a dynasty through his family line. And this is where things become really quite complicated.

Look at what Gideon says, I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.

You see, he seems to be saying, as is right, there is only one king and head of Israel and of the church. It's not Gideon, it's the Lord. But what follows reveals Gideon's inconsistency.

[32:03] He apparently says no to being king, but then look at his actions. Refusing kingship, seemingly, but verse 24, he asks for a king-like tribute.

All the golden jewelry taken as spoil, about 20 kilograms worth of gold, two million pounds worth. And in verse 30, he acts like a wealthy king with many wives and 70 sons.

And if you're not convinced just yet, verse 31 adds that he had a concubine, and notice what he calls his son by her? Abimelech, which means my father is king.

Now, I don't think Gideon was lying when he said that he would not rule over them. I just think that the Bible is utterly realistic about humanity and about the servants that God uses.

They're not perfect. They're flawed. Do we not all struggle to match our theology, what we understand and confess, the Lord will rule over you, with our actions in day-to-day life?

[33:16] I know I do. I'm sure I'm not the only one who finds that. But we do need to be aware that after the Lord has been pleased to use us in ways great or small, there is a real and alluring danger that we profess humility but practice pride.

And there's more to this conflicted picture of Gideon. Gideon was a judge, he was raised up by God and clothed with God's spirit. As a result of his ministry, verse 28 tells us, the land had rest for 40

years.

That's the last time the land has rest in the book of Judges. And so we must not allow Gideon's later feelings to erase the real deliverance God accomplished through him or the genuine blessing his ministry brought.

And verse 33 implies that Gideon's presence restrained Israel. Only after his death did they return to whoring after the Baals. Verse 35 condemns Israel for showing no love or loyalty to his family for all the good he'd done.

Gideon was a real servant of the Lord, used by God, a blessing to Israel. But he did confess that the Lord was king while increasingly behaving like a king.

[34 : 36] And for all the good he did do, his flaws undermined Israel and led them toward disaster. From all this gold that he collected, Gideon fashioned an ephod.

We can read more about ephods in Exodus chapter 28. And it tells us there that a high priestly ephod was a garment with an attached breast piece that bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

And within that breast piece were the urim and thumim, objects by which Israel received direction from the Lord. And so the high priest's ephod signified that Israel was carried before God into his presence by his appointed mediator.

And it also signified that they were guided by the Lord as their true king. And so Gideon's ephod carried unmistakable priestly associations.

It represented mediation and divine guidance, rules that God had already appointed to others and located elsewhere. whatever Gideon's motive in making it, the fruit of this ephod was disastrous.

[35 : 58] Even the language used to describe it being made is reminiscent of the golden calf. Now perhaps Gideon persuaded himself that because God had guided Israel through him, an ephod at Ophrah, his hometown, would preserve that guidance, would extend his good influence.

The arguments may have sounded convincing, even spiritual. But God had not appointed this alternative. For all Gideon's fruit as a judge, he led Israel horribly astray.

He set up an alternative means of relating to the Lord God, a means not given or granted by God himself. Gideon grasped for a place that wasn't his.

It's always a temptation for the Lord's people to seek some new or alternative form of spirituality, something that we can feel and experience, something that gives us a direct word from the Lord for our particular unique circumstances, so that we can claim God has told us to do this or to do that.

Or perhaps an ephod might be a celebrity pastor whose word comes to mean more to us than Scripture itself. Their loyalty blinds us to where they may be wrong.

[37 : 22] Listen to David Jackman. He says, Many a Christian has been carried on a tide of personal popularity far beyond what God was calling him or her to. And look at Scripture's assessment of Gideon's ephod in verse 27.

All Israel whored after it God and it became a snare to Gideon and his family. This is a solemn word to those who would lead in God's church.

And I take it that it's also then a solemn word to those of us who are leaders of homes and families. when we lead contrary to what God has said, when we try to be and do more than God has appointed, when we make people more dependent upon us than is right, when we offer a new way to flourish spiritually, that wreaks havoc.

It corrupts. All Israel whored after Gideon's ephod. And then notice, as Gideon died, verse 33, Israel's whoring after the ephods once again becomes whoring after Baal.

Well, what are we to make of all of this? A grim chapter that shows us all the things that will destroy a church. And the story of a deliverer whose legacy is more whoring after idols.

[38 : 55] Well, these chastening warnings are not here to merely cause us to look inwards this morning, and they certainly aren't here so that we go home and start trying to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. Gideon was an inadequate solution to the internal flaws in Israel.

He couldn't deal with the sin that lurked in God's people because that same sin lurked in him.

Rather, the writer of Judges had a driving concern to show that Israel needed a godly king who was faithful in keeping covenant with God.

And that longing which the writer seeks to awaken in the Lord's people is only and finally realized and satisfied in the Lord Jesus. Brothers and sisters, in the Lord Jesus, we have a king whose motives we never need to question.

they're never mixed or muddled. Jesus is the sole king and head of the church and so any of us who lead are therefore only ever under shepherds of churches and indeed families. And so any legacy in our church will therefore be determined by whether Jesus rules over them and whether his word dwells richly among us. There's no inconsistency in Jesus.

[40:18] Just as we sang, there's no shadow of turning with thee, thou changest not. In Jesus, we have a king who did not cling to his position for his own advantage.

Though he was in the form of God, he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. And because Jesus stooped from his exalted place and raised us up with him, we have the unshakable assurance that our place is with Christ in the heavenly realms.

And so we don't need to jostle for position in this world because our identity is secured in him. We have a place forever, unbreakably. We are sons of God, an identity that cannot be belittled or taken from us and which does not rest upon our brilliance.

God will be God. And in Jesus Christ we have a king who did not make his own protection his chief concern. He resisted the allure of the devil in the wilderness and he said in the garden, not my will but yours be done.

A king who being found in human form humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And because Jesus laid down his life rather than prioritizing his own protection, we are eternally secure in him.

[41:47] This world may kill the body but a day is coming when the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable. And we have a king whose justice is always perfect, never rash, never made murky by questionable motives, never conflicted, always pure, always right.

And in Jesus Christ we have the true high priest and the true tabernacle, the place where God dwells and draws near to his people so that we don't need an alternative, we don't need an addition. And in Jesus Christ we have the true prophet who still speaks and guides his people from heaven through his word to guide and direct his church.

friends, the thing that destroys a church above all else is when its true good and righteous king in head is usurped. Jesus' rule is perfect.

He can lead and rule his church because he has never failed. His heart has never been turned aside from the Lord. God. He is everything that we are not and he is able to make us into all that he is.

[43:10] Jesus is our righteousness. He fulfilled righteousness for us. He credits righteousness to us and by his spirit produces righteousness within us. Judges 8 is a chastening picture of things that can destroy the church.

church. But, but, when we taste deliverance from Jesus' hands, from the unconflicted one, when his reign and rule guide and protect us, the church is built up in love rather than destroyed in pride.

And it's built up through sacrifice and service rather than destroyed in self-protection. it's built up by the one who is our true prophet, priest, and king.

And he doesn't need to grasp to get that position. Friends, Gideon said, I will not rule over you.

The Lord will rule over you. And that's our only hope. And that's the only way. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us, we pray.

[44:35] We are ever conscious of our weakness and our sin. But turn our hearts afresh and perennially to your Son.

And grieve upon our hearts the wonder of our identity in him. And engrave upon our hearts the security that is ours through his life, death, and resurrection. And so we pray, O Lord, that you guard and protect our church.

And in doing so, would tenderly quash our pride and lovingly strengthen our courage and our hope that we would be a church united together in worship and in service.

All for your glory. Help us, for we need it. And there is no other way. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. may!