

Destroying Idols

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[0:00] My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good.

They don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing our series in the book of Judges, and you'll remember that the book of Judges is about a number of things.

It's about the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people. It's about the need for a faithful and true king, a king who can do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts of men.

It's about the power of spirit-filled leadership, and it's about God's grace to hard-hearted and rebellious people, people like you and me.

[1:07] Last week, we began the story of Gideon, and we asked this big question, why is it that God calls Gideon a mighty man of valor, since everything in Gideon's resume and his actions would suggest otherwise?

And we saw that Gideon was a mighty man of valor because, and only because, God was with him. That God does not call the qualified, but instead, He qualifies the called.

This week, we're going to continue the story of Gideon, and we'll see that Gideon has to make a choice. Is he going to serve the true God or false gods? Of course, a choice that all of us have to make as well.

And so, a simple question this morning for this passage is, why is it worth taking a risk for God? Why is it worth taking a risk for God?

We'll look at two things. We'll see first the destruction of idols, and then the powerlessness of idols. The destruction of idols, and then the powerlessness of idols. It's with that that I invite you to turn with me to Judges 6, starting at verse 25.

[2:17] You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. And no matter where you turn, remember that Proverbs 30 tells us, every word of God proves true.

He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. And so, that's why we read now, Judges 6, starting at verse 25. 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 here, 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. Verse 28. 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.

And they said to one another, Who has done this thing? And after they had 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.

[3 : 54] 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 is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down. Verse 32. Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jeroboam, that is to say, let Baal contend against him, 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 Abizrites were called out to follow him.

And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you once again for your word that you've given to us, that you haven't left us to stumble around trying to put the pieces together on our own, but instead you've given us your word to show us the way to walk in this life.

[5 : 14] And most of all, our hope, that our hope is in you. And we ask that you would do that again this morning, that you would arrest our attention, that we would see clearly what you have for us in your word, and most of all, that we would see Jesus and the hope that we have in him.

We are helpless to do this by ourselves, and so we ask that you would pour your spirit out on us in a special way, that we would be able to hear clearly from you and respond with faith and love and obedience.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. You'll remember from last week that the Israelites have been oppressed.

Once again, we see another judge's cycle by another foreign nation. And so they cry out to God asking him, hey, will you come deliver us? And God, instead of immediately sending them deliverance, instead sends them a prophet to tell them, hey, this is how you guys have gone off the map.

And so in verse 10, we saw the prophet said, hey, this has happened because you have gone serving after other gods. It's not a mystery how you've gotten yourselves into this situation.

[6 : 25] No, you did exactly what I told you not to do. You feared gods other than me. This week, we get to see exactly what that means. We saw it in a big picture last week, and now we get to zoom in.

It turns out within Gideon's own family, there is worship of false gods going on. Gideon's own father, Joash, this is what we see in verse 25, has two different things set up.

He has an altar that he's established to Baal. Baal is this male god that they would worship. And he has an Asherah pole. Asherah was a goddess. She would have these poles that might be a tree or something else.

Some folks think that these were actually carved to look like her. So he has not just one, but two idols that he set up. This is not just someone in Gideon's tribe. It is someone in Gideon's very family.

Not just in his family, but his own father. And God comes then to Gideon, this mighty man of valor, and wastes no time in giving him his first task.

[7 : 26] This is verse 25. Take your father's bull, pull down the altar of Baal, cut down the Asherah that is beside it.

Gideon must destroy the pagan worship that is occurring in his very own family. And so, verse 27, Gideon obeys.

Gideon goes and does it. We find out he does it with fear and trembling. We're told also in verse 27, he did it at night because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day.

Now, we might be tempted to throw Gideon under the bus at this point and say, look at him and his fear. But God didn't tell him he couldn't do it at night. In the midst of his fear and hesitation, at the end of the day, Gideon does what God commands.

Gideon is obedient and faithful despite the consequences that might come. He doesn't do what we saw Barak do. Remember, Barak said, I'll obey if Deborah comes with me.

[8 : 32] No, Gideon, in all his imperfection and humanity and trembling and fear, goes and does what God has told him to do. We find out that Gideon has every reason to be afraid.

Townspeople wake up the next morning. They discover that the Asherah pole has been cut down, the altar has been destroyed, and what is their first response?

Verse 30, let's kill him. Gideon is not simply afraid here of being ostracized socially. He's not afraid that some people might say some mean things about him around town.

No, he is too afraid. He's doing this at night because his very life might be at risk. He is not afraid of disapproval. Gideon is actually afraid of death. This also reminds us that Israel has not actually repented of her idolatry.

Last week, they cried out to God saying, look, we're oppressed by these other nations. Please come and help us. But as we said that then, they didn't repent. They continue to have the altar to Baal in the Asherah pole.

[9 : 44] Now, we're gonna come back to what happens next with Gideon, how his skin is able to be saved, but I don't want us to miss what has just happened here. It is not simply or merely that Gideon has to tear down the false worship.

Verse 25, there's a tearing down. Verse 26, there's a replacing. God doesn't just say, hey, do away with this idol worship.

26, and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of the stronghold. And then, go and make a sacrifice. When we're told, verse 27, that Gideon did as the Lord commanded, it does not simply mean that he pulled down the altar and the pole.

It means that he also stood up the new altar, made the new sacrifice. The point is this. The human heart will worship something.

It is not enough to remove one thing. It must be replaced with another thing. We cannot move from worshipping one idol to worshipping nothing.

[11 : 02] No, our hearts are designed to give something, our trust, our hope, our confidence, our desires. And so, if they merely pull down this altar and there's nothing new to replace it, what is going to happen?

Well, of course, that vacuum in their heart is going to be filled by something. They must replace their false worship with true worship. It's not enough to tear down.

They must also build up. It's just like we discussed many times when we were in the Gospel of Mark. One love must be replaced by another love because the heart will love something.

Now, remember that Gideon asked this question in verse 13 of last week. When the angel comes to him, he says, God, why has this happened to us? Why are we not experiencing the success we're told our fathers recalled to us?

The angel tells them, remember verse 10, hey, not the angel, the prophet had already told them, look, you were fearing other gods. In other words, this foreign nation that has come in to take you over, they are merely a symptom of a greater disease.

[12 : 16] The disease is not the fact that the Amorites are there. The disease is your idolatry. You cannot expect to be rescued from this foreign nation until you are rescued from false worship.

We cannot deal with the symptom until we eradicate the disease. And so God is telling Gideon here, look, cut it out at the root. Do you want deliverance from the foreign nations?

You must first be delivered from idols. You want no more oppression. You don't want to be hiding in the caves anymore, threshing out wheat in wine presses.

You have to deal with your heart. And so the point for us is just like the old proverb says, everyone wants to be a gangster until it's time to do gangster things.

Everyone wants revival until it's time to do revival things. Everyone wants a mighty work of God until it's time to pull down the altar to Baal.

[13 : 33] Everyone wants a mighty work of God until it's time to take an unpopular stand that the world will mock you for.

Everyone wants a mighty work of God until the moment that we don't just talk about the sin that's out there in the world, but we have to talk about the sin that's in here in God's church.

We have to repent of our own tongues and selfishness and pride and greed. Everyone wants a mighty work of God until it involves us confessing our sins to a brother or a sister.

Everyone wants a mighty work of God until the moment we have to forgive our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Everyone wants a mighty work of God until the moment that love for God and others becomes more important than personal achievement and peak experiences.

Everyone wants a mighty work of God until the moment we talk about giving generously for the kingdom of God. In other words, mighty works of God require and always require sacrifice and repentance from his people.

[15:01] Everyone wants revival until it's time to do revival things. We see here Gideon does exactly that.

Gideon takes the risk. Gideon faces rejection by his family. Doesn't just risk rejection by his family, although Joash does come in to save him.

Faces rejection by the town. Even more than that, he faces potential death. I mentioned last week in verses 8 through 10 that we see the logic of redemption, that God's salvation comes before our obedience.

It's deliverance followed by obedience, not obedience followed by deliverance. In other words, we don't earn things from God or prove things to him. No, he comes, as Roman 5 tells us, Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

But, and, obedience does follow. There is a call to obedience before success in battle.

[16:07] There is a call to obedience before God clears these oppressors from his people. Again, it's the same thing we heard our Lord Jesus say when we were in Mark, in Mark chapter 8.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Do we really want a mighty work of God?

Gideon, in the midst of his frailty and fear and humanity, is willing to pay the price.

Are we willing to do the same? We see this dynamic also in verses 25 through 26.

[17:15] What is it that Gideon has to do? He's not just making a generic sacrifice. No, he is taking one of his father's bulls to sacrifice.

In other words, what was meant for idolatry. In other words, this bull was almost certainly meant to be sacrificed on Baal's altar, is repurposed and redirected.

What was meant for idolatry is used for worship of the true God. That's what turning away from idolatry looks like. It means taking what was dedicated to false gods and giving it to the true God. It means that our resources and our time are turned over from the things that capture our hearts. And they're given to God and his kingdom.

We still haven't answered our question, though, which is this. Why is it worth taking a risk for God? Why is it worth Gideon stepping out here and risking his own death?

[18:24] Well, we turn back to the story and we see what saves Gideon's skin in this situation is his father, Joash. Joash understands a key in elementary, a theological principle.

Verse 31, he says this. They're coming, by the way, for Gideon's life. They're saying, hey, let's find him and kill him. And Gideon says, will you contend for Baal or will you save him?

He threatens to kill anyone who tries. And then he says this. If he is a god, let him contend for himself because his altar has been broken down.

In other words, idolatry, fake gods, are just one big psyop. The false gods are actually powerless. Joash knows this. And so he's betting on it. We will have Baal protect himself so nothing will happen. Because what is Baal but someone weak, powerless, non-existent?

[19:36] And so Joash is reminding us of an extremely important truth, the simple fact that idols have no real power.

Success will not bring you the healing that you long for. Money cannot protect you from pain and heartbreak and disease.

Sex cannot give your life meaning or resolve the questions you have about your identity.

If you pile things up and you're surrounded by trinkets, you will still be left feeling empty. Let Baal defend himself.

Why? Because false gods cannot deliver on their promises. False gods cannot give the hope they promise.

[20:50] Why is it worth taking a risk for God? Because he is not a false god. The flip side is this, that Yahweh, the God of Israel, has real and true power.

Gideon decides and prepares to go out to war. That's what we see in verse 33. All these enemy tribes are gathering up against him. The Midianites, the Amalekites, of the people of the east, are in

an alliance.

They cross the Jordan and they encamp in this valley. He has three different groups who are coming against him. Gideon here should be shaking in his boots.

Verse 34, But. But what? Why is he not shaking in his boots? But the spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon.

God makes good on his promise. God does exactly what he said he would do in last week's passage. Remember, he told Gideon over and over as Gideon shared with him his concerns and his lack of resume.

[21 : 55] He said, But I will be with you. And what do we see here but that very thing? God clothes him with his spirit so that he has all the power he needs to follow God's command.

Brothers and sisters, we have seen an even greater demonstration of God's power.

We know even more of God's love and power and authority than Gideon could ever dream. We have seen his demonstration when he sent his only son, our Lord Jesus, to live the perfect life that we should have lived on this earth and to die the death that we deserved.

And we see the type of power that is at work that Ephesians tells us is accessible to us when he raises Jesus from the dead. In other words, it is resurrection power that is at work in you, Christian. You have even greater reason to hope than Gideon. It is the power that God uses to save hard-hearted people.

[23 : 12] It is the power that was strong enough to raise Jesus from the dead and is powerful enough to raise us as well. It is the power that gives us great hope and confidence as 1 Peter 1 tells us.

We have this inheritance in heaven. And he describes it in this way. The inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. In other words, there is nothing that happens here on earth that can touch or affect your inheritance there.

Why is God worth taking a risk for? Because he has real power to really save. He gives us the only hope that can deliver on its promises.

He does for us what he does for Gideon. The spirit of the Lord clothed him. That's why we follow him.

That's why we obey him. That's why we trust him. That's why we sing to him. Let's pray. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that Jesus is not an idea or a suggestion or a teaching, but he is a person.

[24 : 37] He is God who became man, who came down, demonstrated your great love and your great power so that we could follow after you with confidence and hope. And we ask that you would be at work in our lives, that we would be willing to take a risk for you.

That we would be willing to stand for what's true and to follow you when it's hard because we know that you are the one and only true and living God. That everything else that makes us promises and gives us hope ultimately is a lie.

We thank you that that's not true of your son and our savior, our Lord Jesus. And so we pray all of these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.