

Judges Chapter 8 v 22 - 35

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[0 : 00] all of you this morning, particularly if you're visiting us, if you're on holiday or you're just passing through, we do welcome you in the name of our Lord Jesus. You'll learn a bit more about these red t-shirted young people here a bit later on as well. But we're here, of course, because of the goodness of our God, his faithfulness, his loving kindness, and we've come to worship him, and that's exactly what the Bible tells us we should do. In Hebrews in chapter 13, verse 15, it says this, through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. How can we bring to God worship? How can we bring to God our praise? It's only, as we read here, through Jesus Christ, his son. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He's the one who's opened this glorious way for us sinful people as we are, to draw near to a holy God and to praise him, not just on a Sunday, but to live for his praise and for his glory. And our first hymn reminds us of who this God is that we come to worship this morning. Songs coming on the screen behind me. Who has held the oceans in his hands? Let's stand together as we sing.

He sees us. Hello? Funny thing. Thank you.

Let us all pray.

Almighty and all wonderful, gracious God, we come to you this morning as those who stand in awe of you, stand in wonder of you, because there is nothing in this world that compares with you, no one in this world who comes anywhere near close to you.

You are so far and above the most marvelous and glorious person in all the universe. And, O Lord, we thank you that when we come to you, we come to indeed the one who is our God.

[2 : 31] He is the God of the whole world, the God of the universe, the God who created all things, sustained all things, provides all things. The very reason we're here this morning, O God, is because you've given us breath and life and food and shelter and clothing, even though we may not even recognize you as the giver of these things, you surely are.

And yet, O Lord, we thank you that you are the God who has made himself known to us, great and awesome as you are, yet you're the God who's condescended, who's come down to us.

We can never get to you, God. We can never reach up to you. We can never be good enough to, as it were, climb the ladder to heaven. None of us, O Lord, are worthy of being able or to draw near to you or seek your face because of our sin.

It's not because, O Lord, in that sense you are standoffish or an ivory tower, God. It's because, O Lord, we are sinful and we are rebellious and our hearts are set against following you naturally.

Lord, it was necessary that you should come to us. It was absolutely essential that you came to us first and made that initiative and took the initiative to become a man amongst us, a man without sin, a man who was truly man but truly God at the same time, your Son, Jesus Christ.

[3 : 58] We thank you that you came to us, came to us in our sin and our filth. You came to us in our poverty. You came to us in our wickedness. You came to us to rescue, to save, to deliver a people for yourself.

We thank you, O Lord, our God, that you came in love. You didn't come to judge at that time. You didn't come to castigate, to tell us how terrible we were.

But you came, Lord, to love us and to win for us salvation, eternal life and forgiveness, particularly when you, as we sang there, felt the nails in your hands when you were crucified in our place upon the cross, when you died the death that we deserve, when you suffered the punishment that is ours. O Lord, our God, you are totally awesome and there's nothing we can really do to say thank you enough for what you've done for us. We thank you that in Jesus, in his life and death and resurrection, Lord, you have become our God.

Where once, Lord, we thought that we were the God of our lives, now we recognize you as our God, my God, my Lord. And we ask that indeed today, this morning, and not just this morning, but through our lives, we may continually, as your word has told us, bring you worship and praise and thanksgiving, not from our lips only, but from our very lives.

[5 : 26] We pray, O Lord, that even this morning as we draw near to you, O Lord, that you would draw near to us, that you would come close to us and by your Holy Spirit speak to us, perhaps speak to us for the first time, perhaps speak to us for the thousandth time, but speak to us and meet with us, Lord, that we may know that we might know your will and purpose for our lives, that we may hear your words of forgiveness where that's needed, your words of encouragement where we are downcast, your words, Lord, of strengthening where we are weak, your words of hope, O Lord, in the place of despair.

O Lord, you know us completely and we ask that you would meet with us, speak with us and help us now in this time. For we ask all these things in and through, Jesus Christ, your Son, who is the Risen One.

Amen. Again, words of our Bibles and the past several weeks, we've been looking at a biography of the life of Gideon and we're coming to the end of that this morning.

So we're in Judges and chapter 8 and if you have one of the red church Bibles, that's page 251. Page 251 of the church Bible and Judges chapter 8.

And we're going to read the last section, which is verse 22, verse 22 to 35. We've been looking at the life of Gideon and the ups and downs of his life and the victories that the Lord has given him.

[6 : 57] And now we're going to read about the final stages of the life of this servant of God. So Judges chapter 8, verse 22. And if you've got a church Bible, 251.

The Israelites said to Gideon, Rule over us, you, your son, and your grandson, because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.

But Gideon told them, I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you. And he said, I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder.

It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings. They answered, We'll be glad to give them. So they spread out a garment and each of them threw a ring from his plunder onto it.

The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to 1,700 shekels, not counting the ornaments, the pendants, the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, or the chains that were on their camels' necks.

[8 : 05] Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ofra, his town. All Israel prostituted it themselves by worshipping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites, did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land had peace for 40 years.

Jerobal, son of Joash, went back home to live. He had 70 sons of his own, for he had many wives. His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech.

Gideon, son of Joash, died at a good old age, was buried in the tomb of his father, Joash, in Ofra, of the Abiezrites. No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals.

They set up Baal Bereth as their god, and they did not remember the lord their god, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. They also failed to show any loyalty to the family of Jerobal, that is Gideon, in spite of all the good things he had done for them.

[9 : 22] We'll look at that in a few moments together. If the Sunday school... I hope echoes something of our hearts as we come to God's word this morning.

Now, in the UK, it's a summer of sport. It always is a summer of sport, but particularly this year, 2017, is the fifth anniversary of the Olympics in 2012, and so there's a big Olympics event going on at the moment in London, and people like Hussein Bolt are going to be running their final race, their career, Mo Farah as well, and other athletics champions.

And it's one thing that every racer, every runner, an athlete seeks for, and indeed any person involved, whether they be in the Formula One, the Hungarian Formula One with Lewis Hamilton today as well, or cyclists in the Tour de France.

What they long for is a really good start, to get off the blocks, to get off the start line well, to begin the race in the lead, as it were, or in a good place, a good position, that they can carry that forward

through the race to the end.

But, as it happens, many racers, athletes, cyclists, whoever they may be, even if they get a good start, there's no guarantee of a winning finish, or a finish on the podium.

[10 : 44] There's no guarantee that starting well will mean finishing well. And when we come to the closing verses of the life of Gideon, as they're recorded here, we see that sadly for Gideon.

Though he started so well, and he did start so well, the Lord meeting with him, and calling him, preparing him, and equipping him, to become this mighty warrior who led 300 men, only 300 men, to an amazing victory over 135,000 Midianites and other tribes who were armed to the teeth. And though he did so well in dealing with criticism, as we saw last week, and opposition, and difficulty, the sad truth is that as we come to the end of his life, we find that Gideon does not finish well.

Started well. Seemed to be going so well. Following the Lord. Faithful to him. And yet, as we see in a few moments, he finished badly, poorly, the Christian life, the life of faith.

And as we come to verse 22, we can understand why the Israelites want to make him their king, their ruler. He's just defeated this great army, taken the kings hostage and put them to death of the Midianites.

[12 : 03] This terrible group of people who, for seven years, had ravaged and attacked and killed and made misery of the life of the people of Israel. They had been decimated and destroyed, and Gideon had led the armies.

No wonder they come to him and say to him, Gideon, we want you to be our king. We want you to rule over us. We want to set up a dynasty of kings from you, men that will be just like you. And even at the start here of this final part of his life, Gideon seems to start well.

His response to their desire to exalt him and lift him up and make him their king, he responds in a very faithful and good way, doesn't he? Verse 23, I will not rule over you, nor my son rule over you, the Lord will rule over you.

That's spot on. Their invitation to be king, he replies with, no, you're not to have a human king, you're not to have a human ruler, God is your ruler. It's a theocracy, this nation of Israel, not a democracy or a monarchy, a theocracy where God is the only Lord, the ruler, and king.

That's a good place to begin. It's the most important place to begin the Christian life. In fact, you cannot begin the Christian life unless you start here within that sense of meaning of Gideon's words, the Lord ruling over you, the Lord ruling over me.

[13 : 32] Acknowledging God as our ruler, as our king, is where we start the Christian life. That confession of Gideon, the Lord will rule over you, is something that happens in the heart of someone when they become a Christian.

Paul talks about it as being a work of the Holy Spirit. He says in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

The very first realization that comes to a person's heart and mind is this, I'm no longer God of my life. I'm no longer the most important person in this universe.

I'm no longer the one who can call the shots in everything I do. I acknowledge for the first time that there is a God and that he is the God that is the God of my life, the Lord of my life.

He's the one that I submit to. He's the one who I acknowledge as the rightful king. And included in those words of Gideon here, I think it's right for us to see Gideon saying to the people, look, I'm not the one who saved you from the Midianites, it's the Lord who saved you.

[14 : 41] He's acknowledging that God is the saviour of his people. Yes, Gideon was used by God. Yes, Gideon was the one who was brave and courageous and trusted God to take those 300 men and to attack by those massive hordes of Midianites.

But it was the Lord who did the work. It was the Lord who saved. It wasn't Gideon's men who put them all to death or fought them in hand-to-hand combat. It was God. And God had brought them down to that number of 300 specifically to show to everybody this was God's miraculous salvation. Those of us who've been going through the journey of his life, remember how God spoke to him in chapter 7 and verse 2. The Lord said to Gideon, you have too many men.

At that time, he had 32,000. I cannot deliver Midian from their hands or Israel would boast against me. My own strength has saved me.

So God had gone to great lengths to show everybody, look, the defeated Midian is my work, my salvation, my power. And Gideon is acknowledging that, I believe, when he says, the Lord will rule

over you.

[15 : 52] Not me who saved you. The Lord has saved you. That's the second thing that happens. When we become a Christian, we recognize and say that God is God, not just that he's the Lord, that he's the one who has the right to tell us what to do and to have his place in our lives as king, we also recognize he's the only one who can save us from our sins.

We recognize he's the only one who can make us right with himself. We see our sin for what it is. We see that we've fallen, we've broken God's commandments. We see that we have not lived as God would have us to live.

And in fact, that that sin has separated us from God and cut us off from him. We see that no matter how much we try, no matter how good we think we are, there is no way that we can be right with God.

There's no way through religion, there's no way through good deeds, there's no way through anything else that we can make ourselves right with God. We recognize God is our savior and has provided that salvation through Jesus' son.

We see that God God is the one who alone can forgive us and make us right because Jesus died in our place, because Jesus took our sin, because he bore upon himself the awful condemnation which is mine, but he did it for me.

[17 : 13] That's where we start. That's where the Christian has to start. Let me ask you this morning, have you begun the Christian life? Have you started well? Perhaps this morning you may be sitting here thinking, well, I'm a Christian.

I go to church and I try to give a good life and I believe in God and I believe in Jesus. Let me ask you, have you started well? Can you honestly say with all of your heart, the Lord God is my Lord. He's the king of my life. I am submitted to him and I want to live to please him. Can you say and have you said in your heart, Lord, you are my savior.

You're the one who alone can forgive my sins and I'm trusting in what you've done for me in Jesus on the cross. See, if we can't say those things, if that's not our confession, if that's not what we truly believe and hold to in our hearts, we haven't even begun the race.

We haven't even begun to become a Christian or to follow Christ no matter how good we feel we may be. No matter what our background is, no matter what our Christian parents are like or the faith that we've learnt, unless it's personal for me, personal for you, that's where we have to start.

[18 : 23] But you notice that when Gideon responds to the people here, he says, I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you, the Lord will rule over you. There's a sense in which it's not the Lord does rule over you or has ruled over you, but the Lord will.

There's a future aspect to it, there's an ongoing aspect to it. And it's imperative that we understand that as becoming a Christian, it's not just that one moment of time in our lives saying God is my Lord and my Saviour and that's the end of it and I just carry on with my life as it is.

It must be the Lord will be my ruler, he will be my Saviour each and every day of my life from now on. There has to be a continuity. Like the runner who begins the race, whether he's, whether he's Usain Bolt or anybody else, if he makes a great start but only does 20 metres and he stops, there's no way he's going to win the race.

He's got to keep on to the finishing line in the same way that he began the race. And dear friends, it's so imperative for you and I that if we have begun the race with Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Saviour, as the one who is King over our lives, it's imperative that we carry on in that same theme, that same vein, that same faith, that same heartfelt commitment.

And that I would put to you, dear friends, is where Gideon went wrong. That's what I put to you, dear friends, is what happened with Gideon. He did not carry on as he began. He did not finish the race of his life with faith as he'd begun the race of his life with faith.

[20 : 03] Sadly, Gideon goes wrong. A good start, and I believe almost certainly as we see here at the end, good intentions, the Lord will rule over you. But the good start and good intentions weren't enough.

he veers off course in the life of faith, and he lives as someone without God as the Lord of his life. There's two areas in Gideon's life which show that he has lost God's rule and God's kingship over him.

Two areas, sorry, Gideon's life which show that he has lost God's rule, lost God's sovereignty, as it were, lost God's kingship in his life.

And they're the two areas that affect us as well. The two things that almost inevitably will happen in our lives as well, if we start well but begin to drift, will always be because of these two things. And they are in perfect order, I can put it that way, they are in consequence of one another. When we lose the one, we lose the other. If we keep the first, we shall keep the other. The two things are this, our worship of God and our living for God.

[21 : 12] Our worship of God and our living for God. Both of these failings come about in the life of Gideon in the latter part of his life and they lead to unimaginable sorrow and grief and trouble for his family and ultimately for the nation as well.

Gideon falls into sin. He drifts from that path, that racetrack, that line, that way of faith and in drifting and going into sin, he brings upon himself, ultimately upon his family, ultimately upon the nation, great harm.

Dear friends, we cannot begin in the Christian life at any point to count sin as being harmless. We cannot follow Christ and at some point in our lives decide that sin isn't as bad as we thought it was. Sin is always destructive, it is always damaging, it is always horrible, it is always trouble bringing, it is always tear inducing, it is never neutral, it is never harmless, it is never a matter of choice, it reaps a harvest of grief in the believer, in the family of believers and in the church.

It always has and it always will. And dear friends, we need to keep that in our minds. Sin is sin. And what we see in Gideon is that that is not the case.

[22 : 40] He begins to become compromised in his attitude towards sin. He begins to weaken in that sense of godliness. So what do I mean by that? What do I mean?

Well, as I said, the first thing that went wrong was his worship of God. Now, as I said, Gideon rightly refuses the throne, says the Lord is your king. But then do you notice immediately verse 24, I do have one request.

It's only a little thing. It's not much. It seems insignificant. Just an earring. Just a gold earring from all your plunder. And we're told it was the custom of the Ishmaelites.

The Midianites were descendants of Ishmael. They would wear gold earrings, the men. And so when they plundered, when they captured them and killed them and they took all their camels and horses and so on, they took their gold and everything as well.

And so just an earring. And they said, oh, well, we're delighted. Just an earring from all the gold we've accumulated. That's no problem at all. But we're told that in fact it was 20 kilos or about 20 kilos of gold that was accumulated along with other fine things.

[23 : 49] Now, don't get me wrong. It's not the riches that are the problem. You think I'm going to say, ah, that's it. Money has turned his heart. Money has turned him away from it. No, it's not about the riches, you see, dear friends.

What we read is what the problem was is what Gideon did with the gold. That's what spells the disaster for him and for the family. We're told he fashioned it, verse 27, into an ephod and puts it in a place of prominence in his hometown.

People begin to worship it and pray to it and so on. So what is an ephod, you're thinking? What on earth is an ephod? Well, back in Exodus and in Moses' time, God commanded that an ephod should be made for the high priest.

It was like a garment, a ceremonial garment that the high priest would wear and on his chest would be a golden plaque which had stones, precious stones inlaid in it which represented the people of God.

And the high priest would wear this special ceremonial robe, this ephod when he went into the temple, when he went into the holy place and so on. Other ephods are mentioned.

[24 : 56] Sometimes they're just simply a matter of sort of a ceremonial robe that was worn by a priest or by a servant of God. But there's other ephods as well in the Old Testament and they seem to be some sort of an icon or some sort of an image that is made out of gold which people used to pray to to get to God, a sort of a connection between them and God.

Gideon makes one here, we're told about, and Micah as well later on in Judges in chapter 17 and verses 5 and 6. I'll just read that to you just so you get an idea of what happened there.

This man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and some household gods and installed one of his sons as his priest. So we're not sure exactly what it looked like, it may have been even an elaborate garment with gold over it or it may just simply have been some sort of an image.

But the problem was this, Gideon took it upon himself to create this thing by which he could come to God and approach God. He saw it as something special.

He saw it as something by which he could seek God's will and worship him. And we see what happened. Verse 27 at the end, all Israel prostituted themselves.

[26 : 15] It doesn't mean that they carried out acts of sexual prostitution. It doesn't mean that. It means they gave their love and their devotion to this thing instead of to the Lord. And even Gideon himself did it and his family.

Now Gideon didn't need to make this ephod. There was no need for it. He'd never been told by God to make this ephod. He'd given no example to. In fact, whenever God had met with him, God had spoken to him very personally.

Either, if you remember at the very beginning, through the angel of the Lord, who we understand to be the son of God before he came into the world as a man, appearing and speaking, or just simply through a tolder voice, God said to Gideon, do this or do that.

He didn't need this extra thing, as it were, this ephod, to get in the way. For some reason or another, he made it. He made it as a representation. He made it so that he could worship God better, he thought, than how God had taught him before.

Now dear friends, the Lord, our God, cannot be served or worshipped as we would like. We cannot determine the sort of worship or praise we give to God.

[27 : 28] We cannot say, well I like this sort of worship, therefore I'm going to give it to God when God has not instituted, commanded, or guided, or direct us to do that. God has laid out in his word what pleases him.

God has shown us exactly what he likes and what he doesn't like. God has made clear what is plain, what it is that he delights in. And one thing for certain that God has said, and Gideon should have known that, is that God has said you must not make an image or an idol or anything to represent me or to bow down and worship.

Exodus chapter 20, when the people had come out of Egypt and into the wilderness, they went to Mount Sinai. And there God gave his laws and his commandments. Exodus 20 verses 4 and 5, you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them. Now Gideon may have made this ephod with good intentions, wanting people not to worship the Baals and the other gods.

But the reason, whatever the reason, he may have even made it as a memorial as to set up to God to say thank you for the victory. But it all went pear-shaped. It all went wrong.

[28 : 49] His whole family began to worship it. He begins to worship it. Soon the whole country goes there to worship it. And so this Gideon, who God had used to tear down false gods in the past, was now one who was setting up something which was a snare, a trap, a problem for all the people.

In fact, it's no wonder, is it, dear friends, that when we read near the end of this passage that when Gideon died all the nation turned to false gods again. It's no wonder he'd almost prepared the way for it by setting up this ephod.

He'd almost undone all his life's work by this one act of false worship. And you say, what's that going to do with us?

I haven't got a Buddha in my house that I bow down to. I haven't got a statue of Mary in my house. I haven't got any of these things that I worship to compromise me.

Now, let's take this a bit further back. Let's step back from this and see there's a temptation, isn't there, in our lives to worship God in a way that accommodates our lifestyle.

[30 : 01] We begin to worship God in a way which is pleasing to us rather than concerned about pleasing to God. What do I mean? When you first became a Christian if you can remember that far back, there was a real sense of I want to worship God and praise him and I want to be wherever he has worshipped and praised.

And there was a sense in which we learned, didn't we, when we were first young Christians that we needed to have our quiet time, have time in prayer with God and time in the scriptures and we loved that as well. There was something about this new Christian life that meant whenever and wherever we were, we were in love with Jesus and we were thankful for what he did for us and it just kept on. We were hungry and seeking to give him praise and glory. But as we've grown in the Christian life, as we've got older, we've found perhaps that there are other enjoyments, other pastimes that begin

to impinge on our worship of Jesus.

Instead of having a prayer time every single morning and Bible study, several days will go by and we haven't even missed the fact that we haven't been in the scriptures, that we haven't been in prayer, that we haven't been thanking God and worshipping him.

And Sunday worship, and please don't think this is some great axe I've got to grind, but Sunday worship. When you were first a Christian, weren't you there twice on a Sunday and the midweek?

[31 : 26] When you were first a Christian, you couldn't get enough of being in the presence of Jesus and his word and his truth and singing his praises. But didn't you find it haven't you found? As time has gone on, well, there's this important matter that I've got to deal with.

It's called Coronation Street and I can't miss out on what's happening to Deidre or whatever it may be. Or there's this event or there's that matter or actually, I just don't have the same love, desire, passion for worshipping Jesus as I once did.

Something's got in the way. It's not an idol necessarily in the sense that it's a fashioned image but it's an idol in another way. It's doing what I want. Jesus is no longer really the Lord of my life. Really, I've sort of come to a compromise position.

We've had discussions, God and I, or at least I have with him, and told him this is what he can have now. Not the full amount but, well, I think 75, 60, 50, 25% is 10.

It's still pretty good, I think, for God to have. Our worship of God has begun to drift. I'm not talking about religion here, friends.

[32 : 37] I'm not talking about legalism. I'm not talking about saying, if you're a Christian, you must, you must, you must, you must, you must. I'm saying, if you're a Christian, I want, I want, I want, I want, I want. And all of us know that our hearts grow cold.

And all of us see the slide. I don't think the slide of Gideon's life happened immediately. It was slowly. It was, it was almost invisible to the naked eye. But it was happening.

This is about worship. This is about loving God. This is about rejoicing in Christ. This is about delighting in Him. This is about the work of the Holy Spirit overflowing within our hearts.

Paul warns about quenching the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work is what? To draw us to Christ, to exalt Christ, to give us a love for Christ. And that must surely be something that is constantly growing and going and ongoing.

You see, what happens is this. As we see here in Gideon's life, once our worship, once our love for Christ, once our delight in Him begins to ebb, once it begins to become less, once we begin to be less concerned, excited, and delighted, once we begin to, as it were, lower the level of which God is Lord of my life, then immediately, or say soon, what happens is the rest of my life is ineffective.

[34 : 00] So we see that what happens next is that Gideon's living for God is also substandard. Gideon's living for God also takes a step down.

This is chapter 8 here, verse 29. Jerobbal, son of Joash, Jerobbal was the nickname they gave to Gideon.

Let Baal deal with him, as some people called him that, his nickname. Son of Joash went back home to live. He had 70 sons of his own. He had many wives. His concubine who lived in Shechem also bore him a son whom he named Abimelech.

Now Gideon had rejected the invitation to become king or ruler of the people, but he begins to live the lifestyle of a king and a ruler of the people, accumulating for himself lots and lots of wives.

I tried to work it out. If you've got 70 sons, they must have also been daughters as well. So let's say maybe the same amount, possibly 50, so 130 children or so.

[35 : 05] How many wives have you got to have to have that many children in your lifetime? I was saying it must be at least 20, maybe 25, 30. But far, far too many.

And if 20 or 30 wives weren't enough for Gideon, he's got to have a mistress on the side, out of town. How does the man have the energy? How does he have the interest?

But he does. This woman in Shechem who gives him the son who he calls Abimelech. The name means my father is the king. So he wasn't hiding who she was or who he was.

Abimelech, if you read into chapter 9 and chapter 10, Abimelech, this son of his mistress, murders all the other 70 sons, throws the nation into almost civil war so that hundreds are killed and goes around as a very nasty, unpleasant person until eventually a woman in a tower throws a millstone onto his head and kills him.

Well, she doesn't quite kill him because he says to his servant, get your sword and kill me so nobody can say a woman killed me. He was a nasty, horrible piece of work and he came about through the immorality of Gideon.

[36 : 28] Now, of course, Gideon was following society at his time. It was usual for a king or somebody of great importance to have many, many wives. Just remember how later on that affected poor King Solomon.

He had 700 wives and 300 concubines and were told that they turned his heart away from the Lord and he again was a man who started so well but finished so sadly.

Gideon was following the society of his time but actually what he was doing was living literally as a man who did not have the Lord as his God. You see, dear friends, when we let worship and love for Christ and devotion to him and that glad and joyful submission to him as the Lord of our lives, once that begins to slip and to slide and it becomes a bit of a compromise and we try to work it out so that actually we can have the best of both worlds, our cake and eat it, then what happens is that very soon our lives begin to slip and slide as well.

Very soon we no longer count sin as sin, no longer do we actually think well, yeah, when I was a younger Christian I wouldn't have done that but now I think I can get away with it and it will be alright.

I can do this, I can act in this way, I can go to this club, I can behave with these people, I can let myself to be just half and half but before we know it dear friends, inevitably what happens is that we are no longer the godly or holy or Christ-like people that we started out longing to be.

[38 : 04] we are taking on the very similar view to the world around about us so that actually there is not a great deal of difference between us and them. Well if they can do it why can't I?

I won't go to the extreme that they go to but we find that our witness for Christ is damaged beyond repair. We begin to be the hypocrites that we so hated when we were younger and swore that we would never be.

Gideon's life began so well, he accomplished so much, he did great things and God did great things through him just as God does and continues to do great things through you and I but the question is this, to me and to you is have I run the race faithfully?

Am I still going with the same heart and passion as I did before or have I allowed things to creep in so that I'm not the Christian I once was?

Yes I may be wiser, I may know my Bible better, I may be able to answer questions on theology better, I may be a church member now and all these things are a deacon or an elder but is my life still on track?

[39 : 19] Have I started well and am I still running well? See Gideon leaves a legacy doesn't he? Which is so sad. Here's a man who God raised up who delivered the people for 40 years there was peace for 40 years the nation was not invaded and attacked by the Midianites but listen to the concluding words after his death in verse 33 no sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals they set up Barbereth as their God and did not remember the Lord their God who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side they also failed to show any loyalty to the family of Jerobbal that is Gideon in spite of all the good things he had done what a legacy to leave behind here he was in their prime position to lead the people into a right faithful ongoing worship and perhaps he kept it all together a little bit in those 40 years but as soon as he's dead if I put it this way all hell breaks loose and all false worship comes in and the Lord is forgotten dear friends what's the legacy that you and I want to leave to our children to our grandchildren to our great grandchildren what's the legacy we want to leave to this town or to the town in which we live what's the legacy we want to leave to our friends and our neighbours about our Christian life well he started so well he was so keen for God she was such a bright clear witness but we noticed after a few years it all sort of tailed off it was never quite the same the things that they once spoke against they do the things that they once would not entertain they entertain a life of consistent faithfulness or a life that begins well but tails often through lukewarmness

Gideon is a lesson to us dear friends of what God can do what God is faithful to do even through a scared fearful person like him but Gideon's life is also a warning to us that we must carry on with the Lord's help by his grace we must continue to declare day by day the Lord will rule over me let me close by reading these verses from the Apostle Paul he himself knew the temptation and the danger of not finishing well this is what he writes and he speaks to the people but he speaks about himself as well listen to it it's 1 Corinthians in chapter 9 verse 24 do you not know that in a race all

the runners run but only one gets the prize run in such a way as to get the prize everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training they do it to get a crown that will not last you talk about the athletics the Olympic games they get it for a crown that will not last but we do it for a crown that will last forever therefore

I do not run like someone running aimlessly I do not fight like a boxer beating the air no I strike a blow to my body to himself literally to my own will make it my slave so that after I've preached to others I myself will not be disqualified for the prize if Paul was concerned that he may not finish the race then dear friends we cannot take it for granted that we will make it to the end we look to the Lord we seek his grace and we walk closely before him let's pray together now Lord our God we are so grateful that you are the one who keeps and sustains and strengthens and helps we confess that you're the God of salvation not Gideon or not ourselves you're the one who saved us and brought us to that place of acknowledging you as Lord of our lives you're the one who opened our eyes to see that our sin can never be resolved apart from Jesus and that you are our saviour and you're the one who set us on this wonderful race this wonderful path of life everlasting of life following Jesus of life for Christ and oh Lord we come to you and each one of us must confess that Lord there are times when we have wandered off the path like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress we've taken by Path Meadow we've gone a route which seemed to be better to us or easier to us and Lord we must confess as well for some of us here what was once a life that was on fire for you is now just a smouldering ember Lord where once we were hungry and thirsty and loved you and worshipped and delighted to bring you praise and we're excited about the things of God and spent time with you Lord something's got in the way or several things have just popped up here and there and they've caused us Lord to slow to wander and Lord not just in our worship but in our whole lifestyle as well Lord we've allowed those sins well we don't call them that we call them habits or hobbies we call them whatever we like to call them but we know what they are they're things Lord which keep us from living godly holy lives and though we enjoy them Lord we know that they are to the cost of our witness and the cost of our testimony and your praise and really they're to the cost of our joy in Jesus because every now and then your Holy Spirit pricks our conscience about them Lord please bring us back onto that right path please keep us following you wholeheartedly steadfastly Lord where we have grown cold breathe your Holy Spirit upon those embers as it were and bring them back into a flame and Lord where we are at this time perhaps on the edge of wandering here and there Lord bring us back bring us into the right way cause us to run with the strength that you provide and give and Lord make our end of life Lord as fruitful and as faithful as the beginning of our Christian life oh Lord please work in us as individuals and as a church that we may oh Lord finish the race and leave behind us a legacy to your glory praise and honour for we ask it in Jesus name Amen Amen different