

The Hall of Faith: Gideon
Hebrews 11:32
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 16, 2023

We have a full morning today as you've already noticed. A full house as well. You're about to see baptism here in a moment, I know you're excited about that, so I want to jump into the sermon. But before I do, I do want to give a plug for our conference next weekend, the Principles of a Healthy Church Conference with Carl Hargrove. Because when you think about a healthy church, a lot of things come into mind. Sometimes you think numbers, you know, the bigger the church, the healthier it is. But if you've been a Christian for any number of years, you know that's not true. A lot of churches are very large, that probably should be shut down, that are not preaching the gospel anymore, and so forth. So numbers are not the mark of the church. Some might think that a budget is a sign of the healthy church, money, money, money. Well, that's not true either. I mean, your Saviour was poor, and the 12 disciples were poor. So that's not the mark either. Others might think it's a building, parking lot, so forth, and so on all kinds of stuff. But that's not actually the case. First Thessalonians 5, I just want to read this to you because it's a key verse for the conference we're doing. Verse 14, actually, verse 13, says,

live in peace with one another. We urge you to admonish the unruly, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See, that no longer pays another with evil for evil. But always seek after that, which is good for one another, and for all people. Rejoice always pray without seeking, ceasing, and everything gets thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ.

And putting that all together, the idea here is that the mark of a healthy church is peace. And the sign that a church is where it needs to be, is that there's unity there. People are one in the Spirit of Christ. And that's what this conference is about, and I encourage you, if you haven't signed up yet, please do so. We'd love to have you be a part of that with us. Carl Hargrove is the head of an organization called Grace Advance. And the reason we're having him come out to Chilliwack is because our church was started through that ministry. Every church has a journey, but seven years ago, our journey began when an organization that is set up to plant churches in North America for John MacArthur's ministry in Los Angeles, was set up here to investigate the possibility of starting one here in Chilliwack. And they did that. Several of you were involved in that process. And I came on as part of that connection there. And so we're asking him to come preach on a healthy church. And also tell us about the beginning of Grace Fellowship here in those early years. And so this weekend for you, we'll tell you how our church began, some of the history there. And I think you'll really enjoy that. But for now, I'm gonna say a word of prayer so we can get our minds wrapped around the Word of God and point in that direction. So if you would pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we are now coming to the time in the service when we open up Your word. And every time we do that, we want to have a spirit of reverence about us. The Word of God is to sit over us, we don't sit over it. Our hearts and minds need to be submitted to the truths and the things that we're

learning here. As we're diving into the story of this amazing man, Gideon, there can be a tendency just to focus on the flashy parts of this and the interesting things that happened. But at the end of the day, we need to remember that Your hand of power was over this man. And it's the hand of power Lord, that we want to see in our world today, we want to see it in church today, we want to see it in our lives. And so would you allow us Father, to glean from this, and to learn some deep things from Your word that we may apply to our hearts and minds today, as we reflect on it. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

Well, this morning, we are coming to the next person in the Hall of Faith, and that's Gideon. And in order to introduce him to you, I would invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Judges. So I can say a few words about that book because the book of Judges is such an unusual part of the Bible that you really can't talk about the people in it without explaining a little bit. There's so much sin and violence in here that if you don't talk about it first, about the background, it doesn't make a lot of sense sometimes. Because the Bible tells us that after the people of Israel left the wilderness, the Lord told them to conquer the Promised Land, they did it. He instructed them to take it over and they obeyed; but the problem was, they didn't obey all the way. And they left some of the original inhabitants still alive. And as a result of that, Judges 2:11 tells us this is what happened. It says, "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and serve the Baals, and they forsook the LORD." And what that means is that as the original inhabitants stayed in the land, the Jews saw what they were doing, and they copied it. They watched the Canaanites serve the Baals, and they said, "Hmm, that's interesting." And they watched them bow down to the statues and bow down to the idols and says, "Oh, that looks fun. Let me try it." And as time went on, it says, they picked that over Yahweh. They chose their idols over God, which is why verse 14 says that the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers. And that means He gave them into the hands of raiders or desert raiders, nomads, because Israel lived in a desert region. At this time, it was populated by bands of itinerant herders who sometimes made a living by invading other towns or communities and stealing all their stuff. Stealing, killing, pillaging everything they could find. They would take over a certain territory and steal the sheep and oxen; they would go into another one, and they would steal the money and clothes. Or they would stay and relieve them of their food because they practice what was known as a starved earth policy, where they would consume everything, they could get their hands on until it starved the Jews out. It was about to wipe them away, which would have been the end of them if it wasn't for what verse 16 says, when it tells us that then the Lord raised up judges, who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. Now, if you have a pen with you, and you're comfortable writing in your Bibles, I would encourage you to underline that verse, or put a star beside it, because that's the key. It's what it's about. And that is that the Lord gave Israel judges to rescue them from those oppressors.

And the word judge is a Hebrew word *sapat*. It's a little bit misleading because it doesn't refer to a man you would see if you went down to the courthouse and sat through a trial. The word literally means ruler or someone who judges with a sword in his hand. Because remember, God wanted the people of the land to be dead. And He told the Jews to go in and leave none alive. So when they didn't do that, the Lord sent these men in to carry on the task of destruction. It was their job to rain down ruin and misery upon

the Canaanites and slay all they could. It was said the American frontiersman Jedediah Smith was part preacher and part grizzly bear, because he had a Bible in one hand and a gun on the other. You could kind of look at the judges like that, except they were heavy on the gun and light on the Bible sometimes. They were far from perfect.

But just to show you who these people were, there's a handout in your bulletin if you want to take that out that gives you a list of the judges. This is all background for what we're going to talk about today. We're gonna go through this with you because there were 13 judges who ruled over Israel during this time. There's 14 If you want to count Deborah and Barak as two separate ones.

And just to go through them, the first one was Othniel, if I say that correctly. He was Caleb's nephew and son-in-law. According to Judges, chapter one; he came from a prestigious family in Israel. His uncle was one of the original men who went to spy out the land the first time the Jews were told to conquer it. The second one is Ehud, who was a great grandson of Benjamin. So he came from an important family too; his ancestor was head of one of the 12 tribes. The next one was Shamgar, who's a pretty anonymous figure. We don't know a lot about him but Judges 3:31, says he struck down 600 Philistines with an oxgoad, that kind of gives you a flavor of what these people were like. That's a strange way to fight. But the idea is that he didn't have a sword or access to a traditional weapon. So he looked around him on the farm, picked up the next best thing he could find, and that was a stick to prod the cattle with and he started swinging it and he killed 600 men. Now that's a supernatural thing, not just because he killed the man but because the oxgoad held together through all that slaughter. Then to speed it up a little bit after him. There's Gideon, Abimelech, and Tola. There was Jair, Jephthah, and Ibzan. There was Elon, Abdon, and Samson, everybody's favorite judge because of his feats of strength. I say that kind of jokingly. But every time I asked my boys who their favorite person is in the Bible, they say Samson because he tore open a lion with his bare hands and you can't get better than that.

But the point is that this is what the Lord called the judges to do. He told them to kill Israel's enemies. In other words, they were not told to make peace with them, or friends or buddy, buddy. And He didn't command them to argue with them, or reason with them, or sit down for a cup of coffee and have a dialogue. The Lord told them to raise up a sword and strike them down. To pick up an oxgoad and start swinging it because the people of Israel were compromising with these inhabitants. They were turning away from God; it was pulling their heart away from Yahweh, and it was their job to make it stop, in the most brutal way imaginable. That's why all the violence is in the book. That's where it all comes from. Because the idea is that as the Jews sinned and repented, and called out to God for mercy, the Lord sent them a judge who would stop the suffering and misery by bringing peace to the land. Then a couple years would pass, they would sin again, and then repent again and call out again; and He would send another one. And then they would sin again and repent again and call out again; and He would send another one. And over and over and over again. It was just a vicious cycle of sin, repentance and deliverance, over a period of about 400 years. There's a little discrepancy as to how long this lasted. But if you want to write this verse down in your notes, First Kings 6:1 says that it was about 480 years, from

the time the Jews left Egypt until King Solomon took the throne. Which means that when you take everything else into account, and all that period of history, you come to a timeline of about four centuries, which is a long time to live this way. It must have been hard for these judges because they had their hands full of depravity and evil and wickedness. And they were trying to hold back the tide of some of it. But the point is, they could do it because of their faith. They could hold back some of the evil, win great victories for the Lord, go to battle, swing the sword, because they trusted in Him. And that's all. It's not because of their virtues. When you read the book of Judges, you don't get the impression these people had a lot of great character. I mean, some did a little more than others, but they were pretty rough around the edges, but it happens simply by the grace of God.

Which brings you to the book of Hebrews. So if you want to turnover in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, let me connect this to the Hall of Faith. Because if you look there in Hebrews 11:30. Let me just start reading here. It says that,

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed act of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight.

When the author mentions Gideon, Barak, Samson Jephthah, he's mentioning people from the time of the judges. These were the men and women in Israel who led Israel during this awful time in history. I've told you before, the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11, you can divide it into four phases. The first one is the antediluvian period, which covers the lives of Abel, Enoch and Noah, in verses four through seven, the man who lived before and just right after the flood. Then the second phase is the patriarchal period, which covers the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Joseph in verses eight through 21. Those are the fathers of Israel, where the nation came from. Then the next one is the beginning of Israel as a nation, which covers the lives of Moses and Rahab, in verses 23 through 31. We just talked about those recently, if you missed it, you can catch it online. And then the next one is the judges and the Kings, which covers these men in verse 32. And the reason the author puts them all in this passage is because he's trying to wrap things up at this point in the chapter. He's spent a lot of time talking about the people, how the people in the Old Testament were saved by faith. So now he wants to give you just a few more names and kind of call it quits. So we're not going to be in the Hall of Faith forever. I'm gonna cover a few more people, but before he finishes it off, he says, "I can't leave these people out, because no one trusts in God more than the judges. They had to help Israel through one of their darkest times in history. And the only thing that allowed them to do that was their confidence in God."

When you read the lives of the judges, I mean, one thing that strikes you is the power to do all that didn't come from them. And the ability to conquer kingdoms and perform acts of righteousness and quench the power of fire was not on account of their strength, it was an account of His. There's no way a mere man could kill a lion with his bare hands. It's just not possible. I had an Old Testament professor who told me we often picture Samson with a bunch of muscles. He said, "I thought he was kind of a nerdy guy with glasses and about your height, Jeremy." Because his strength came from God. You can't slay 600 Philistines like Shamgar did without God. And the point is that a man didn't do it alone, it was done by the Lord of Heaven. Because the lesson of the book of Judges is that God doesn't want you to play with sin, He wants you to kill it. And the point of this whole story is that He doesn't want you to toy with temptation, He wants you to pull out your sword and cut it down, hack it into pieces. And the only way you can do that is through faith. Can't do it in your own power. It's not possible. You do it by relying on Him.

I mentioned that because I really believe we've lost some of his fighting spirit in the church today. We are far too prone to compromise in the 21st century. I mean, how many churches do you know right now that are compromising? And wavering between two gods like Israel. The God of the culture and the God of the Bible? The God of secularistic, humanistic, atheistic, agnostic, mushy gushy ism. And Yahweh. Millions of them; you see it everywhere. If you don't believe me, go down to a local Christian College around here and ask them, "What is your position on Genesis one? Let's just start at the very beginning. Do you believe the Lord created the earth in six literal days?" What will most of them say? "No." Why? They've compromised. We want to accommodate so we're going to embrace evolution. Or go in there and ask them about their stance on homosexuality. And if they think that marriage is supposed to be between one man and one woman, and that's it, see what they tell you there. They'll say, "We don't." Why? For the same reason. They're wavering. They're giving into the opinions of the culture. Ask them about their views on abortion, they'll say the same thing. Ask them their thoughts on hell, they'll say the same thing. Ask them their position on the atonement, or the cross or the deity of Christ, and they'll do it there. Why? Because we're almost living in the days of the judges now. The church has begun to forsake the Lord just like the people of Israel did. And the point of this book of the Bible is that you can't do that; you have to stand and fight. Listen, you want to be a Christian in Canada right now, you cannot be a coward. Those days are over. It's not an option for you. You're gonna have to have a backbone.

On December 26, 1993, John MacArthur preached a sermon on this entitled hacking Agag to pieces. It was built on the story in First Samuel where the Lord told King Saul to kill the Amalekites and their king Agag, but he wouldn't do it. He left them alive. And so the prophet Samuel stepped in and did it for him, in order to remind Saul that this is what it's like to honour God. You have to kill everything He tells you to. You leave none. It's all or nothing with Him. There's no middle ground. Which is what we're going to see this morning with the first judge in the Hall of Faith. And that is this man, Gideon. Because the Lord called him to be all or nothing. He wanted a total commitment from him, although to be honest, he did struggle with it. And let's see what this story was like. I'm gonna give you four events from Gideon's life of faith this morning. So if you're taking notes, that's our outline for today, we're going to

look at four events from Gideon's life of faith. And if I get a little animated, we're talking about war; so please forgive me. I am a southerner. We get excited when we talk about things like that.

And the first event is his calling. So the first event in Gideon's life of faith is his calling to this office of judge, which refers to the time when the Lord reached out to him. In order to see that you can turn back to the book of Judges with me. We're going to look at chapter six. By the way, the name Gideon, if you want to write this down, it means a destroyer. Because that's what he would become. The Lord would use him to destroy an entire host of the enemy's army. But he didn't start out that way. Which is why his story I think, is so fascinating. If you look in Judges, chapter six, verse one, it says this, it says,

Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD handed them over to Midian for seven years. The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For whenever Israel had sown, the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the people of the east and march against them. So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, nor a sheep, ox, or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts in number, and both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to ruin it. So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD.

And then if you look down in verse 11, it tells us that,

Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, valiant warrior." Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"

We'll stop our reading there. If you notice, this passage begins by saying that the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. You see that kind of in the middle there. That's a common expression. In the book of Judges, you find it in Judges, 3:9, in Judges 3:15, in chapter 4:3. You see it in chapter 6:6, in chapter 6:7, chapter 7:20, and chapter 10:10, because remember, this is the pattern of the book. And that is that the people of Israel are continually sinning, repenting, and calling out for help. Sinning, repenting and calling out for help. Sinning, repenting, and calling out for help. It's just a vicious cycle for all these 400 years. And here after they sinned, before they call out for help, it says in verse one, the Lord gave them into the hands of these people to the Midianites.

They were one of the nomadic tribes living in Canaan that I just talked about, that would make a living by taking over parts of land and devastating it. When you do a study of these people in the Bible, it's

interesting because Genesis 25:2 says the Midianites were related to the Jews. They were stepbrothers in a sense, because after Abraham's wife, Sarah died, he went on to marry a second woman named Keturah. And the Midianites were sons of the children that came from her. So they had a close relationship with Israel. They weren't enemies at first, which is why you see them mentioned several times in the Bible in a positive light. Because if you remember, when Moses fled from the wrath of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, he landed in the land of Midian. And he married a woman named Zipporah. So Moses had a Midianite wife, who talked like a Midianite, walked like a Midianite looked like one, all her days. That's what she was. And when you read on in that story, you discover that while he lived there, he also worked for a Midianite man named Jethro, who was a shepherd, who was his father-in-law and a priest of Yahweh. So Jethro, led the people in that part of the world in the worship of the one true God. We don't know exactly how that worked, but apparently there were priests of God before the priesthood was established in Israel, and one of them lived in Midian. Some scholars believe that as such, Jethro would have taken Moses under his wing, probably mentored him, and helped him along in the faith, which shows you how friendly the Midianites were with the people of Israel early on. They had a good relationship enough to intermarry and become family with one another. But now, the book of Judges says that's all changed. Because the Midianites are no longer friendly with the Jews. On the contrary, they're enemies now. So that verse two here says that they prevailed against them to the point that they sent the Jews into the mountains and caves running for cover. Because verse four says they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth. In fact, verse three says it happened when Israel had sown. In other words, once the Jews had put their crops in the ground, the Midianites would probably wait until sometime around harvest time and come and eat all their food up, and descend upon the land like a plague until they had nothing left. Which is why verse seven says, the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, it was too much.

So in order to help them the Lord decides to call one of the most unlikely people imaginable, and that is this man Gideon. and you find him in verse 11. Doing what? He's beating out wheat in a wine press. Now, let me say that again, in case you missed it, it's important. He's beating out wheat in a wine press. That's not the place you typically do that sort of thing. You typically beat out wheat on a threshing floor, which was a stone slab on the top of the hill, out in the open exposed to the elements, so that when you struck the wheat with a stick, the edible part would be separated from the chaff and the chaff would blow away in the wind. But that's not what he's doing. He's down in a wind press, which was really nothing more than two big holes in the ground several feet deep, one slightly elevated from the other, and a channel running in between them so that you could crush the grapes in one place and the juices would flow down into the other one. Verse 11 says the reason he's doing that down there is because he's scared of the Midianites. In fact, by the way, if you were threshing wheat in a wine press, the chaff wouldn't blow away, it would just fall in the hole, making a big mess. But the reason he was doing that was because he was scared they would come in and take it from him. He kind of did it like this, he would, he would beat it on the ground and look up, you know? And beat it on the ground and look up and then do it over and over, which is not too encouraging is it? This is not the kind of man you make a fighter out of; he's about as brave as a marshmallow right here. He's as valiant as a teddy bear.

But if you notice, verse 12 says the angel of the Lord visits him, and he says “The LORD is with you, valiant warrior.” Now put that all in the context here. That's kind of funny. In fact, I don't know about you, but when I read this passage in my mind's eye, I see Gideon threshing his wheat in his hole, and the angel of Lord saying this to him, and Gideon dropping his sticking saying, “What, what? Who's there? Friend or foe? Are you here to help me or hurt me? Or I see him working, and the Angel of the Lord calling, “ The LORD is with you, valiant warrior.” And Gideon thinking to himself, “Who is he talking to? Me? You got the wrong guy. I'm not courageous at all.” But the angel says, “No, I've got the right guy. I'm talking to you. Because this is what you will become with my help. I'll make you one of the bravest men in the Bible. I'll take you from this pit and put you in front of an army.”

And when the passage mentions the angel of the Lord here, I need to tell you this is what's known as a theophany, or an appearance of God on earth, where the Lord leaves His place in heaven in order to reveal himself in a tangible way. Because if you notice in this passage, so many times, when the angel speaks, the Lord speaks. Because verse 12 says the angel of the Lord appeared to him. Then in verse 14 it says, “Then God looked at him.” Then in verse 16, it says, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Surely I'll be with you, and you will defeat the Midianites.’” Because this angel is no ordinary creature; He is none other than Yahweh Himself. Some believe Gideon might have been speaking to the pre-incarnate Christ here, and that could be the case, which must have had an impact on him. Because before the angel does this, as far as we can tell, Gideon doesn't believe yet. At least he's not brave. He's doing what everyone else is doing. He's hiding and ducking and running for cover. Probably worshipping idols because we're going to find out there's one in his father's house. But now everything changes. Because one of the first things the angel of the Lord tells him to do in verse 25, is to tear down the altar of Baal that belonged to his father, put an altar to the Lord in its place. And he does because if you remember, the Lord is calling this man to be a judge. And it was the judge's job in Israel to rid the land of idols, cleanse it from pagan worship. And this is where He tells him to start doing that; you do it in your father's house. In other words, “Gideon, before, I call you to do this in Israel, and start chopping down idols here, there and everywhere in this part of the country, that you do it in your backyard first.

And I bring that up, because you hear a lot of people complain about the sins of the culture today. And you hear them gripe about all the idols that we see everywhere. They say, “They're so bad, the world is bad, culture is bad, people are bad.” And that's true. No one can deny that. So they want to start chopping down idols, here, there and everywhere, as well. They want to chop them down in books and sermons and so forth and so on. There's a place for that. But they often forget that the first place God wants you to do it is in your own backyard. Judgment begins in the household of God. So that before you start pointing fingers at the culture, you have to look in the mirror and start among ourselves. Because you don't have to go very far to see an example of idolatry today. All you have to do is drive to a local church.

I was talking with a pastor the other day who told me someone visited his church last week. They said they had been to six churches recently in the Chilliwack/Abbotsford area looking for somewhere to attend, and none of them preach the Bible. They couldn't find a single place that opened up the Word of God and explained what it said. And she was wondering why. Well, the answer is they compromised. That's why. They know that the world doesn't want to preach from the Bible anymore, so we don't preach from the Bible anymore. They don't like it when we open up Scripture, so we don't open up scripture. We just give them some cute stories instead, and insert a few insights from the newspaper.

Another example of this; we've had several families in our church who were involved in a Christian School has recently changed its position on homosexuality or are starting to move to waver on that. And they've asked me why. It's the same reason. The world doesn't like it when we call homosexuality a sin, so we don't call it a sin anymore. They don't appreciate it when we say that it's wrong, so we don't call it wrong anymore.

But the problem is, that's like throwing up a statue of bail right in your own backyard doesn't solve any issues. It's placing an idol right here among us, and bowing down to it and saying, "Oh, mighty idol, what do you want us to do? Oh, great Baal, how do you want us to respond to the things in the culture? Tell us and we'll do it." That's not what God says to do with Baal. Take out your axe and cut it down. Take out your sword, hack it to pieces. That's the only way you're gonna make a difference in this world. I think so many times churches and schools they do those things because they want to be relevant. But they forget the thing that makes you relevant is the fact that you're not like them. Once you're like them, the relevancy is over, why they want to come to your church.

Charles Spurgeon once said that "I believe that one reason why the Church of God at this moment has so little influence on the world is because the world has so much influence over it." We're not that different from the culture anymore. So they look at us and say, "Why would I want what you have? You sin, I sin. You lie, I lie. You lust, I lust. You covet, I covet. You swear, I swear. You blaspheme, I blaspheme. You fight, I fight. You hold grudges, I hold grudges. So what's the use of your religion? The only thing that makes your religion powerful is the difference. And the change, and the fact that you won't have anything to do with these sins anymore. It all starts at home.

And it brings us to another event and Gideon's life of faith. And that is the episode of the fleece. A second event in his life of faith is the episode of the fleece. We can't get to everything in here about Gideon, there's just so much to talk about. But this describes what happens from the time the Lord calls him until the time he goes to war. Because when you first meet Gideon at the beginning of this chapter, he's hiding from the Midianites; he's ducking down in the wine press. But when you find him at the end, he's going to war. And you can get the impression that it sounds like the Lord just flipped the switch. And this guy turned into a different person. He just zapped him with the Spirit, and he left all of his fears behind. But it didn't exactly work that way. There was a struggle going on in this man. And if you look in verse 36, it talks about that.

Here's the struggle going on in Gideon. After the angel had talked to him, and he had torn down the altar to Baal, and says the Holy Spirit came upon him, Gideon summoned people to war, getting ready to fight. But then in verse 36, it says, "Gideon said to God, 'If you will deliver Israel through me as you have spoken, Behold, I will put a fleece on the threshing floor.'" Now let me just stop here for a moment and point out that the key word there is the word "if." Because Gideon is saying to God, "If I can trust You, God, and if You will do what You said, then do this for me." In other words, if You are so strong and mighty and powerful, and faithful, and good and true, and righteous, and You'll stick to your word and preserve me in the battle, this is what I'm requiring of You, give me a sign. Now, that's ironic because verse 21 says that the angel of the Lord had just given Gideon a sign. He had told him to prepare some meat and unleavened bread and place it on a rock, at which time He took the end of His staff and lit it on fire, which is all the proof Gideon should have needed. He shouldn't have wanted any more than that, but he did. Because he didn't trust God all the way yet. There's still an inner battle going on in him.

In order to explain what happened here, let me just say that the setting for this is important. Some of you have studied the read the story of Gideon in the fleece. But if you remember Gideon is a farmer. And so he made his living off the land like everyone else did. So the first time you see him, he's threshing wheat in a wine press, not on a threshing floor where that's typically done. But now that's changed because verse 37, says, he's willing to stand on the threshing floor again, out in the open. He's made some progress. And while he's standing there, he makes a deal with God that goes like this. He tells the Lord that he wants to put a fleece or a coat of wool on the threshing floor, so that in the morning, if the fleece was wet with dew and the ground was dry, he would know that God called him and he would go into battle, which is what happens. As you read the story, that's exactly what the Lord does. Then the next day to confirm the event was real and not a hoax. He does it again, except this time. He says in the morning, if the fleece is dry and the ground is wet, he'll have further confirmation and know for sure that he's supposed to charge into war, which happens as well, the Lord does both of those things. Which makes you wonder, why did He do that? And the reason is because the dew in Israel was unusually heavy at certain times of the year. The way their seasons operated, they would have a drought for six months on the calendar from April to October, where there was no rain. So the only thing that helped the plants survive was the tiny little drops of water that would form on them at night, as the cooler air from the desert hits the warmer ground causing condensation to occur. Which was dew.

In fact, I looked it up this week, and I really wanted to show you how much dew they got in Israel, but after half an hour of looking I couldn't find it. But um, but I do remember that when my wife and I were visiting Israel, we left our clothes out one night in May at this time of the year in order to dry out on the back porch of the hotel we were at. And in the morning, they were so wet, they look like someone had put them in a bathtub. I'll never forget it because we were miserable. We had to go around all day and those wet clothes looking like Gentile tourists or something. And that's what this is talking about because verse 38 says that Gideon squeezed a bowl of water from the fleece, after it sat there all night

the first time. it's a lot of water. In order to demonstrate that the Lord did a miracle here; He performed something that was truly amazing. He reversed the flow of nature in a way that Gideon would never forget; it was truly remarkable.

But it makes you ask this question, what does it say about his faith right here? Not much. What does it tell you about his trust in God that he would ask for this? Not a lot. It was very weak. Hebrews 11:1 says that "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Which means that Gideon should have been trusting in things he couldn't see. Not in things that he could. And he should have been finding his hope in the spiritual realm, not in the physical. But he wasn't doing that yet. He still had a long way to go. Before we're too hard on him, let me ask you this. How many people do you know that do the same thing today? And they won't trust God until He does something like this. They read the Bible, and they say, "I don't know if I can believe that until I speak in tongues first." Or they hear something taught from the word and they respond by saying, "I don't think I can put my hope in that until the Lord gives me a special prophecy. I have to have an unusual miracle. I have to have an emotional encounter where I'm down on the floor, crying my eyes out, otherwise, I don't think this is worth it." You see it happen all the time. It's a very common thing in the 21st century.

By the way, it happened in Jesus day as well. It wasn't just in Gideon's. But listen to what Jesus said about this. In Matthew 16:4 He said that an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign. And if you notice, Jesus didn't say a good generation seeks for a sign. He said an evil one does. Why? Because Jesus was standing in front of them, and they didn't believe Him. The Lord was right there talking to them face to face, and they still rejected Him. So what's a sign going to do? Nothing, and it's the same way with Gideon. He already met the Angel of the Lord, had spoken to the pre-incarnate Christ, what's the fleece gonna do? And the idea here is that this passage, I just want to point that out to you to say this passage is not given to you as an example to follow. It's just telling you what Gideon did in a moment of weakness. I know some people take this story and they say, "Well, what's my fleece today? What am I going to lay down?" Well, you're not supposed to do that. We often say in our Bible study, this is a descriptive verse, not a prescriptive one. The Lord is not prescribing something for you to do. He's just describing an event that happened.

When I was growing up, I was in a church where they would often tell us if you want to know God's will, pray for something special. So look outside and say, "Lord, if you make that leaf fall off that tree, I'll go to the mission field in Africa. Or, Lord, if you have the phone ring today, I'll know I'm supposed to marry that person." That's a terrible way to make a decision like that. God wants you to open up the Bible and read it. That's where His will is found. Augustine said it this way, he said, "If you want to know the will of God, then love God perfectly. And then do whatever you want." Study the Scripture, understand what it says, apply it, repent of any known sin, do all those types of things, and then just make the best decisions that you can, trusting in His will. I remember someone asked one of our professors in seminary, "What should we be looking for as we go into ministry? And how will we know if we've picked the right church?" And he said that if you believe God is in control, then wherever you

are, is where you're supposed to be. So make the best choice you can and rest in His perfect sovereignty as you do so. But I wanted to mention that because I know this is a story that can be often confusing to people.

And it brings us to another event in Gideon's life of faith. And that is this battle with the Midianites. So a third event in his life of faith is the battle with the Midianites, which refers to the time when he does go to war. This is where everything's been building up to in the story. And I just want to read this to you. If you look in Judges, chapter seven, it says this, it says,

Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him got up early, and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to hand Midian over to them, otherwise Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has saved me.' Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and worried, is to return and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand from the people returned, but ten thousand remained.

Then the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. So it shall be that he of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." So he brought the people down to the water. Then the LORD said to Gideon, "You shall put everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps in one group, and everyone who kneels down to drink in another." Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people kneeled down to drink water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "I will save you with the three hundred men who lapped, and will hand the Midianites over to you; so have all the other people go, each man to his home." So the three hundred men took the people's provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And Gideon dismissed all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the three hundred men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

And then if you look in verse 16, a little further down. It says that

And he divided the three hundred men into three units, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. Then he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets around the entire camp and say, 'For the LORD and for Gideon!'"

So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle night watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. When the three units blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" And each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. And when they blew the three hundred trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the entire army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.

Now I want to stop the reading there, but I wanted to read all of that to you to show you this is one of the most exciting stories, I think, in the Bible. This is where you see the power of God displayed in an unmistakable way. And to walk you through it a little bit, verse one tells you where this occurs when it says Gideon and the people who are with him camped by the spring of Herod, which was located a few miles west of the town, Ophrah, where Gideon lived, which means he's fighting in familiar territory here, this is taking place nearby. You always have an advantage in a battle if you know the terrain and Gideon knows the terrain. Verse three also says they were set up on Mount Gilead, which is in a region known as the Gilboa mountain range. It is found almost in the middle of the country, close to the Jordan River. And the reason that Jews are located there, is so they could have a view of the surrounding landscape, they could sit up on the hill and see where the enemy was. And they could also maybe run back there in case there was a problem in the battle, which would have helped them if it were not for, by the way, they always tell you that the high points are good in battle; you always want to be high going down, as opposed to the opposite.

Which would have helped them if it were not for what it says next, because the passage tells you, while they're set up on the mountain, the Lord asked them to do something strange, and that is to send most of the soldiers home. Now, I don't know if you know how warfare works or not, but you don't want to send soldiers home. You keep them around. I mean, the more the merrier, right? If anything else, they could just plug a hole somewhere in the battle lines. But verse two, the Lord tells Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many. Now say to them, 'Whoever's afraid and trembling, let him go home.'" 22,000 return that means 22,000 men are scared. You're gonna find out later on that the Midianite army in chapter 8:10, numbered 120,000 people, or more. If you're 32,000 Jews, and you're looking down on our army of 120,000, you would probably go home too. That's a very frightening thing. So the army's cut down by 70% here, decimated by a third. Start off with 32,000; only 10,000 remain, and the crazy thing is God is not done in the sifting process. Because verse four says he told Gideon that the people are still too many, so this is what I want you to do, ask the men to drink from the water nearby. And if a man gets down on all fours, and laps it like a dog, keep him. And if he knelt down and drank like this, with his eyes scanning for the enemy, looking around for danger, send him home. Now, I don't know about

you, but I don't think that makes a lot of sense. If you're gonna send somebody home, send the dogs home. Right? They've been called the Lappers and the Watchers. Send the Lappers home; those guys are crazy. But the Lord doesn't do that. Okay, He chooses the worst type of men to remain. And some scholars have said that's the point. Not only is He decimating the army and knocking it down, but He's choosing the weakest members to fight. Verse two tells you why. It says because "So Israel would not become boastful saying 'My power has delivered me.'" Because God knew the Jews. And He understood if they had 32,000 men, they would say that if they want to battle with that many warriors, they would pat themselves on the back and say, "Way to go, our power did this." And He also understood that if they had a force of 22,000, or 10,000, they would do the same thing. So He wanted to set things up in such a way that they would not under any circumstances whatsoever, take credit for it. I mean, the Midianite army, one passage in here, says they were as numerous as locusts, and their camels were without number. And there's no way that 300 men was going to attack that and live. It's impossible. That's the point. With men, that is impossible. Nothing's impossible with God.

And to demonstrate this, verse 16 says Gideon has the men go into three companies, puts trumpets and empty pitchers into their hands with torches in them. And he says, "When I give the signal, shout 'For the Lord and for Gideon,' and blow the trumpets and smash the pots." Which means you need to reveal your location. Now, again, let me talk about that for a moment. How much faith would it take to do that? If you were going to approach an army of that many people in the middle of the night, how many of you would want to let them know where you were with 300 men? In fact, the passage says they were supposed to do that and stand there. In other words, they're not being told to charge the enemy. They're not told to rush in there and attack. They're not told to shoot at them or hurl spears at them or throw rocks, just make some noise and stand. Blow your trumpet, trust God, and they do it. It looks to me like a suicide mission. but not with the Lord because it says that when the enemy heard the racket, they jumped to the conclusion that Israel was coming after them. So they started panicking, running for their lives, and chopping each other up with their swords because it was dark and they didn't know what was happening. So they just freaked out. And the principle here is that it is not the size of an army that wins the battle, the size of an army is faith. And it's not the strength of a soldier that brings victory, it's the strength of the soldiers' God; and Israel had a stronger God than Midian did. That's why they won.

The Book of Romans told us last week that of God is for us who can be against us? And the answer is no one, not a soul. And that's what's happening right here in this part of the Bible. I just told you that one thing you learn from the life of Gideon, is that you have to resist the culture. You can't compromise with it all the time, you're gonna have to stand. But I didn't have a chance to tell you that as you do that, you stand with a spirit of hope and confidence because you know your God is bigger than theirs. If He can destroy 120,000 Midianites with a small number of Jews, He can take care of whatever problems you face in this day and age. Amen? What do you have to worry about? I mean, it's so easy to get down about the state of the church right now and grieve over the state that it's in because it is a mess. It's stooped so low, it makes you wonder, is there any hope? And the answer is, yes. There's always hope, and it comes from the Lord. It doesn't come from the government, doesn't come from politics, you don't

find hope in that maybe the church would garner more votes, so we can get more people in halls of Parliament. You don't get hope in money, you don't get it in buildings, you don't get it in all those types of things, you find it in Christ and Christ alone. That's the only thing that's going to fix this mess. That's where our confidence is.

You know, for an example, the men in our leadership training are currently studying a book on church history. And as I was preparing for this sermon on the book of Judges, I couldn't help but compare this to the Dark Ages. It was a time after the city of Rome fell, and the world was plunged into darkness because the people didn't know the gospel and the one true God anymore. They were taught that in order to go to heaven, you had to pray to saints, and visit relics, and take the Mass, and go to confession, and all that type of stuff. And when you read about that, it makes you wonder what happened? How did all that change in a thousand years like that? And the answer is God, the power of Christ. The Lord raised up a small army in the form of men like Martin Luther and John Calvin and William Tyndale, in Oelrich Zwingli in order to step in and tell people that's not where you find salvation; you find it in Christ. Politics didn't do that. Money didn't make it happen. All the money was in the Roman Catholic Church; the reformers were poor. It all happened when God dipped His finger in the flow of history and stirred things around through revival because God doesn't need a large army to change the world. He needs a few good men; that's it. He doesn't need thousands to fix things. Give Him 12 disciples, and He'll turn it all upside down. In fact, if you want the Lord to change things in Canada, let me tell you what you need to do. You need to ask Him to give us more men: men to preach the gospel, men to fill the pulpit, men with a backbone. No more jellyfish men. We have enough of those. We don't want any more people ducking down in a wine press; have them stand up to the army. If you want Him to help bring revival, this is how it happens. Ask Him for soldiers: soldiers to confront sin, soldiers to cut down idols, soldiers to make disciples and build up the church and equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Everything starts there. It starts when you pray. All of this happened because of faith. None of this happened on a human level. None of this made sense on a human level. It happens when you trust in the Lord which brings you to one more event in Gideon's life of faith.

And we've looked at his calling, and we've seen the story of the fleece. And now we've looked at the battle against the Midianites. But one more to talk about here, and this is the most tragic part of the story, by the way because when you look at the previous story, the battle with the Midianites, it's one of the highest points in the book of Judges. It shows you the wonderful things God did through this man but a final event in his life is his fall at the end.

A fourth event in Gideon's life of faith is his fall at the end, which refers to the time when he lapsed back into idolatry. I told you before, the judges were not necessarily heroes in every sense of the word. They had a lot of faults. And Gideon was a man who had them as well because he ends up backsliding at the end.

And I won't give too much attention to this for the sake of time, but if you read through chapter 8, you can see that after the great victory, a number of the Midianites escaped. Most of the army was cut down and destroyed itself, but two other leaders ran away and Gideon and the Israelites chased after them. So that in chapter 8: 21, it says, "Then Zebah and Zalmunna," these two leaders, "said, 'Rise up yourself, and fall on us; for as the man, so is his strength.' So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks." Now, remember, I keep saying this, but this is important. Gideon is a judge. And it's a judge's job to kill all the idolatry, and sin, and evil things that he can in Israel, and kill the people that are committing them. That's what he does here. And as he does that, it says he takes the crests and ornaments that were on their camels' necks and takes them off. That's the reference to a small idol the Midianites would place across the neck of their camels so that it would provide protection for them in battle. And so when they charged in the enemy, it would keep them safe from harm because it functioned like a good luck charm for them. They believed it helped them access the gods' power, which is why Gideon took it off here because it was this symbolic way of saying, "That didn't work. Even though you placed this on your camel in battle, you still died afterwards. So your god failed you. So let's just get rid of this thing." Not only does he get rid of that, he gets rid of these two leaders as well. The Jews would have held these men in reverence because they lead such a large host of people. And they might have been tempted like King Saul did with King Agag to keep them around, maybe as a trophy. Gideon says, "No, we're not gonna do that." He just puts him to death.

And as a result, the next verse says that the people of Israel tried to make Gideon a king over them. Because the thinking was that if Gideon can do this, he can do anything. And if he can defeat the Midianites, maybe he can defeat all the other people who are troubling us, like the Philistines and Ammonites, and Moabites. But Gideon says, "No." If you notice verse 23, he tells them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD your God shall do it." In other words, Gideon is acknowledging to them God saved you from the hands of the Midianites. God saved you from the grip of the enemy. God upheld you, so you need to fix your attention on Him. Let Him be your king. Stop talking about me so much.

And to be honest, I would really like it if the story stopped there. It would be really wonderful if it all ended right there in that verse, and nothing else was said about Gideon. But the problem is that it doesn't. If you read on in your Bibles, it tells you this in verse 24. It says,

Yet Gideon said to them, "I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his plunder." (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they said, "We will certainly give them to you." So they spread out a garment, and every one of them tossed an earring there from his plunder. The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, apart from the crescent amulets, the ear pendants, and the purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and apart from the neck chains that were on their camels' necks. Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah; but all Israel committed infidelity with it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his household.

Now to explain this when it says the people of Israel gave him 1,700 shekels worth of gold, that comes to about 42 pounds, which is worth a tremendous amount of money. In this day and age, some said it may be worth a little under a million dollars. And if you're wondering where they got all that, the answer is they got it from the dead. After they killed this army of 120,000, the Jews went through the remains and they picked up the pieces of gold and silver and jewelry and treasures and ornaments and trinkets; and they kept it for themselves. The thinking was the Midianites don't need it anymore, so we'll keep it. And Gideon sees that and he says, "I won't accept your offer to be king, but I will request something of you. It's very small. I don't want a necklace. I don't want a bracelet. I don't want a wristband. Give me an earring. Tiny little thing. Now a tiny little thing of an army of 100 people's not much, but a tiny little thing in an army of over 100,000, that's a lot of earrings. Any jewelry store in town will be jealous of that. And instead of using it for the altar of a Lord, verse 27 says he makes an ephod or a breastplate, places it in his hometown as a reminder of the victory the Lord gave him. And over time they turned it into an idol.

Now that may sound kind of silly that they turned this into an idol. But the fact is they made an idol out of everything else, so why not? And they turned every rock and hill and tree into a false god in the book of Judges. So why wouldn't this be turned into one too? They looked at the breastplate as time went on, they said, "Oh, mighty breastplate, thank you for saving us from the Midianites. Praise you awesome breastplate for bringing peace to our land and making the violence stop. Oh, you're so beautiful, glorious ephod. We've never seen anything like you. We bask in the glory of your splendor." Which sounds stupid. But that's how they treated everything else. Remember, this is the cycle of the book of Judges. They would sin, repent, call out to the Lord for mercy; and a judge would come in. And then over time, they would forget and then they would sin, repent, and call out to the Lord for mercy again, over and over again. And the sin they turn to here was idolatry.

Which just reminds you that the best of men are men at best. Even the greatest of heroes fall short of the glory of God in this messed up world. I mean, Gideon was a hero in many ways. I mean, make no mistake about it. He was an amazing man. But the truth is that his life didn't end well. He stumbled at the finish line. In order to remind you again that your hope is not in men. We want men. We want soldiers to come into the church and stand up to all the terrible things we're seeing, and lift us out of the pit. But the fact is, that's not where we place our focus. We put it on Christ instead. People are fickle. I mean, if you follow the news lately, I was just thinking of name after name after name, I could list here, I'm not going to do that. But you'll know Christian leaders have led us down in recent years, haven't they? They crash and burn all the time. They go up in a blaze of glory; they go down in one they swoop in and out. Which can be frustrating and makes you wonder, who can we trust? And the answer is that we trust in God first and foremost, above all else.

In fact, if you want to see this for yourselves, I just want to tie our thoughts off with this, if you want to turn back to the book of Hebrews. It tells you where to put your trust in at the end of the Hall of Faith in

Hebrews 12. Because after talking about people like Gideon and the judges, this is the conclusion that the author comes to at the end of chapter 11. And that is this it says

Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

When the author says we have a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, he doesn't mean we have a great host of people looking down on us from heaven. He means we have so many witnesses from the Old Testament. We have so many stories of men like Gideon, and Barak, and Jephthah, and Samson; and in light of all this, this is what you have to do. Lay aside your incumbrances, run the race, fix your eyes on Christ. Why? Because that's who they're pointing to. This is where the Old Testament is taking you. It's leading you to the Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to pay the price of our sins. In fact, the passage says He is the author and perfecter of our faith. That means He starts it and finishes it. He begins your faith and He brings it to completion and He holds you up the entire way.

This passage says He endured the cross for you. Because the Bible tells us Jesus lived a perfect life, free from any sin. And with that perfect life He allowed the Father to crush Him and kill Him and put Him to death at Calvary so your sins can be forgiven. The way it works is that as you come to the cross, and believe in God, the Father takes your sins and gives them to Christ. And He takes Christ's righteousness and He imputes it to your account. So He can look at you say you're not condemned anymore. "My blood covers you. When you fail, My blood covers you. When you stumble, My blood covers you. When you mess up, My blood covers you because it pardons every transgression." Listen, friends, there's only one hero of the Bible and that's Christ, amen? There's only one main character in here that it all comes to, and that's our Lord Jesus Christ. This passage says you need to look at Him so you don't grow weary and lose heart.

Can I just ask you here in closing? Is anybody growing weary in the battle right now? Anybody losing heart? I just mentioned all the compromise, and all the weakness in the church today. Does it not just make you sad? There's times it just guts you. Not if you look to Christ. Keep your eyes fixed on Him.

In John 16:33, Jesus said that "I've said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world." That's how you run the race. You remember that He has overcome all these things. And I know that's a simple way to end the sermon.

But what's wrong with simple, Amen? I think we could use a few more simple things in our lives today. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we wanted to end on a note of thinking of Christ because Gideon had a tremendous life, all these judges did. There's no way men could have lived in those times and not done these things without hoping in You, the Lord. They failed. Father, we fail. Our church today, the church in Canada is in many ways, failing; it's sailing on stormy waters, it's being besieged by troubles on all sides, so we want to wrap our thoughts up this morning with thinking of the One person who bears us up under the trouble. And that is Jesus.

It's been said that one way you know you're winning the race, is that you're still running it. And you're still pursuing the finish line and the finish line is Jesus. Lord, I pray that our church would remember that this morning. I pray that nothing I've said today would discourage anybody ultimately because it would always point them to what He has accomplished in our lives. Father, we always want to reorient our thinking toward the cross. It's the focus of everything this morning.

In fact, Father as we come to these baptisms this morning, we are thankful for the opportunity to do this. We're thankful for what You have done in these people's lives. We're thankful for the fact that salvation did not come from us; it came from You. You're the one that saves sinners. You're the one that draws people to Yourself. You're the one that redeems them. You're the one that provides atonement. You're the one that provides propitiation where Your wrath is covered on the cross, and every drop is paid for; that all comes from You. And we were so grateful this morning for the opportunity to remember that. Lord, thank You for the Bible in its totality. Thank You for the fact that it does have stories like this of these men that did tremendous things.

Father, would you give us godly men today to serve in churches? Would you give us pastors and preachers of the word like the reformers and those men of old, that sit up to the forces of hell? Father, we want to see the church grow spiritually. We want sinners saved, but that can only come through courage. Give us courage today, Lord,

And as we come to this time in the worship service, I pray for those who are about to be baptized. Would you give them some encouragement as they remember these testimonies are such a blessing for all of us to hear. May Christ be glorified in it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.