

The First and Greatest Battle

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[0:00] But we're back this morning in the Bible in the book of Judges. Josh Johnson's been looking at this of late, and we're coming back to that this morning. And we're going to read together in Judges chapter 6.

And if you don't have a Bible with you, plenty of Bibles just outside the door there on the racks. Stewards will be very glad to give you one. Do just ask. And we're going to be reading together the book of Judges in chapter 6.

And in those church Bibles, verse 2's Bible, it's page 205. So it's a long chapter. We're reading most of it.

And I'll begin at verse 1. And you'll see that we have this very common refrain we've already seen that repeats all the way through the book of Judges.

The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.

[1:02] 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 strongholds.

For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them. They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land as far as Gaza.

And leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. For they'd come up with their livestock and their tents. They'd come like locusts in number.

Both they and their camels could not be counted. So that they laid waste the land as they came in. And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord.

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 bondage.

[2:07] 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. Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ofra, which belonged to Joash, the Abizite.

While his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.

And Gideon said to him, Please, sir, 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. And the Lord turned to him and said, Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian.

[3:20] Do I not 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. And he said to him, If now I find favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speaks with me.

Please do not depart from me here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you. And he said, I will stay until you return. So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young

goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah flour.

The meat he put in a basket and the broth he put in a pot, and he brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. And the angel of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened cakes and put them on this rock and pour the broth over them.

And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes.

[4 : 37] And the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. 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. And then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord is Peace.

To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites. That night the Lord said to him, 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 there, 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. When the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built.

[6 : 09] And they said to one another, Who has done this thing? And after they searched and inquired, they said, Gideon, the son of Joash, has done this thing. Then the men of the town said to Joash, Bring out your son that he may die, for he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it.

But Joash said to all who stood against him, Will you contend for Baal, or will you save him?

Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning.

If he's a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down. Therefore, on that day, Gideon was called Jeroboam.

That is to say, let Baal contend against them, because he broke down his altar. 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.

But the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet. And the Abiezrites were called out to follow him, and he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him.

[7 : 29] And he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them. Amen.

And may God bless to us his word and help us to understand his message to us from it today. We'll do open your Bibles once again to Judges chapter 6.

Our greatest need is spiritual. As individuals, as a church, as a nation, our greatest need is spiritual. However much this world would want to undermine that and muddy and confuse our concerns and priorities, the truth is that our greatest need, our greatest problem, is a spiritual one.

Our wandering hearts. Now, of course, Christians are not immune from painful and trying difficulties in this world. We're not. We will all have all manner of needs and trials.

[8 : 37] but, however pressing other concerns might feel, nothing matters more than who and how we worship.

When the Lord's people lose sight of that, God can become little more than someone we look to for relief from whatever we presently find hard. We domesticate him, treating him as though he were at our beck and call.

I was struck recently by an older Christian man who I had the privilege of praying with. He's a wise and godly man. He asked how he could pray for me and after we prayed, I asked how I could pray for him and his answer was simple but profound.

Pray for my godliness. My greatest need is always more godliness. Not a change in circumstances, not relief from any difficulty.

He's more godliness. Well, as we begin the story of Gideon, Israel is under a heavy yoke. They're greatly troubled to the point of desperation.

[9:46] Yet, that is not the first battle that God's chosen deliverer will fight. Before Gideon enters into battle with Midian, first he engages in battle with Baal.

There's a bigger problem that's much closer to home than the rampant Midianite raids. The first and greatest battle is a spiritual one, the battle for the worshipping heart of Israel.

Now, before we come to that, we need to step back and briefly see where Gideon's story fits within the book of Judges. The Gideon cycle that we're beginning marks a change in the book.

Gideon is the first judge whose story receives such an enlarged treatment. It goes from chapter 6 through to chapter 9. We're given his call, his deliverance of Israel and phases, and then the troubled aftermath of his ministry.

Up to this point, the judges have been presented positively as instruments of God's deliverance. But their deliverance has always been temporary. As chapter 2, verse 19 tells us, whenever a judge died, the people returned to their evil and became even more corrupt.

[11:03] And Gideon's story begins to tease out why that was the repeated pattern. He's a genuine deliverer, but he also leaves a deeply mixed legacy.

He rescues Israel from Midian, yet his later actions contribute to spiritual disaster. And his story cannot be separated from all the terror associated with his son, Abimelech.

Gideon, therefore, exposes Israel's need for more than another temporary rescuer. They need a deliverer who can rule them in perfect righteousness and reclaim their hearts to the Lord.

The inadequacy of the judges awakens an inexorable longing for the faithful king, ultimately for the Lord Jesus, the true and perfect deliverer, the king in David's line.

And yet, for all of Gideon's later failures, he was a genuine deliverer whom God used to rescue his people, and he had various battles on his hands. And so notice how our passage directs our attention to the first battle.

[12:15] Our passage begins with the Midianites and the Amalekites in verses 1 to 6. They invade and Israel hides from them. But then at the end of the passage in verses 33 to 35, they return.

But Israel now rises to meet them. And just inside those two scenes, there are two accusations about dishonored gods. Verses 7 to 10, God accuses Israel, you've not listened to my voice. And in verses 28 to 32, Gideon is accused of dishonoring Baal. And so at the heart of the passage is verses 11 to 27.

God commissions Gideon and sends him to cleanse his own household, to cleanse out Baal worship, to fight the first and greatest battle, the spiritual battle for the worshipping heart of Israel. And so our passage has three movements, discipline and diagnosis, then deliverance, and then defiance. And so the first movement then is discipline and diagnosis in verses 1 to 10.

[13:24] God's fatherly love for his people moves him to discipline them in order to draw them back to wholehearted devotion to him. Listen to how our church's confession describes the privileges of having God as our father.

It says, all those who are justified enjoy the liberties and privileges of God's children. They are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as by a father, yet never cast off.

One of the privileges of being God's children is that he loves us enough to discipline us. And Judges illustrates this in manifold ways.

We've seen throughout Judges that Israel failed to clear out the land. They allowed the peoples of Canaan and the gods of Canaan to retain a foothold among the Lord's people in the Lord's place. And God had warned that these things would become a snare to them.

And sure enough, we have heard the grim refrain again and again, and here it is in verse 1. The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

[14:40] And so the peace that the land knew is gone. And God gives Israel into the hand of Midian for seven years. Now, seven years is shorter than the 20-year oppression that Jabin had.

But the narrator gives us the most sustained and devastating description of this oppression that we've had so far. For seven years, the Midianites arrive like the swarm of Locusts described in verse 5.

They flood through the land at speed on their camels and bleed it dry. They take the crops and the livestock in an annual blitz which brings Israel, verse 6, very low.

Verse 4 says that new sustenance, new sustenance is left behind. And in verse 2, the Israelites are driven from their homes and reduced to living in the caves and the mountains.

Almost like animals. But what Israel does not appear to appreciate is that this grim and grave predicament should not have surprised them. They are enduring the very covenant curses God had warned about in Deuteronomy 28.

[15:51] He told Israel what would happen if they betrayed his covenant, if they rejected his voice and turned aside to other gods. And so, verse 6, Israel cry out to the Lord because of Midian.

That cry has become familiar in judges but this time the pattern changes. Do you see it in verse 7 and 8? God's first response is not to raise up a judge, a deliverer, but to send a prophet.

Israel does not first receive a saviour but a sermon. Before there is deliverance there must be diagnosis. This unnamed prophet recounts God's glorious acts in history bringing them out of Egypt, delivering them into the land, defeating many enemies in the process.

God had shown extraordinary covenant kindness. But then look at verse 10. 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. There's the diagnosis.

[17:05] That's why they're under discipline. That's why they've been given into Midian's hand. Israel thinks their great problem is Midian but it isn't. Their great problem is not the danger outside Israel but the disloyalty within Israel.

The real problem plaguing and impoverishing them is their spiritual prostitution. Their pursuit of foreign gods. They've rejected the voice of God who rescued them and they've given their worship to gods that can neither speak nor save.

We can get this all out of order can't we? We can begin to think of God merely as some sort of divine doctor or therapist or fixer whose purpose is to relieve whatever discomfort or deprivation we're currently experiencing.

But as our loving Father as the one who pities and protects and provides for us and chastens us God's greatest concern is not our comfort but our consecration.

That does not mean of course that God is indifferent to our suffering Israel's painful cries don't fall on deaf ears but God loves his people too much merely to relieve their pain while leaving them to travel comfortably along the route to destruction.

[18:34] the judgment that Israel were suffering at the hands of the Midianites would either prove to be a foretaste of what was to come or for those who were true Israelites believers it would be the means of them turning again to the Lord.

Now in our progressive culture love is increasingly defined as affirmation. To love someone is to approve of who they understand themselves to be and how they choose to live.

To call someone to change now is treated as harm even as hatred. It can even mean being prosecuted as a so-called hate criminal.

But God's fatherly love is too forbearing and faithful and flawless simply to affirm his people as they walk comfortably down the route to disaster which is the route away from him.

Israel's great need was not merely relief. They needed to understand the reason for their affliction. Its intention was rebuke. Its purpose was to expose their idolatry and refine their devotion to the Lord.

[19:50] Rebuke that paves the way for remedy. And friends we have the same God. He has not changed. His love for his people is relentless. There will be times when we find ourselves under great testing.

Times when the lewd we carry and the burdens that dominate our lives feel almost unbearable. Maybe stress at work that's making us miserable. Could be anguish in our relationships that keeps us awake at night.

Perhaps frustration in all of our endeavors one thing after another just seems to keep on going wrong. All kinds of deprivations perhaps even disease and the prospect of death.

Now we must not draw a simplistic straight line between a particular trial and a particular sin. The Bible does not allow us to do that. It simply isn't the case that every illness or hardship or trial is a direct rebuke for some specific act of disobedience.

But neither should we think that our trials fall outside of our Father's covenant love or that they serve no purpose in his hands.

[21:06] Even when believers pass through experiences that have the shape of covenant curse, things like loss and frustration and disease, for the believer such things may be God's loving chastisements granted to us to prepare us and refine us for God's perfect rest.

It's right in the midst of painful and difficult circumstances to pray for relief. Israel cried out and the Lord heard them. Our cries don't fall on deaf ears, but perhaps my friend's prayer request is also fitting.

My greatest need is always more godliness. forgiveness. And so as well as praying for relief, we might also ask the Lord to teach us how our present trials might be a means of drawing our hearts and our trust more and more unto the Lord and thus away from other things.

Listen to Ralph Davis. He says sometimes we may need understanding more than relief.

Sometimes God must give us insight before he dare grant safety.

Understanding God's way of holiness is more important than absence of pain. We may want out of a bind, whereas God wants us to see our idolatry.

[22:36] God means to instruct us, not pacify us. Israel wanted relief from Midian, but God was seeking to reclaim their hearts.

And yet, having heard the accusation of verse 10, you have not obeyed my voice, we might expect the next words to pronounce further judgment. But no, God in his grace raises up another deliverer. The cries of the Lord's people don't fall on deaf ears. Diagnosis is followed by remarkable, undeserved grace. deliverance, which brings us to our second movement, deliverance, verses 11 to 27.

Deliverance. In his grace, God gives his people a deliverer to confront their disloyal worship. God's prophet has delivered the diagnosis.

Midian is afflicting Israel because they've not listened to God. They feared the gods of the Amorites. They bowed down to them and erected their idols in the land. But wonderfully, God does not diagnose his people's great problem without also providing the solution.

[23:53] And that's what we see here in the call of Gideon. God has accused Israel of ignoring his voice and serving other gods. And we might expect then verse 11 to announce judgment. But instead verse 11 begins God's gracious deliverance.

God intends to deal with Midian, but his deliverance begins at Baal's altar. And so in an act of astonishing grace, God raises a deliverer in verses 11 to 24.

Every detail of Gideon's call here makes clear that the Lord himself undertakes to deliver his people. Gideon appears thoroughly unsuited to the task.

The angel of the Lord finds him in verse 11 beating out wheat. But have you noticed where he's doing that? He's doing it in a wine press. Gideon is hiding his meager harvest from the Midianite raiders.

He is experiencing the same judgment as Israel as a whole, ravaged and driven into hiding. And like Israel, Gideon has not yet understood the diagnosis delivered by the prophet.

[24:59] When the angel assures him that the Lord is with him, Gideon replies, verse 13, please my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?

Gideon knows the stories, he's heard about how the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, but he concludes, now the Lord has forsaken us, given us into the hand of Midian.

He's conscious that Israel is under judgment, but he's clueless as to why. Why? Gideon is therefore representative of the nation as a whole, hiding from Midian, confused by God's actions, and unaware that the fundamental problem is Israel's disloyalty.

But Gideon seems unpromising in other ways. Look at verse 15. Please Lord, how can I see of Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest, I'm the least in my father's house.

Or in verse 17, after various reassurances, he wants further proof. Show me a sign. Gideon belongs to a long line of servants who did not feel up to the task that God gave them.

[26:12] He's in Moses' company, and Jeremiah's, and Isaiah's, and many others. Human weakness is so often the stage upon which God displaces power, and that's what we see here.

Again and again, the answer to Gideon's weakness is verse 12, the Lord is with you. Verse 14, have I not sent you?

Verse 16, I will be with you. Same word spoken before to Moses and to Joshua, I will be with you. That is Gideon's strength.

And there is nothing in this world that can finally withstand those words, I will be with you. not numberless warriors mounted upon swift camels, not the ideological tides that seem to dominate the world for a time, not even the schemes of Satan.

And that bulletproof assurance that God will be with Gideon is an assurance that God's deliverance is always unstoppable. That is the hope of the Lord's people, not their ability to fight, not their pedigree, but the Lord's presence and his blessing.

[27 : 29] And still, even after granting such assurance, the Lord continues to graciously accommodate Gideon's weakness. He does give Gideon a sign. Gideon scurries off to make some food, he butchers a goat, he bakes some cakes and he boils some broth.

And he brings them to the angel under the terebinth tree. And the Lord's sign is to treat the rock that the food is placed on like an altar upon which he consumes Gideon's food as an offering and a blaze of fire.

Displaying that this was the very word of God speaking to Gideon. And the Lord assures Gideon he need not fear, he says peace to you. Very often Gideon gets a hard time for his actions here, for his continuing need of reassurance and we'll see more of it next week.

But there is comfort for us in discovering that the Lord God is a lot more gracious than many a commentator. Gideon's weakness is met with reassurance after reassurance.

That's what our God is like. The success of God's servants does not lie in their inner stores of courage or strength or wisdom but in the presence and promise of the God who calls them.

[28 : 45] And so Gideon's response to an encounter with the living God is worship. That's where this begins. He builds an altar, verse 24, and worships.

And so with God's deliverer now raised up and reassured, God's astonishing grace unfolds further. Verses 25 to 27, God sends his deliverer against disloyal worship.

before Gideon confronts Midian, he confronts Baal in his father's house. Gideon, representative of Israel as a whole, had to do battle with Baal before turning to anything else.

Verse 25, he's told, pull down the altar of Baal that your father has and cut down the Asherah that's beside it. Israel's oppression, impoverishment, and strife all arise from covenant treachery.

They've scorned the living God. They've sought security and comfort and fertility and hope from gods that cannot speak or save. And therefore, there's no issue more pressing than the restoration of true worship, worship that honors God and blesses his people.

[30 : 04] Gideon receives a two-fold command. You see, first, pull down the altar of Baal, cut down the Asherah, and then, verse 26, in its place, build an altar to the Lord your God.

False worship must be demolished, and true worship must take its place. They can't coexist, and one needs to be pulled down whilst the other is built up.

God will not share his people with Baal, or with anyone else. His covenant love is rightly jealous and exclusive. He claims the wholehearted love and loyalty of those he's rescued.

But this two-fold command brings a caution to us, I think. You see, some Christians become really very skilled at identifying and pulling down idols.

They can be very perceptive and penetrating in their analysis analysis of the world, the church, of education, of family life, of culture, and very able then to construct comprehensive and prescriptive steps to fight and pull down and deconstruct the idols of our world.

[31 : 23] But Christianity cannot be reduced to denunciation, and we must be careful that such prescriptions don't themselves become a new idol, an idol of our own self-righteousness because we've ordered our family life in the right way, the right education, and so on.

A number of years ago, I used to listen to a podcast from America that was full of penetrating insight about the world and the church, but I had to stop listening to it because I realized after a time that it was only ever negative.

It was really very good at pulling down idols, but never really aimed at cultivating worship. It is not enough to tear down Baal's altar.

An altar to the Lord must stand in its place. We're not merely called away from false worship, we're called into the joyful worship of the living God. And notice what Gideon has commanded to offer upon this new altar.

a burnt offering. A burnt offering spoke of Israel's need for atonement and of Israel's dedication to the Lord. That was precisely what Israel needed, an atonement for their disloyalty and their hearts reclaimed in love and wholehearted devotion to the Lord.

[32:48] So Gideon obeys, he pulls down the idol, the altar, and offers up a sacrifice. brothers and sisters, there is nothing more important for us than that we are drawn into and enjoy true worship.

Worship that enjoys and delights in the abundance of what God has promised and what he's delivered. Worship that experiences the love and presence of God with his people.

Worship that reclaims our hearts from dead and corrupting religion and draws them to the living God. That's what we were created for.

It is in worshiping, loving, and serving God that we can become all that we were intended to be. We were created to glorify God and enjoy him. But divided worship deforms us.

It disorders our loves. And it prevents us from enjoying the purpose for which we were made. And so if as a church we begin to have divided loyalties, if we become a church that allows or enables one another to resist Jesus' rescue of us and his rule over us, then our ministry will be blighted.

[34:04] Our warfare in the Lord's army will be weakened and compromised. But notice God's devastating diagnosis is not followed up with some crippling command to tidy ourselves up, to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.

His diagnosis is the precursor to a deliverer. Friends, our greatest need is spiritual and where the Lord is exposing in our hearts our treachery towards him.

Whether that be for the first time this morning or whether it be for yet another time, this passage assures us that God is in the business of deliverance.

He was in Gideon's day and he still is today. God has raised up a servant upon whom his spirit rests, who is able to do battle with not just the particular idols that allure and ensnare us, but one who is able to do battle with the enemy behind every idol.

God has raised up a deliverer for us who resisted any and every enticement to bow down to someone who isn't the Lord God. a deliverer who was offered all the kingdoms of this world and authority over them and glory from them if only he would worship the devil, but he refused.

[35:29] A deliverer whose obedience was learned through suffering, not through stumbling into and out of disobedience. God has raised up a deliverer for us who could himself also become the sacrifice that was offered on the altar for our sin once for all, to cover every vile instance of us whoring ourselves to things other than God, to cover every last vestige of our unfaithfulness.

God has raised up a deliverer whom Hebrews tells us will lead us in worship, true worship, who will stand in the midst of the congregation singing praises alongside his brothers and sisters.

God is in the business of deliverance, and there is a deliverer in the Lord Jesus who is willing and able to smash for us the idols we've allowed to ensnare us.

And there is a deliverer in the Lord Jesus who is willing and able to restore us to enjoy what we were made for. If only we will trust him and turn to him.

Well, after this battle has been fought, we get movement three in which we see defiance in verses 28 to 35.

[36:50] Defiance. God uses his servants' faithfulness in the battle for true worship to rise holy defiance in others. Costly obedience can be contagious.

God is often pleased to use one of his servants' faithfulness to put courage into others. And we see that in two scenes here.

Gideon had been afraid of what might happen for pulling down the altar of Baal, and so we're told that he acted at night. And sure enough, his action draws out a mob begging for his blood.

Loyalty to the Lord inevitably leads to a clash with this world. Baal must be avenged, said the mob. And so they demand that Joash, Gideon's father, whose altar it was, hand over his son, the culprit, to be killed.

But look at his response in verse 31. Bear in mind, this was Joash's altar. He says, will you contend for Baal? Will you save Baal?

[38:01] Surely, whoever contends for him, shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down.

Joash seems quite literally to have developed a new theology overnight. If Baal really is a god, he should hardly need you to see of him. Let him defend himself.

It's a comedic and ironic reply, and yet a perfect one. How could anyone disagree? I wonder if he said it with a wry smile. Well, of course, we don't need to be told what Baal did, because Baal is lifeless, mute, deaf, dumb, blind, and good for nothing other than corrupting the heart of man.

God. But notice, as soon as all of the paraphernalia of Baalism is pulled down, and in its place is the worship of the Lord, well, there is danger, yes, but there is also defiance.

Here is further confirmation and reassurance to Gideon that surely, just as the Lord had said, surely the Lord was with him. Here his looming death is swatted aside by the very person whose altar was broken down.

[39:21] And we see similarly in verses 33 to 35, if God emboldens some semblance of faith in Jewish, he also emboldens fight at Jezreel. We end where we began conflict with Midian and Amalek.

The annual raid arrives again, but this time Israel are not cowering in caves. At Gideon's trumpet blast, they're assembled to fight, to resist, to defy Midian.

Because this time, verse 34, the spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon. The Lord was with him. The Lord was in the business of deliverance. And look at the name of the first group to muster.

It was the Abiezrites. The very clan in whose territory Baal's altar had stood, and among whom Gideon had just faced murderous hostility.

But now, some of their number are standing ready to fight at Gideon's side. Gideon's battle with Baal in an act of dangerous obedience is met with a growing defiance of Baal and of Midian.

[40:33] And that shouldn't surprise us, should it? That God might be pleased to use the costly obedience of his servants to rouse faith and fight in others. When the church treats spiritual realities as ultimate realities, that will make an impression upon those around us.

Think about that in our families. Few things will speak to our children more than seeing their parents make costly decisions to be obedient to Jesus. It will strike them and stick with them when they see in their parents an unbreakable concern to worship, to honour the Lord, to give themselves in loving service and devotion to him, whatever it might cost.

And in our church, when the time comes again, as no doubt it will, that we have to make a costly public stand in order to show that we do prize Jesus and his word above all else, we can be assured that in God's economy, such things are not wasted.

He might just be pleased to rise faith in those who are watching on as we do so. Or perhaps when you're teased at school or university for being a Christian and you've taken it and you've embraced the scorn, or when your livelihood has been threatened for your faith, but you won't be disloyal to Jesus.

Doesn't that example strengthen the resolve of brothers and sisters in the church family for when they might face the same. You see, when the Lord's people are given to worship him, when they respond to his wonderful deliverance, when they take seriously spiritual matters, when they're drawn to him in delight and they receive from him, we know that he's been at work within us and we can be confident that he will also be at work through us and God's work causes ripples.

[42:37] There is great encouragement for us here. As a church family, if we continue to trust Jesus and are willing to let him expose and eradicate any double-mindedness or any divided-heartedness in us, if we spur one another on together to prize Jesus above all else, then not only will our ministry not be faithfully undermined, but we will be confident that God is with us and that he may well be pleased to use our commitment to him to rise faith in others.

Gideon's first and greatest battle was a spiritual one. It was a battle for the worshiping heart of Israel and our greatest need is spiritual too. In Jesus we have one who can lead us and provide for us all that we need.

as we heed the word of the Lord who says, I am the Lord your God. You shall not fear the gods in whose land you dwell. Well, let's pray.

Gracious Lord God, we knew that our hearts are so easily swayed. We feel the allure of all manner of idols in this world that promise to satisfy us.

And so we need your help. Grant us grace to trust your word. And so to see through the empty and destructive promises that lie behind idolatry.

[44:17] But Lord, we ask too that you would woo our hearts with the wonder of Jesus. that our love for him might be our best defense to the snares in this world.

Help us to this end. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.