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[0 : 00] Well, if you'd like to turn in your Bibles, if you do have them, back to that passage in Judges, chapter 6. That is what we will be looking at together this evening.

And we're going to be spending some time talking about the subject of heroes. Heroes are very important, I think to all of us, but they certainly are important to me.

I think the first heroes I really remember from my childhood came from Star Wars. And they still hold a very special place in my heart.

I remember Han Solo, played by Harrison Ford, was basically who I wanted to be when I grew up. And there's still probably a small part of me that does want to be Han Solo, played by Harrison Ford, when I grow up.

If I grow up. So heroes are extremely important to us. And you do see this in children as well. The games that children play, they play at being heroes. They want to save the world, don't they?

[1 : 00] And we love to read about heroes in our books as well. We read about all kinds of men and women who have done extraordinary things. Who have conquered mountains.

Who have circumnavigated the globe. Who have fought wars on the side of justice. Who have defeated evil regimes. We love to hear about heroes.

And what is it that makes someone a hero? There are all kinds of answers in our culture, aren't there? Certainly we would say things like courage and intelligence and ability.

Those often make our heroes. Sadly, a lot of the time in our modern culture, a hero is someone who is all over the media.

Someone who gets people really excited when they see him. Someone who is all over our tabloids. And in church culture as well, we do have our heroes.

[2 : 04] Our heroes are the most exciting preachers. Our heroes are the men and women who have written books about their journey through faith.

And their journey through life. Our heroes have testimonies involving sin and suffering. And Damascus Road experiences at two in the morning. Our heroes are the people who pray for longer. Our heroes are the people who stack chairs better. We do have our heroes in church culture. Now, it is a good thing to admire and imitate good and godly people.

It is a good and right thing to admire and imitate our brothers and sisters in the faith. Paul does say to the Corinthians in his first letter, Be imitators of me.

But sometimes we face a certain danger. Sometimes we look at our favorite heroes and we forget that there is another hero who stands behind them.

[3 : 09] There is our Lord and Savior, Jesus. And when we forget that he is the true hero, we are in desperate danger of making the good news about what we do rather than being about what God has done in Christ.

I say this because all too often this is how I think. And perhaps you can identify with this. I look at my spiritual walk and ask, How faithful do I feel today? Or how much of the Bible did I read today? And I compare it to my favorite Christian heroes and I decide based on that whether I am going to feel pride or despair today. So this is why Judges 6, this passage in Judges, in fact, this is why the whole book of Judges, if you haven't read it recently, this is why this is so powerful and valuable and essential.

Because the book of Judges destroys this way of thinking, of building up heroes and measuring ourselves up against them. As we read this chapter, we read one of the most vivid and exciting illustrations of that great truth that Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians.

Here we see the story of Gideon, God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong.

[4 : 41] Here we see weak human beings. We see the God who walks with them. And we also see a glimpse of the real hero who in Gideon's day was still to come.

Here in the story of Gideon, we see grace in action. In this really rather spine-tingling meeting, God reveals himself to an ordinary man and he turns his life completely upside down, just as he has done for every believer.

And this evening, we're just going to look together at a few things God does in Gideon's life. And finally, we are going to look at who Gideon is pointing us to. So we're going to look, first of all, at how God sees Gideon.

Then we will look at how God changes Gideon. We will look at how God clothes himself in Gideon. And finally, we will look at how Gideon points us to Christ.

So we will look at seeing, changing, clothing, and Christ. So let's start off with how God sees Gideon. And the first thing to notice as we read this passage is how does God find Gideon?

[5 : 50] If we look together at verse 11, we read, the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

Now when you thresh wheat in ancient Israel, you do it on something called a threshing floor. So a threshing floor is a wide open space that's exposed to the wind.

And the idea is you take all your grain and you scatter it out over the threshing floor. And what you do is you take your thresher and you start beating the grain with it.

And the idea is as you beat it, all the chaff, the kind of light, fluffy, useless stuff that surrounds the grain is going to get whisked up in the air and blown away by the wind. And the heavier grain is going to be all that's left.

So a threshing floor is absolutely ideal for this. On the other hand, a winepress is a small stone trough. It's great if you're wanting to trample grapes and turn them into wine, but it's absolutely terrible for threshing wheat.

[6 : 56] You can only do a small amount at a time and it's very hard for the wind to come over and take away the chaff. In fact, the only reason you would ever try and thresh wheat in a winepress is if you were scared and wanted to hide what you were doing, which is exactly what Gideon is doing.

He's trying to keep it from the Midianite invaders. This is the action of a defeated man, not a hero. And in what he's doing, he actually echoes the actions of all Israel as well.

We've just read, the Israelites have prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. They've completely gone into hiding. And from their perspective as well, it does look like God has abandoned them.

We read when they cry out to God, God sends a prophet and all this prophet says to them, he first of all reminds them what God has done and then he says to them, the Lord said to you, I am the Lord your God.

Do not worship the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live, but you have not listened to me. And that is where the prophet ends it. If this were any other story, that is where the story would end, with Israel's failure of being abandoned.

[8 : 16] But with God, this is never the end. God never leaves it just with that. And so we see that God shows up and when he shows up, he turns to Gideon, this defeated failure of a man.

And the amazing thing is what he calls him. If you look at verse 12, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, the Lord is with you, mighty warrior. He calls him a mighty warrior, this frightened, weak man, living in the hills and threshing wheat in a wine press.

God is calling him the name which he will become, not the name that he is. The world sees defeat. God sees Gideon standing already victorious, not because Gideon is a hero, but because the Lord is with him.

And aren't we in the same position? If we're honest, when most of us do what I was talking about earlier, when we assess ourselves by the standards of this world or by the standards of the church, we find ourselves sadly wanting.

And the truth is, actually, assessing ourselves by the standards of the world or the standards of the church, that's not going far enough. Because the Bible says the standards isn't the world, the standard isn't the church, the standard is God himself.

[9 : 43] And it points out to us, points out in Romans, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The truth is, this evening, this won't sound very encouraging, but if you feel you are a failure,

actually, in one sense, you are a failure.

I am a failure. Each one of us is a failure. Compared to God, we are all sinners. We have all run after other things and forgotten the creator.

And yet, God does not leave us like that. Just as with Israel, just as with Gideon, God comes, he redeems us, he buys us back, he saves us, and listen to the names that he now calls us.

In Peter's first letter, we read this, you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

Now, the truth is, I don't often feel very much like a royal priest. And I don't often feel very holy.

[10:56] And yet, God says, this is what we are. Not because of our actions, but because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. And he is not just saying, this is what we will become one day in our resurrection bodies.

He is saying, that is what he sees now, when he looks at us. Now, this should transform the way we view, not only ourselves, but our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

One thing that I was always told to do as a child, when we went on holiday, I was always told to wear sunglasses. And I always, always refused. And I still do to this day, which I know isn't very good for my eyes, but I have real problems with sunglasses.

My problem is, you're sitting on this beautiful beach, the sand's all golden, the sea is blue, the sky's blue, the sun's beating down. And then you put something over your eyes, and suddenly everything turns this drab shade of brown.

I really cannot stand sunglasses. But often, that's what we do with our lives. We put on this world view, this comparison of ourselves to the world, or our church heroes, and we look around at the world around us, and we see it as sort of drab and brown, and we find ourselves wanting, and we find our brothers and sisters wanting.

[12:15] But the reality is, we should not see ourselves through the lens of our heroes. Rather, our vision should be cross-shaped.

We should see one another through the lens of the cross, and what Christ has done. If we wouldn't dare think ill of Christ, why do we dare think ill of his bride?

Yes, we sin. And yes, sometimes we feel almost defeated by our sins, and as Christians, I can, well, you've just heard me talking about Star Wars.

We can be very silly people sometimes, as all people can be. But God knows what we truly are in Christ. And his ideas about what we are like, what other Christians are like, are far more important than anyone else's.

So don't dare to look down on that brother or sister who you find a little bit strange, who you find a little bit difficult to spend time with, who you find a little bit awkward, because that brother or sister is an heir to God's kingdom, and the king himself has died for them.

[13:27] Don't dare to think that you have nothing to offer, you are valueless and meaningless, because in Christ, God looks on you and sees you as his child.

But of course, God's love for us, it is not blind. And that's a point we need to remember as well. One of the types of films that I particularly dislike are romantic comedies.

And there is a certain kind of romantic comedy that I find especially bad. It's always American, and it's always set in a high school, and the plot is always something like, there's a girl who shows up at high school, and everyone thinks she's really ugly and really geeky, and then the high school prom comes along, and she walks in, and everyone's suddenly like, wow, she was beautiful all along.

All she needed to do was take her glasses off and let her hair down, and suddenly we've all seen how beautiful she is. As human beings, we are not like the beautiful girl who's really perfect, but just happens to be wearing glasses.

As people, we really are quite messed up inside. And though God sees us through Christ, he does not leave us where we are.

[14:40] He loves us too much to let us stay as we are. And that's why, as we shall see, he not only sees Gideon, but he also changes Gideon.

God does command him to defeat the Midianites, but first of all, he has a different challenge for him to take on. Verses 25 and 26 say, that same night, the Lord said to him, that is Gideon, take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old.

Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it, then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you

cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.

We don't know entirely whether Gideon, just like the rest of his town, worshipped this false god Baal and this false goddess Asherah. I think in all likelihood, he did, which just shows the grace of God all the more, calling Gideon while he's engaged in this idolatry.

But either way, God is calling Gideon to destroy Israel's idols, to turn away from sin, and it's a frightening thing to do. It's a difficult thing to do.

[15:56] It's a dangerous thing to do. Now, Gideon, to his credit, does what he's told, but, and this I find really encouraging, he does it in the middle of the night to try and keep it secret.

One commentator has a lovely phrase about this, obedience was essential, heroism was optional, which I find an encouraging thing to remember.

You don't need to be a brave or courageous person to serve the Lord. You just need to be faithful. And God honors Gideon's faithfulness. When the angry men of the town find out what's happening, they demand to kill Gideon.

And then Joash's father stands up and he essentially points out that if Baal is a god, he's a big kid now and he can look after himself, and if he can't protect his own altar, then he's not a god at all, which of course is a very good point.

But this is so much more than an interesting story about village politics and coming up with pragmatic theology in the heat of the moment. This is an essential part of the chapter.

[16:59] It's an essential part of the story of Gideon. Before any armies are summoned, before the big battles happen, before the Midianites are fought, the idols need to be got rid of.

The Midianites really, they're just a sideshow in this chapter. They're not the important thing at all. Yes, they are devastating the country, but it's actually God who's given Israel into their hands. And the reason is Israel's evil, their devotion to other gods. The whole reason the Midianites are here is just to get Israel to turn back to Yahweh, their Lord.

The whole point of this whole invasion is this moment here, when one frightened man goes up a hill in the dead of night and destroys the idols holding his people back.

Not because he's a hero, but because God wants him to. Once God has entered our lives, he will change us. And the process may not always be comfortable.

[18:06] One of my favorite writers is C.S. Lewis. And in his book, *The Great Divorce*, he writes about all kinds of different characters and their relationships with God. And it's quite a strange story.

It's got all kinds of parables in it. But one of his stories is that there is a man who is always wandering around with this giant lizard draped around his shoulders. And this lizard is always whispering in his ear.

And the lizard is his lust. And he wanders along and he hates this lizard. He hates the things that it tells him to do. He hates the way that he can never get rid of it.

And finally, an angel comes up to this man and he says, do you want to get rid of this lizard? And the man says, yes, of course I do. Absolutely. And the angel says, here, let me kill it for you. And the man draws back and says, oh, wait a second.

That's a bit abrupt, isn't it? I want to get rid of it, but we need to do this quite slowly. We need to transition. And the angel says, no, no, we need to kill it now.

[19:08] And he reaches out and his hand is burning hot. And the man steps back further and says, no, you can't do that. You're hurting me. Stop it. I really need to go and talk to a doctor about this. I can't get rid of it all at once. It's not healthy, you know.

And the angel says, no, we need to kill it now. If we do not kill it now, we will never kill it. And finally, the man agrees.

And as the angel reaches out and burns this man and as he calls out in pain, he says, God, help me. And in a moment, it's all over and the lizard's back is broken.

And the man is finally free. If we want to know God, as we were saying this morning, the price is free.

We must never let go of that. Jesus has paid everything with his blood. He has opened the way to the Father. But if you do not believe in Jesus yet, I do need to warn you.

[20:06] If you turn to Jesus, you will find that your life will change. You will find yourself repenting, turning away from things you once held very dear indeed.

And it will all be for your good, but it will not be a comfortable process. And for all of us as Christians, we are still going through that process, aren't we?

So often, I'm like the man with his lust around his shoulder. I find myself compromising as I get rid of my idols. I try to cling on to those little shreds of comfort. I think we all do, don't we? Yes, Lord, I love you and I want you in the centre of my life. So I'm getting rid of my temper. Except when someone really, really annoys me. I mean, I won't get into a blazing round with them, but what I will do is I'll think about it and meditate on it and I'll hate them in my heart all night. That's okay, isn't it? Lord, I'm devoting myself to you, so I'm going to get rid of my greed as long as you don't ask for that one thing. That thing is mine.

[21 : 17] Does that sound familiar? We are a chosen people. We are a royal priesthood. We are a holy nation. So let's live like it.

Let's not cling on to the idols of our lives or do things by halves. And maybe when others see how our hearts are now a temple for Christ, they will see what Gideon's father saw about Baal. They'll see that these sins and these idols that once had such a hold on us, they have no power compared with the living God. They can't satisfy, they can't save, and they are destined to burn one day.

But as we said this morning, we are not called to do this job of destroying our idols on our own. We cannot do it on our own. The change does not come from us. Rather, Paul says in his letters to the Romans in chapter 8, verse 9, you, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.

[22 : 26] By God's grace, we're no longer controlled by sin, are we? But we're controlled by the Holy Spirit. And that takes us to our third point. God sees Gideon, God changes Gideon, and God clothes himself in Gideon.

We read on in the chapter that the Midianites have returned, and God proves that, yes, he does want to draw his people back to him, but he is also going to save them from the Midianite invasion. Let's read verses 34 and 35. Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

This is starting to look a bit more like a mighty warrior, isn't it? Gideon's no longer threshing wheat in a wine press. He's starting to lead an army. What's changed here then?

Has Gideon suddenly realized he can do it? Has he suddenly got his inner warrior, started channeling that? No, of course not. He's already told us he's no warrior.

[23 : 37] But instead, the Spirit of the Lord has suddenly come upon him. In fact, the language in the Hebrew is actually even stronger than our translation that we're reading this evening. Literally, the Hebrew says, the Spirit of the Lord clothed himself with Gideon.

What an amazing phrase. What an amazing truth. God had already promised Gideon that he would be with him, hadn't he? But I'm sure Gideon never imagined that that would mean that God would come and be within him.

God keeps his promises and exceeds them. And that means for us, when Jesus promises disciples at the end of Matthew, I am with you always to the very end of the age.

When we turn back to that passage in Romans 8 and read what happens when the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, God isn't just giving us an idle promise. He's not saying he's with us in some metaphorical way.

He means it. As we said this morning, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. What an amazing truth.

[24 : 52] Notice though, that doesn't take away our personalities. It doesn't take away who we are. And it doesn't always take away our fears and our failings either. And Gideon too, here, can be an encouragement for us once again.

Gideon assembles an army with the Spirit of God clothing himself in him. But then what does Gideon do? He has a bit of a wobble, doesn't he?

He has a bit of a panic. He asks God to confirm that he'll be with him, even though God's already promised that. He lays out this fleece, doesn't he? And then, just to be doubly sure, he lays it out again.

Now sometimes people, and some friends of mine who are very good and godly people, sometimes people will say this is all a very commendable act of faith and we should all imitate Gideon, we should all test the Lord and when we're faced with a choice, we should say, God, I want you to show me in some clear way which way I should go and I don't actually believe that's quite right.

God has already told Gideon what he should be doing and where he should be going and in the same way, God, he already directs us through his word, doesn't he?

[26 : 01] He does direct us through the wisdom of friends and sometimes he even directs us in miraculous ways but we don't need to lay out a fleece every time we have a decision, we can be confident that God is already leading us but of course with Gideon here, God is gentle and he bears with him, he meets him where he's at, God doesn't strike down Gideon for his lack of faith, rather he cherishes and encourages this little spark that Gideon has.

We see here that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit it's not actually dependent on how Gideon feels, he clearly doesn't feel very spirit indwelt, he clearly feels quite scared and quite uncertain.

No, the indwelling of the Spirit doesn't depend on how Gideon feels, it depends on what God is doing. The fact remains God is with him whether he feels like it or not.

And that means for you and me this evening, if we believe in Jesus, whether we feel like it or not, the Holy Spirit really has made his home in us.

We really are clothed with his power, with the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead. And that's a wonderful truth and encouragement.

[27 : 29] And that should encourage us to live life more boldly as well. why are we so scared to share the gospel with our friends? Is it because we feel we're not up to the task? But the truth is, yes, we're not up to the task, but the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead has made its home within us.

And he is eminently up to the task. Why do we worry so much about what our future holds? Is it because all our plans and contingencies might not work out?

Well, the truth is, no, they might not. But God's plan never fails and he has made his home within us. And the glorious thing is, just like with Gideon, this is not conditional on you or me feeling all buzzed and excited and Spirit-filled.

It's entirely dependent on what Christ has done on the cross. And that finally does lead us to Christ. Because in Gideon, we do see a picture of someone much greater.

Gideon is a picture of the true hero, Christ. You see, just like Israel, all of humanity has sinned. And just like Israel, we are all enslaved.

[28 : 46] And we're not enslaved to the Midianites, we are enslaved to death. And judgment and sin. You will die and I will die.

And you will face your judge and I will face our judge. Just like Israel, each of us needs a saviour. But we don't need a saviour like Gideon who will fight a battle for us.

We need a saviour who will take away that sin, who will take away that guilt and take away that judgment. We need a saviour who is unlike Gideon, who will not sin, who will not hide away, who will not have doubts at the last minute.

We need one who, unlike Gideon, won't just take away an army, but will take away death itself. And that is who we have in Christ.

That is what the Lord, that is who the Lord has sent in Christ. Christ. And that is why this passage in all of Judges is so important.

[29 : 54] We see here that Gideon is not the hero. Jesus is the hero. He is the one who has saved us from all our enemies. And having done that, we see that he comes to us and he sees us as mighty warriors and beloved children, not because of what we are like, but because of what he is like and what he has done.

He changes us by his spirit and he proves that those idols that once seemed so precious are just useless baubles. And he comes and clothes himself in us, helping us to live a new life for him.

So as we come back to the subject of heroes, the truth is the church doesn't actually need a hero. The church already has its hero.

His name is Jesus. That is what the great saints of old knew. That is the reason for their greatness. They knew that they were not the heroes of their story but their saviour was.

And this evening, I pray that God would help us all to know that we do not need to be heroes.

Rather, we need to know the only hero. We need to know Christ.

[31 : 15] Let's pray once more. Father God, thank you so much that although we are sinful, although we are cowardly, and although we are scared, that is not how you see us.

You come and you see us in Christ as a holy people, as a chosen people, as a people belonging to you. we thank you that you come and you change us by the power of the Spirit.

You destroy our idols and we thank you that you come and make your home in us through the Holy Spirit. And thank you that this is all down to Christ.

Lord, we pray that you would take away from us the temptation to try and make ourselves the hero of our own story. We pray that always we would be looking to you as the only hero, as the only saviour, as the only one who can accomplish what needs to be accomplished.

And we ask for anyone who does not know you in that way yet that they would come to know and worship you as Lord and saviour and they would share in our joy in salvation.

[32 : 31] Amen. May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will.

And may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Amen.