

Mercy And Assurance

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. 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're 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 true and faithful 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 mercy towards hard-hearted people, people just like you and me.

[1 : 0 8] We've been in the story of Gideon for a minute, a couple weeks now, and last week we saw that Gideon was commanded to destroy his father's idols. And so we asked this big question, why is it worth taking a risk for God?

And the answer is this, remember that truth is that idols have no power to deliver. It is only God who has real power to really save.

This week we have a similar question before us. What do we do when following God causes us to tremble?

What do we do when obeying God causes us to fear? What do we do when obedience presents a tremendous risk?

That's the challenge that Gideon faces in this passage. It's a challenge that we face as well. And so I'm going to invite you now to turn with me in your Bible to Judges 6, starting at verse 36.

[2 : 1 0] You can turn in your Bible. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now Judges 6, starting at verse 36. Then Gideon said to God, If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, Behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor.

If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said. And it was so.

When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. Then Gideon said to God, Let not your anger burn against me.

Let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew.

[3 : 20] And God did so that night. And it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

Our Father in Heaven, we praise you and thank you that you do speak to us by your Word. And we thank you that you know that we are only dust, that we're feeble and frail, that we're filled with questions and doubts and fears.

And we thank you that you meet us at those questions and doubts and fears, that you aren't put off by them, you're not offended by them, but instead you come to us like a loving Father.

You help us, you remind us, you lead us. We ask that you would do that very same thing this morning, that you would remind us of our need for your grace, and you would show us how you meet us and sustain us at that very same place.

We thank you that we don't have to worry about whether we've earned or deserved these things. We know that we haven't, and so instead we simply ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[4 : 30] Last week we saw Gideon tear down his father's idols, and the point there, one of many points, is that he has to tear down the idols.

He has to do away with the false worship before he can experience a military victory. That the problem that they're facing is not simply or merely or primarily a problem of being oppressed by this other nation.

No, their real problem is a spiritual problem. So they have to address the issues of the heart first before they can address issues of the military. But they must still address issues of the military.

The Midianites have not gone away. We had an intermission. Gideon had a little bit of a break from worrying about them as he got to worry about his father's idols and altar. But now we return to what God told him two weeks ago.

Remember, verse 16, he says, You shall strike the Midianites as one man. And so we're back to military action. Gideon has been tasked with delivering, with rescuing his people.

[5 : 40] Not only has he been tasked with that, but you may remember that the nations, the peoples of the east, are gathering against him. So Gideon is outgunned, outmanned, and overpowered.

We also know, we've seen this before, Gideon has a fearful streak. Remember last week he was told, Hey, go and destroy these idols. He obeyed, but how did he obey?

Verse 27 tells us he did it by night because he was too afraid. Now that's important because that same fear is going to rear its head again this week.

Fear creeps up as the battle draws near. Gideon realizes he had legitimate fear last time. He had reason to fear for his life. It was threatened after it was discovered in the town that he was the one who tore the altar of his father down, the altar to Baal.

Now he has legitimate fear again. He is about to face this oppressive force that has oppressed Israel for many years. We can understand why Gideon here is shaking in his boots.

[6 : 48] Not simply because of his personality, but because of the very real challenge that's in front of him. He has been given something that may feel for him impossible.

And so it's with this fear creeping up that we see Gideon coming to God and saying, Hey, I need reassurance. Are you going to do what you've said you're going to do?

Show me that you're going to keep the promise. You said, this is verse 16, I'm going to strike the Midianites as one man. Is that really true?

That's where we come. In this passage, verse 36, right at the very beginning, he says, If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said. That as you have said refers back again to verse 16.

It's referring back to the promise that God gave him. And so he asks for two different signs here. The first sign, verses 37 through 38, he says, Hey, I want there to be dew only on the fleece, not on the ground.

[7 : 55] We might think that that's going to be enough, but no, Gideon needs even more reassurance. He says, Okay, let's do it another time, but let's flip it. This time I want the fleece to be dry and the ground to be wet.

Now, if you dig into this, there's all sorts of ideas about what the fleece may or may not symbolize. There's different ideas about how dew works and whether the first time was really a miracle or if it was just the second time or we should consider them both a miracle.

I'm not going to take us down that bunny trail this morning because the major point is clear. God is the one with true power.

God is in control. Baal isn't. God is the one who determines the ways of the world.

You'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide. Israel had been looking to Baal for life-giving rain. Now a pair of signs clench Yahweh's power in Baal's sphere.

[9 : 01] Yahweh is sovereign even over the dew. Gideon can march forward having been shown that Baal is nothing and Yahweh is everything.

Yes, God is really in control. And so Gideon's asking God this question. He's saying, look, is Baal really nothing? Is Ashtra really powerless?

Yes, yes, yes, they are. Is God really in control? Is he really the one who reigns and rules in the world?

Yes, yes, he is. And so we have a very simple story here in five verses with just a couple basic principles, a couple basic points.

And the first is this, obedience is often a fearful thing. Obedience is often a fearful thing.

[10 : 05] Gideon is trembling here to obey. He's facing the prospect of death as he goes up against these peoples of the east. We also face fear as we consider following God's command.

And remember, our big question is this, what do we do when following God causes us to tremble? If I trust God and I leave justice in his hands, rather than taking it into my own hands by slandering my enemies, will he defend me?

It feels like caring for my family will eliminate what the culture says is most valuable and precious in this world.

My pleasure, my autonomy, my self-discovery. Will God honor my obedience? Is my obedience what will actually bring real and true fulfillment?

It might feel like facing death to forego sexual experiences that the world says are essential to being complete and satisfied and human.

[11 : 25] It may feel like death to face the scorn and ridicule that will come from the world when we stand against it.

Loss of social respect can feel like a death. Is the Christian community strong enough to sustain me if the world rejects me?

Can I face the fear that comes with obedience? What if I reach out to the marginalized and the outcast?

Will the inconvenience and sacrifice be too much? And so Gideon is asking, and we're asking as well as we follow after God, if we step out in faith, is God great enough and powerful enough to deliver on his promises?

Is he really God? And so Gideon here, he's worried. Worried God isn't strong enough to protect him, to care for him, to defend him.

[12 : 42] So he asks for a sign. He brings his unbelief forward and says, look, God, I need help. I need help to believe that you are as powerful as you say you are.

I need help to believe that you're going to do what you said you would do. And so we can compare him to the father that we met back when we were in the gospel of Mark.

Remember, Mark chapter 9, there's this father who's coming forward, his son, to be healed by Jesus. And what does he say? What does he tell Jesus? He says, I believe.

Help my unbelief. I want to have faith. Give me faith. I'm facing fear. I want to obey.

Remind me that you are powerful. Remind me that your words are true. And so if obedience is such a fearful thing, if it presents these risks to us, what is it that we do?

[13 : 48] Well, part of that's going to depend on whether we take Gideon here as positive or negative. It's not just the signs and the do that are hotly debated.

It's also hotly debated whether we should see Gideon as an example to us or as some sort of warning to be avoided. I've already played my cards a little bit by bringing up Mark chapter 9 because the positive view of Gideon is this, that Gideon is just like that father.

Gideon is coming before God and saying, look, I believe. Help my unbelief. In fact, we can understand the positive view of him when we compare him to Barak.

Remember, Barak receives a rebuke from Deborah. He gives this condition that he places on his obedience. And so Deborah says, fine, I'll go with you, but you're not going to get the glory.

Here, we don't see anything like that at all. God does not condemn Gideon in any way. In fact, God meets him at his request. Hey, you want to grow in your belief? You want to grow in your faith?

[14 : 51] You know what? I can help with that. You want to be reminded that my word is true? I can help with that. You need to know, again, you need reassurance of my presence with you?

I can help with that. And so what's the difference? What's the difference between Barak and Gideon? The difference is this. Barak was looking for insurance.

Gideon is looking for assurance. Barak was looking for insurance. I will go if Deborah comes with me. I don't think God's power is enough.

I need to have a backup plan. That's not what Gideon does here. In fact, Gideon never says, hey, I'm not going to do this. We don't see that anywhere in the passage. No, he's just looking for assurance.

He's saying, look, I need to believe. Help me believe. He does not do what Barak does. He places zero conditions on his obedience. All he does is ask for help.

[15 : 57] Barak, at least at first, doesn't believe God is powerful enough. Gideon says, remind me that you're powerful enough.

Help me believe that you're powerful enough. In fact, we see that kind of language in verse 39. He's apologizing for himself.

Let not your anger burn against me. Let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more. Recognize that I'm feeble and faltering.

Please come and help me. I told you earlier, this is a simple and short story with just a basic couple few principles.

The first was this, that obedience is often a fearful thing. And the second is this, God delights to meet his people who are faltering and fearful.

[16 : 59] God delights to meet his people who are faltering and fearful. He delights to grow their faith. Now, if you have a negative view of Gideon, you're probably thinking at this point, okay, great, what are we supposed to do?

Should we all just start putting out fleeces? Anytime something happens and we're not sure, we should come up with some crazy sign, go to God with it and say, okay, if you're powerful enough, then you'll do this.

And if you don't keep my car free of frost, even though it's snowing overnight, I'll know that you're not powerful enough. That's the fear, right?

If we don't see Gideon as negative, then we're going to start doing all sorts of strange things, requiring God to intervene if we're going to obey. But remember a few things.

First of all, Gideon is not asking what he should do. He already knows. He says, Gideon is not looking for direction.

[18 : 13] Gideon is not looking for a sign to know what he should do. He's asking for a sign to remind him of God's power. He's not really looking for direction. He knows the direction.

He's looking for assurance. He's simply asking God to remind him of his power. In fact, we see a similar thing in other parts of the Old Testament.

In Exodus chapter 4, Moses is also given signs by God to remind him, hey, I'm powerful. I'm with you. Moses needs signs.

Gideon needs signs. We do not, however, follow Gideon's example. We do not follow Gideon's example by coming up with tricks for God to perform, not because Gideon is wrong, but because Gideon is obsolete.

I'll explain what that means in a minute. We don't come up with signs for God to perform, to remind us of his power, not because Gideon is wrong in what he does, but because Gideon is obsolete.

[19 : 20] And what I mean by that is this. Gideon did not know what we know. Gideon lived on a different side of Christ's death and resurrection.

Moses, in Exodus 4, who received signs from God, lived before Christ's death and resurrection. In other words, we do not ask God for a sign because we have received God's greatest sign.

There is nothing more powerful on offer than God's resurrection of his own son. Gideon does not know what we know.

He is not as familiar with God as we are. He cannot see everything that is to come. Christian, you look back.

When we doubt and question God's power, we have something much more glorious than dew on a fleece. We have the resurrection of the Son of God.

[20 : 35] There is no greater sign. God delights to meet his people who are faltering and fearful.

We have more assurance already than Gideon could dream of. This is on page seven of your worship guide. When we, like Gideon, find ourselves doubting God's promises or God's presence, we can ask him to point us again to his son saying, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.

This is what Gideon needed and received. God will do the same for us. We don't ask for signs because we have the greatest sign.

We don't ask for signs because we have what Gideon didn't have. We have our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We know what Gideon didn't know, which is that God sent his one and only Son to become a human in this world.

He lived the perfect life that we should have lived. He died the death that we should have died. And it's not even worth thinking about dew on fleece when we can look back to Christ's resurrection from the dead.

[22 : 02] If we ever doubt then that God's promises are true, if we face up against the fear that comes with following God and obeying him, the answer for us is this, that we do look to God for a sign, but it's the sign we're told about in 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20, which is that all of the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ.

Will God provide for us if we obey him in generosity? Yes, because of Christ. Will God sustain us if we are rejected by the world for standing for what is true?

Yes, because of Christ. Will God provide when we sacrifice for the marginalized and the outcast?

Yes, not because of a fleece, but because of Christ. Remember Romans 8, verses 31 and 32. If he gave you his son, will he not also with him give you all things?

What do we do when following God causes us to tremble? We look to the greatest sign he has ever given. We look to his son. We remember that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ.

[23 : 48] In his autobiography, About Faith, the army legend, Colonel David Hackworth tells the story of his time in the Korean War. And during this time, he was going through days and days of very little sleep and extremely cold nights.

And he came to a point where he decided he had had enough. And so he devised a plan to get himself out of the Korean War. He found a grenade and he emptied some of the powder out of it so that it didn't have its full force.

And his plan was to dangle his leg in a hole, throw the grenade down, and injure himself just enough that he could go back home.

Right as he was about to do this, he says this, And I was just about to pull that pin when I saw the most beautiful sight, a sight that every infantryman in Korea dreamed of seeing.

It was the sun slowly rising. It meant that the terrible night was over. And so he doesn't pull the pin, he stays in Korea.

[25 : 00] Brothers and sisters, the resurrection of Christ Christ is the rising of the sun. It is the reminder to us that the dark night is over.

It reminds us that no matter what we face, no matter how much we fear or tremble, the terrible night is over. When we're afraid to obey, it reminds us that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you for your word and we praise you and thank you for your mercy and your grace that you don't despise us in our fears and our doubts, but you meet us there.

You sustain us, you strengthen us, and we ask that you would do that again today. You'd remind us of the great hope that we have in Christ, that we would believe more and more what you tell us in Romans, that if you've given us him, will you not with him give us all things?

We ask these things in his name, the mighty name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.