

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

July 23, 2023

Mighty Man of Valor

Judges 6

Prayer: *Father, we do thank you and praise you for your grace, we do thank you for your goodness, we thank you for the gift of your Son, the ultimate gift. And Lord, we also thank you for the gift of your word. This morning we want to again open that book up and pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you again might make this of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, there's one thing about human beings that you can bank on or at least God can bank on is that we in general are faithless and rebellious creatures. What we're going to see this morning is that Israel was no exception. Her history was one of constant spiritual entropy from being lined up with God's plan and purpose and experiencing great peace, great prosperity and then rebelling and experiencing rebellion's consequence. See, blessings for Israel historically devolved into curses as she repeatedly forgot where those blessings came from. And almost every time we run into good news in the Old Testament it's only a matter of time before we find

rebellion setting back in. The good news turns bad and the determination to follow after God and his ways begins to dissipate and disappear.

God warned his people in *Deuteronomy 8*, saying: *"Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God."*

Well this morning we're going to take a very brief look at the life of Gideon whose life story actually perfectly mirrors the

up-and-down nature of Israel's relationship with their God. The story of Gideon occurs in the book of Judges and where we pick up the story is forty years after Israel's last great victory under the leadership of Deborah and it was a victory over the Canaanites. God had blessed Israel abundantly by giving them this impossible victory. And true to form over the next forty years of peace and prosperity, rebellion began to grow and foment and once again God had to discipline Israel.

The last verse of Judges 5 sets the stage. There we find them singing a song celebrating the great victory of Deborah. This is what it says in *Judges 5:31*. It says: "*So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.*" And the land had rest for forty years. And so ends chapter 5 of the book of Judges.

The very next chapter opens with this ominous statement: *The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.* Now, the Midianites stemmed from Midian who was a son of Abraham and Keturah which was one of his wives and they had a long and varied history with Israel and much of it was not good. It was the Midianites who sold Joseph into slavery, and it was the Midianites who used sexual idolatry as a means to drag Israel into the worship of a false god

known as Baal Peor.

Numbers 25 says: *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Harass the Midianites and strike them down, for they have harassed you with their wiles, with which they beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of the chief of Midian, their sister, who was killed on the day of the plague on account of Peor."* And what that's referring to is Cozbi was the daughter of the chief of Midian and Zimri was the son of a leader of one of the Israelites and together they celebrated their rebellion against God by publicly flaunting their infidelity. I mean, they basically were daring Israel's leader to do something about it. God's response was a plague and the plague killed 24,000 before Phinehas executed them both, having caught them literally in the act. The Midianites were a tribe that God saw being powerfully used by the enemy to lead Israel down a pathway that ended with them worshipping this false god Baal of Peor.

So at this point in Gideon's story we see God allowing the same Midianites to become bitter enemies of Israel. And they become so strong and Israel had become so weak that the Midianites not only kicked them out of house and home, they also used Israel as a steady and ready source of easily obtainable resources.

Judges 6 says: The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number—both they and their camels could not be counted—so that they laid waste the land as they came in.

So understand where once mighty Israel now finds themselves. You see, after forty years of peace and prosperity at the hands of Deborah they've now been reduced to this status of unwilling tenant farmers who were no longer able to stay even in their own houses. I mean, not only are they scrambling to live in caves and dens in the mountains but every single attempt to scratch out a living by planting crops ends with a raid in which the Midianites steal even their hope of ever living free. And so for seven years they've been living as pawns of the Midianites. Verse 6 says: *And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel*

cried out for help to the LORD.

Well, it took seven years but Israel finally cries out for help and this is a huge, huge change. You know, it's popular today to say that change happens only when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of changing. And you know, I understand that; it makes sense, but from God's perspective, from God's perspective what does Israel's history say about them and about us?

Well, what it's saying is that we have no natural inclination towards God. If things have to get to a state where we're living in caves and dens, helplessly watching as overwhelmingly powerful thugs rob us of everything before we actually turn to God, then God wouldn't be at all unreasonable in concluding we don't have much natural inclination towards him. All it requires for us to see God is a state of pain that's so great that the pain of seeking God becomes a reasonable alternative to ignoring him. I mean the Israelites cried out to God for one reason and one reason only: The Midianites had made their life so miserable that appealing to God for them became the only available option.

You know, for forty years their houses had been built, their crops had come in, their herds and their flocks along with their silver and gold, they had all multiplied and slowly but surely pagan gods

were invited in and the real God was shown the door, that is until the Midianites came by and changed the calculus. You see, absent the Midianites, Israel had no interest at all in returning to God. But they're not alone. You see, Israel is us. And what is truly stunning is that God is willing to accept us on terms that should be an affront and an embarrassment to him. He's the king; we are his subjects and we so often treat him as if the opposite were true. And it doesn't go unnoticed by God.

This is what he says in *Isaiah 65*. He says: *"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.' All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—a people who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on altars of brick."*

Have you ever had a relationship with someone where you realize sometimes after a very, very long time that this person basically has no interest whatsoever in you. He has no interest unless, of course, there's something you can do for them. And you look back over your relationship over the course of months or maybe even years and you realize that every time they were interested in you

was only because there was something that they were after; and once having gotten it, they just kind of disappeared. Well God knew that's precisely where he stood with Israel. And he responds initially to their cries for mercy from the Midianites by sending them a prophet who basically states God's case.

This is *Judges 6:7-10*. It says: *When the people of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of the Midianites, the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery. And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. And I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice."*

Now, God doesn't tell us who this prophet was, but this is not the only response that Israel receives. They get a much greater response than that. You see God himself. He pays a visit to his beleaguered, beloved people. In verse 11 it says: *The angel of the LORD came and sat down 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.* Let me first explain the

difference between an angel and the angel of the LORD.

You see, an angel is just a category of a creature, a creature who lives in a different realm, a creature who serves God; the other is God himself assuming the form of an angel or a person. We call this a theophany. It's an appearance in human form of the pre-incarnate Christ. And it's actually important to distinguish the pre-incarnate Christ from the post-incarnate Christ because ever since Jesus took on flesh, his commitment to us in flesh is permanent. 2,000 years ago in a barn in Bethlehem God became a man and he will remain forever in that state having flesh just like you and I did. Prior to his incarnation, however, Jesus assumed a number of different forms and he visited his people at particularly crucial times. And again, it's what we call a theophany. And usually the distinction the scripture makes instead of referring to "an angel of the Lord", it refers to as "the angel of the Lord" or the scripture gives this particular angel qualities that could only apply to God.

One example of how it treats a typical angel is Mary, told by an angel named Gabriel that she would bear the Lord Jesus. It says: *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's*

name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Well, here's an angel doing what angels normally do, they're just basically considered messengers of God. Well, if you look at our text this morning you see it's describing a very different type of angel. This is an angel who does something that no angel would ever do. He accepts worship from God. We don't have time to go into that, you're just going to have to trust me that if you read the text you'll find out that he does. This is the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. And our text introduces us to this angel by saying: *The angel of the LORD came and sat down 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.*

So just picture the scene, we have this angel just calmly sitting down under a tree opposite Gideon who's threshing wheat and as we look at the picture we see that everything in this picture is wrong. You don't thresh wheat in a winepress. And second of all wine threshing was always done on the outside so that you can take advantage of the wind to blow away the chaff. Obviously Gideon is attempting to harvest wheat and not draw the attention of the Midianites. And so we have this once proud warrior and we see him now, he's hiding out and he's squeezing out what meager harvest he

could without getting it stolen.

So here's Gideon, he's threshing alone and suddenly he's joined by this unique visitor. Verse 12 says: *When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."* You know, this is not the first time that God has employed what seems to obviously be sarcasm and maybe a little bit of humor communicating with his people. I don't know how else you could interpret the phrase "mighty warrior" spoken to someone who's hiding in a pit threshing wheat that he's afraid is going to get stolen. I'm not certain if it's humor or sarcasm, but both are completely lost on Gideon who responds this way, he says: *"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."*

Well, what we're going to see that God actually has mighty plans for Gideon but I want to focus on the first response to the Lord because it's universal in its application. Gideon's extremely unhappy. He knows he's in the presence of a great spiritual being and yet he doesn't hesitate to more or less unload on him. You know, his response to the angel's statement, *"the LORD is with you"*

cuts right to the chase; but like so much of our responses to God, it misses the most obvious point. Gideon doesn't realize that he's complaining about God's absence while speaking directly to the Lord of the universe who was clearly and unmistakably right at that very moment decidedly not absent. The Lord's statement gets lost in Gideon's bitterness and Gideon asks the question that I think every single Christian at one time has asked. He says: *"But if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?"*

And so in Gideon's case we're invited, so to speak, behind the scenes to see things from God's perspective. And so we see a people who's heart has grown cold who've abandoned God and only because the Midianites you are seeking him out we get to see what God is up to here; and Gideon's plight, it's our plight as well.

There are many Christians today who desperately long to have the same kind of encounter that Gideon had with Christ particularly when life turns hard and God appears to be absolutely distant. You know, maybe a Christian couple who can't conceive and they see people all around them ignoring or abusing their kids or a young wife or mother who watches and weeps as cancer threatens to steal her kids or her kids' father. It may be simply the frustration of trying to live your life for Christ and finding out that any and all of your plans wind up just going south no matter what you try.

You cry out to God and what you hear back is crickets. And you quickly realize that Gideon isn't the only one who feels -- quote -- *"the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."*

See, I think this goes to the deepest need that we have as human beings. Joni Eareckson Tada a few years back put it extremely well in her book *When God Weeps*. She describes two different scenarios both involving a hundred pound weight that you're required to carry on your back. She says in one case you're given a weight and you're given a complicated series of directions for you to go from one point to another and you're not told what the weight is or even why you're carrying it but you're told it's absolutely necessary. Well, in the other scenario, you're told that hundred pound weight is actually your son who's been severely wounded and the directions are to the nearest emergency room. Now understand the work, the labor in both cases is exactly the same: You have to carry a hundred pounds of weight to a certain destination. Well in one scenario you grit your teeth, you work until you get to your goal or exhaustion stops in your tracks, but in the other one you become a person possessed. You're almost unaware of the weight that you're carrying and your determination to get there as fast as you can, there's no thought of exhaustion, there's no thought of failure, there's just determination. Well the only difference

between the two scenarios is that one of them answers the why and the other one doesn't. You see, in one exercise the point is uncertain; in the other one it is the driving force.

I can't tell you how many times I thought, God, if you just made yourself clear. If you just came down and sat next to me while I'm threshing out in this winepress. If you just revealed to us in a way that would give us absolute certainty, if you just showed us this is right and this is wrong, it would make all the difference in the world. We could do just about anything if we didn't have the question of why lingering over our heads constantly. But then I remember that the answer to all the whys in this world comes from a place where faith is no longer necessary.

You see, God's definition of what faith is in *Hebrews 11:1* is: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* And God seems to be telling us that true faith is having an attitude of certitude about something you can't be certain of. It's being absolutely convicted about things that are not empirically provable, things that are not seen. And so desperately we want to see a reason why and we understand how much easier it makes things, but what if God is saying that we really don't understand what he values in us. And what he values in us is being certain about things that we can only hope for and being of

convicted about things that we can't see. That's what's precious to God. God also says without faith it is impossible to please him. Faith is the one thing that we have that is absolutely precious to God.

You know, in all of our actions, our interactions with God we're on one side of the ledger and he's on the other. We're on the side that has absolutely nothing. I mean we're here because of God, we live and breathe and have our being because of God, and everything we've ever received has come from God's hand. And so in terms of offering God something of value we're like a six-year-old trying to figure out what he's going to give dad for his birthday. I mean, there's not a single physical resource that a six-year-old has that obviously dad doesn't already have. But we all know there's a whole host of very precious things that a six-year-old can give. He can give his heart, he can give his trust, he can give his faith in his dad, and we know that those gifts are precious. When we come before God we're in the exact same position, and God is quite clear telling us that there's no physical resource that we could ever give him that he doesn't already have in spades, I mean, he's the creator of all things, he owns the cattle on a thousand hills. But he does tell us that we do have one thing that is precious to him; that's faith. It's the ability to be certain about things we can only hope for and being convinced about things we cannot see.

Faith is the only meaningful currency we will ever have with God and it's precious to him.

I once had a conversation with a young man who was upset about God's apparent silence. You know, he said he heard all of the different arguments about Christianity and faith and he really wanted to believe and he told me, "I've repeatedly cried out to God over and over again, and my response was a big fat zero." Well, I told him God's timing is uniquely his that he needed to trust that God means what he says when he says that all who seek him will find him, but I wonder if that actually missed the point. You see, if God put such a priority on faith then wouldn't it follow that he expects to be accepted and followed by faith?

See, I'm concerned when people expect that if God doesn't give them a profound almost physical experience, if he doesn't sit down next to them while they're threshing the wheat then somehow or other God has failed to keep his end of the bargain. But God never promised us the physical experience of his presence. In fact what God is interested in coming from us, what God views as the keystone of our relationship to him is the very same thing that God told Abraham was the key to being right with God, and it wasn't some great right or sacrifice or good work, it was simply the act of trusting God for things hoped for and things not seen. In fact God said in

Romans 4: For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Gideon's a recipient of a direct visitation from God himself. And God starts out by announcing precisely the gift that he's receiving. God says to him, *"The LORD is with you."* And Gideon in his pain and his blindness, he doesn't see it at all. And so he starts right in complaining about the absence of a God who's sitting right next to him. I mean the irony any can't escape us. And his question is really, he says: *"But if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?"*

You see what Gideon's doing here? He's doing what all of us do. He's conflating the presence of God with good fortune. You know, bad things that are happening so God couldn't possibly be with us. But God tells us over and over again that that calculus is wrong. He says in *1 Peter: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

See, being a Christian doesn't give you a ticket to health, wealth and prosperity like the prosperity preachers claim. God doesn't

walk any of his children around difficulty; he walks them through it. *Psalm 23* says it best as can be said. It says: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

But still we have this question, we have that question of why. Why don't you sit each of us down next to the winepress and just give us an explanation? Why don't you tell us why God can still be with us and things can still be this huge struggle?

Well, if I were to look at the question of why from God's perspective, I think I would see an entirely different scenario. I think what we would be hearing God say is just what he said to Gideon. He said, I am here. I'm here with you. I am right by your side but you're choosing not to see me. God has come down not just temporarily as he did with Gideon but now permanently he has become one of us. Think of that. He now has flesh and blood. I mean our faith is not in a concept or in a quality, it's in a person. I mean, from God's perspective his love for us is demonstrable and empirically provable. There's an historical Jesus. He's attested to by non biblical sources who were no fans of that Jesus. So we know that Jesus actually existed, otherwise, folks, it's game over.

I mean as Paul says in *1 Corinthians 15*: *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.* Paul says if Jesus didn't actually rise from the dead then all of this Christian faith, it just goes away; it just disappears because it's all based on one solid fact: God became a man. And from God's standpoint faith is simply a matter of getting on his wavelength. I mean God knows what he's already done. God knows what it cost him: himself. But he led a perfect life and then he offered that life up on the cross as payment in full for our lives of imperfection and sin. God knows that by faith when we trust in him, we have that perfection as our own. God knows what he's accomplished. What he wants from us is our willingness to believe it.

Gideon's unhappiness with God started after forty years of plenty, and it culminated after seven years of trial. But God's unhappiness with us goes back to the very beginning. God's perspective starts in the garden of Eden with an active flat-out act of treason committed by a couple that God had only done good for and blessed. I mean, all of Adam's existence consisted of gifts and blessings beyond measure. Perfect life, perfect animals, perfect creation, perfect garden, perfect everything, including a perfect companion created from a rib from his side. They're both surrounded by wonders that human eyes have never seen since,

including every possible wonderful thing to eat. And God places one restriction on them: Just don't eat this one fruit. We all know what happened. Adam and Eve choose to side with the serpent. They believed his lies that his restriction on Adam and Eve was designed to prevent them from becoming just like God. What an incredible response to the gifts that God had lavished on them. What an incredible insult. But understand, God was never taken by surprise by Adam and Eve's treachery. He knew before they'd even been created that they would rebel and reject him, that he would have to at some point come into our existence to pay the price of that rebellion. And those are the facts that God knows with absolute certitude because he's at the center of all of them.

See, the faith part is a challenge to us as to whether or not we will believe God when he tells us three different things: Number one, what our real situation is; number two, what he's done to address it; and number three, what we have to do to appropriate it. I mean the real situation is that we are, all of us, fallen sinners and that no matter how hard we might try we will never, ever achieve the level of goodness that God requires for heaven. God is a flawless being and he requires us to be that as well. That standard demands one hundred percent absolute perfection. And Jesus made that demand crystal clear in a statement we discussed just last week in the Sermon on the Mount. This is what Jesus said

in *Matthew 5:48*: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Well, that's a standard only the Lord Jesus Christ could measure and make.

And secondly what Jesus has done to address the fact that since Adam's fall we can no longer meet that requirement is that God himself came down and lived among us perfectly to offer up his perfect life in the place of ours. And thirdly what we have to do to a appropriate what Jesus has done is simply to believe, to place our faith in Christ's provision for sin. *Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.* And this applies if your name is Bill or Mary or Sue or Abraham. What matters is faith, it's faith that was critically in short supply when God met with Gideon at the winepress.

Gideon has long since abandoned the notion that God is loving and caring for him and his nation because the Midianites have had such success in attacking them. And again Gideon says: "*But if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.*" So says Gideon. Well Gideon very quickly learns the wisdom of *Proverbs 17* which says: *Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when*

he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

Gideon should have kept his mouth shut. He only knows that he's speaking to a very powerful spiritual being and he's complaining mightily about how unfairly and poorly they've been treated. Little does he know that the God he's speaking to has every right to give Gideon's complaint right back to him, that Israel has treated God poorly and unfairly. But this angel that's sitting next to him has far different fish to fry. And so he calls Gideon's bluff. This is what the angel says: *And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"* And he -- that's Gideon -- said to him, *"Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."* And the LORD said to him, *"But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."*

Well Gideon, consider your bluff called. And unfortunately we're going to have to stop the narrative at this point unless you want a four-hour sermon. The facts are God met Gideon's complaint, he met it with a great and mighty task that he had Gideon accomplish. God took the army of ten thousand men that Gideon had down to three hundred for one purpose. He says in *Judges 7:2*: *The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the*

Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" And if you read Judges 7 you'll find all of the details of how God with only three hundred men and Gideon defeated the entire Midianite army.

You see, God met Gideon when circumstances that had driven his faith to his lowest ebb and he simply told him, *"The LORD is with you."* Gideon couldn't believe it because he had conflated God's presence with worldly success and so it blinded him so much that he wound up bitterly complaining about God's absence to God. And by the time God is finished with Gideon we see that his faith has grown in leaps and bounds. And his success as it were was directed related to the promise that God makes to each of us whether we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death or enjoying life at the peak of the mountaintop: God is always with us as he was with Gideon. *And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."*

You see, Gideon learns that the key to his success is the key to ours as well. It's the presence of Christ in our lives. It's something we can only appropriate by faith. *For we walk by faith, not by sight.* And what I want us to take away from our brief look at Gideon is that God also has great and mighty things for you and me to do, because Gideon is every man. And God is using his anger

and his bitterness and his circumstances to paint a vivid picture of how he interacts with every single one of us.

Understand, Gideon got a privilege that very few of us get. Gideon got an answer to his why. He received a very specific and direct answer, something all of us would love to have. But you got to understand the task that God had for Gideon. It was the defeat of the entire Midianite army of 135,000 with a force numbering only three hundred, not something I think I'd be volunteering for.

You know, the young man that I met, the young man that cried out to God said he heard nothing back, he reminds me of Gideon. He reminds me of Gideon complaining mightily about God's absence to God. You see, God has spoken and he's spoken mightily and he could say to my friend, look, I left heaven itself to be born in a cave to peasant parents. I lived out my time on earth perfectly, then I went not to a palace to live but a cross to die for your sins and then I rose from death, conquering death itself. I've made my statement already; I made it with my life. It's crystally clear and historically verifiable. If you're waiting for me to sit down beside you as you thresh out your life, understand that Gideon didn't have what you have. He didn't have the record that I've left in my word. He didn't even know what a cross was and yet he was saved in the very same way, by faith in my provision for him.

God says I met him and grew his faith because I had a great and mighty task for him to do. By faith he was to conquer armies.

Well, there's a great and mighty task that awaits every single son and daughter of Adam and that task requires faith as well. First and foremost it's to believe God when he makes his claim on our lives, and to live our lives pursuing -- quote -- *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. That's the only currency that we have with God. It's precious to him and lifesaving to us, and so God has determined to grow that capacity in us.

I mean, if you're waiting for God to come sit down beside you, you may be waiting forever. And God has every right to say I've done more than enough to prove historically and otherwise how real I am and how much I love this world. If you still have doubts, now may just be the time to simply give them up and trust in the God who gave his life for you. As God says: *To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness*. Let's pray.

Father, I just again, this is a timely word because many of us are asking the question why. We're asking it for Andy and for Darcey and the family and we don't know why. What we do know is that,

God, has promised to sit down beside us, that you have promised that you would walk through this with us -- not get us around it, but get us through it. Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Lord, we pray this day for that specific comfort of your presence and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.