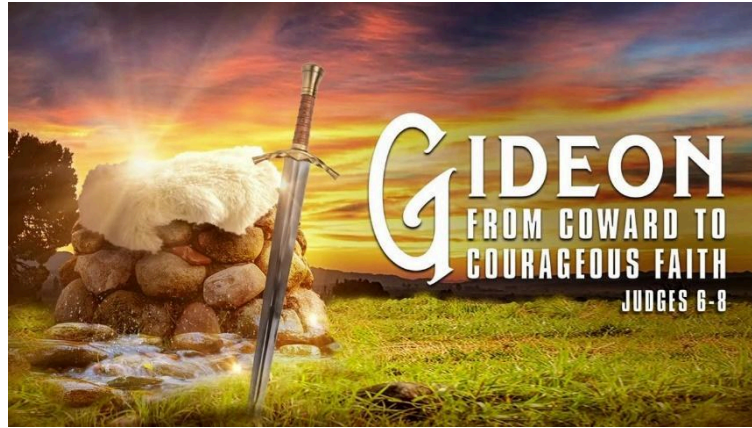


ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING
A SERVICE OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM WITH COMMUNION
10.30 AM 21ST JULY 2024

Rev Dr Julia Binney leading & Rev Dr Jim Binney preaching

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk.

Find us on Facebook @ Abbey Baptist Church, Reading



Summer Series: Not Only for Heroes... Twelve studies on the lesser known heroes of faith from Hebrews 11

Theme 8: The Courage of Faith – Gideon (Hebrews 11:32)

CALL TO WORSHIP: from Psalm 147:1-5

Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God,

How pleasant and fitting it is to praise him!

He determines the number of the stars

and calls them each by name.

Great is our God and mighty in power;

His understanding has no limit. Praise the Lord!

HYMN BP&W 15:

Let us sing to the God of salvation,
let us sing to the Lord our rock;
let us come to his house with thanksgiving,
let us come before the Lord and sing!

*Praise our maker, praise our Saviour,
praise the Lord our everlasting king!
Every throne must bow before him,
God is Lord of everything!*

In his hand are the earth's deepest places,
and the strength of the hills is his!
All the sea is the Lord's, for he made it
by his hands the solid rock was formed.

Let us worship the Lord our maker,
let us kneel to the Lord our God;
for we all are the sheep of his pasture

he will guide us by his powerful hand.

Let today be the time when you hear him!

May our hearts not be hard or cold,
lest we stray from the Lord in rebellion
as his people did in time of old:

RICHARD BEWES (b. 1934).

A PRAYER OF PRAISE:

Almighty God, ruler of heaven and earth, Lord of space and time,
Creator of all that is and was and shall be,

We worship you. Receive our thanks and praise.

Everlasting God, all good, all truth, all love, all mercy.

We honour you. Receive our thanks and praise.

Infinite God, greater than we can imagine,

Wiser than we can understand,

Kinder than we ever fully appreciate.

We declare you to be our God, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Holy Spirit inspire in us, we pray, the love and devotion that you deserve. Amen.

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

For those times when we lose sight of your infinite greatness and power.

Gracious God, **forgive us.**

For those times when we depend only on our own limited strength and power.

Gracious God, **forgive us.**

For those times when we give way to fear because we do not trust in you as our faithful
and promise fulfilling God.

Gracious God, **forgive us.**

Lord, help us to trust you and to be strong and courageous in you.

In Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours

now and for ever and ever. Amen.

FAMILY TIME: The Cowardly Lion

(An offering will be taken during the next song, and then the children will leave us for their own groups)

SONG:

Our confidence is in the Lord, the source of our salvation.

Rest is found in him alone, the author of creation.

We will not fear the evil day, because we have a refuge;

In every circumstance we say, 'Our hope is built on Jesus.'

He is our fortress, we will never be shaken; x4
We will put our trust in God. We will put our trust in God.

NOEL & TRICIA RICHARDS © 1989 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

BIBLE READING 1: Judges 6:1-6,11-16

BIBLE READING 2: Hebrews 11:32-34

SERMON: Not only for Heroes 8: The Courage of Faith - Gideon (Hebrews 11:32, Judges 6 & 7, 8:24-27)

The way in which the Writer introduces the name of Gideon in Hebrews 11:32-34 reminds us of the conclusion of John's Gospel where it is implied that if everything God has done and is doing (particularly in and through Jesus)

were recorded, 'the whole world could not contain the books that would be written' (John 21:25). So here, the Writer (perhaps sensing that he is running out of available manuscript space) lumps together a veritable host of heroes of faith (Hebrews 11:32)



Gideon was the fifth Judge of Israel, and when we are first introduced to him he presents a very pathetic picture (Judges 6:11). Fearing the Midianites and the Amalekites, who were all the time looting Israel's flocks, herds and produce (Judges 6:4), Gideon was hiding from public view. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appears to him and reveals that he is to be the deliverer of God's people (Judges 6:12-16). The trouble and distress which had fallen upon God's people had come because they had forsaken God and done evil in his sight (Judges 6:1,13). In their distress they 'cried out to the Lord' (Judges 6:6), and God graciously raised up Gideon in answer to their cry. Disobeying the Lord will always have consequences, but if we confess our sin, return to the Lord and seek to please him, he will always undertake for us and bless us (Proverbs 28:13). Gideon's story is the story of someone who grew in faith. Someone who was transformed by faith from somewhat of a spiritual coward to a hero of faith! To appreciate the courage Gideon displayed in trusting God we need to read Judges 6,7 and 8:24-27. Notice the following:

1. It takes courageous faith to hear and obey the call of God.

Gideon was a timid, anonymous young man threshing wheat, and suddenly the Lord calls him to undertake a great task (Judges 6:11-12). Gideon felt utterly unfitted, unready and unworthy for such a task (Judges 6:15), and he told the Lord so... but the Lord simply confirmed his call (Judges 6:16). And from that moment this timid young man had the courage and the faith to take God at his word and go forward in God's strength (Judges 6:14). There have been many more modern examples of this very thing. William Carey was a cobbler mending shoes when God called him to take the gospel to the people of India; D L Moody was a salesman in a shoe store when God called him to a world-shaking task of evangelism; and David Livingstone was only a mill worker in the little village of Blantyre in Scotland, when God called him to open up a path for the gospel in Africa. To answer God's call demands a courageous faith. It may be to do with initial faith: conversion, baptism, church membership? It may be to some special task: a particular ministry or mission? Do you have the courage to say 'yes' to God... to take that first step of obedience?

2. It takes courageous faith to throw down the altars of Baal.

In Judges 6:25 we are told of a special commission which God gave to Gideon, and what a challenge this was to his faith! 'Pull down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it.' Throughout the Old Testament, we read accounts of idol worship among the Israelites, especially the worship of Baal and Asherah. Baal was the name of the main god worshiped in ancient Canaan and Phoenicia. Central to its belief system were things like prosperity and fertility, and its worship rites both

elevated materialism and involved sexual perversion. The practice of Baal worship infiltrated Jewish religious life during the time of the Judges (Judges 3:7), became widespread in Israel during the reign of Ahab (1 Kings 16:31-33). The paganism that surrounded God's people crept in, gained a foothold, and led to much misery. It was a constant struggle to stay true to the Lord their God. Christians today may be quick to judge the Israelites for their idolatry, but we should remember that idols take many forms. Idolatrous sins still tempt the modern-day believer (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8-10). Instead of bowing down to the ancient forms of Baal and Asherah, we today sometimes honour possessions, success, and physical pleasure rather than living in ways that honour God. 'A fundamental mistake of the conservative side of much of the Western church is that its basic goal is to get people into heaven rather than to get heaven into people.' ~ Dallas Willard (*Renovation of the Heart*). Gideon's brave action is an example of a man or woman of faith determined to scorn the low standards of this modern age.

3. It takes courageous faith to build up the altars of the Lord.

Gideon was not only told to break down the altars of Baal, but commissioned to rebuild the altars of the Lord (Judges 6:26). It takes courageous faith to do that in days of secularism and apostasy. To cast worldliness and carnal methods out of a church and re-emphasise prayer, the preaching of the gospel, the Lordship of Jesus Christ... the kind of Christianity that stresses living by the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) rather than a 'what's-in-it-for-me' approach.

4. It takes courageous faith to ask God for confirmation of his revealed will.

The incident involving 'Gideon's fleece' (Judges 6:36-40) is controversial and intriguing. As a general principle I don't encourage this approach – it smacks too much of 'putting God to the test' (Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:7). Gideon, however, was an Old Testament believer and did not have that complete revelation that only comes to us in Jesus Christ. He could only walk in the light he had received. For Gideon, laying down a fleece was not evidence of his lack of faith. In fact it required great faith to make such a proposal to the Lord, confident that God would perform a miracle. In these frenetic days I have become a believer in 'slow wisdom'. More often than not God reveals his will to us in a series of steps (Joshua 1:5). It takes courageous faith to keep moving forward, but to do so at a steady pace refusing to be rushed, seeking God's confirmation of his revealed will – through his Word and by his Spirit – along the way.

5. It takes courageous faith to not despise the day of small things.

Israel's enemy was very powerful, and numerically far greater than Gideon's army (Judges 6:5). Gideon had 32,000 men (Judges 7:3); but what a shock when God told him to reduce his forces (Judges 7:2-3)... and then to reduce them still further! (Judges 7:4-7). What a drastic subtraction this was! Why was this necessary? Because God sensed that Israel would be tempted afterwards to say, 'We gained the victory!' (Joshua 7:2). God had to show clearly that it was his victory and not theirs (see Zechariah 4:6). And God works in much the same way today (1 Corinthians 1:27). We must never despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10). The widow's two mites (Mark 12:41-44) or the little lad's five loaves and two fish (Mark 6:30-44). Never denigrate what God can do with seemingly insignificant people... even someone like you or me? It takes courageous faith – aware of our own frailty and insignificance – to step out in faith and follow the Lord.

6. It takes courageous faith to wield God's weapons of warfare.

Gideon's army had very strange weapons – trumpets, jars and torches (Judges 7:16,19-22). Nevertheless the use of these strange weapons caused chaos within the enemy ranks and in effect the Midianites defeated themselves (Judges 7:32). We, ourselves, are caught up in a great spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18) against our three great enemies – the world, the flesh, and the devil – but we cannot win this warfare if we rely on our own strength (2 Corinthians 4:7), or weapons of our own making (2 Corinthians 10:4). It is hard for us to lay down conventional weapons – even the Christian equivalents of guns and bombs – and to trust only in the Lord! It takes courageous faith to 'use gods mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments' (2 Corinthians 4:10 NLT). But this is what God is calling us to do, as we live for him and serve him in this troubled and violent world.

7. It takes courageous faith to go on with God after a great victory.

Sadly Gideon's story does not end well in that despite the great victory God gave Israel over the Midianites they eventually, over time, succumbed to the old ways once again (Judges 8:24-27). It was not a sudden act of apostasy but a more subtle decline away from courageous faith. Gideon refused to rule over Israel because he wanted them to recognise God as their King. He had each Israelite contribute a gold earring and fashioned a sacred garment to symbolise God's reign over Israel... but 'soon all the Israelites prostituted themselves by worshipping it, and it became a trap for Gideon and his family' (Judges 8:27). Israel 'forgot the Lord their God, who had rescued them from all their enemies surrounding them... nor did they show any loyalty to Gideon despite all the good he had done for Israel (Judges 8:35). It is always a dangerous time for the believer after a time of victory, success or achievement. Remember that even Jesus, following his baptism, found himself in the wilderness tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1,2). If God has given you a mighty deliverance, look out and be on your guard (Ephesians 6:13-18). Is your faith still a courageous faith... or have you slipped back into your old ways? However... even though the place of great blessing may be the place of great danger... it can also be the catalyst to even greater victories, as the life and ministry of Jesus himself clearly demonstrates!

TIME OF SHARING AND BAPTISMS: Peggy Lee, Aro Abdullahi & Edward Tam

SONG: Scars – I am They <https://youtu.be/lt1XzDf-pFo>

Waking up to a new sunrise
Looking back from the other side
I can see now with open eyes

Darkest water and deepest pain
I wouldn't trade it for anything
'Cause my brokenness brought me to you
And these wounds are a story you'll use

*So I'm thankful for the scars
'Cause without them I wouldn't know your heart
And I know they'll always tell of who you are
So forever I am thankful for the scars*

Now I'm standing in confidence
With the strength of your faithfulness
And I'm not who I was before
No, I don't have to fear anymore

I can see, I can see how you delivered me
In your hands, in your feet I found my victory

*I'm thankful for your scars
'Cause without them I wouldn't know your heart
And with my life, I'll tell of who you are
So forever I am thankful for the scars.*

MATTHEW ARMSTRONG, MATTHEW HEIN, ETHAN HULSE, JON MCCONNELL 2018

HYMN MP 988:

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son

To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart –
His wounds have paid my ransom.

STUART TOWNEND © 1995 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

COMMUNION

WORDS OF INVITATION:

The table is prepared, the meal is ready,
Jesus is here, ready to meet your need.
Come to his table with your sorrow and find joy, with your faults and find forgiveness,
with your regrets and find hope, with your fears and find courage.
Come, if life is dark and find light, if your heart is troubled and find peace.
Come, just as you are, to meet with the one who welcomes you in love, who waits to
set you free, to wash you clean, to fill you with his power, and to bring you fullness of life.
His body was broken so that we might be made whole.
His blood was shed so that divine life might flow within us.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

INSTITUTION:

'The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread
and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
In the same way after supper he took the cup saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

This is the body of Christ, broken for you.

(take a piece of bread and eat as it is served to you)

This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

(we drink together once all have been served)

POST COMMUNION PRAYER:

**Living God, we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son,
the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Please fill us afresh with your Spirit that we might be strengthened and empowered to
serve you in the world. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION: Hassan & Parisa

My God, we your children live in a strange world where we witness unpleasant events every day – war, earthquakes and many other things. We ask you to be our strength in enduring these problems. Help us so that our gaze is only on you, so that our words are your words, your desire, our desire. Help us to be worthy children for you.

Lord, in these days when we are approaching the closure of schools, we ask you to give all our children the power to understand the lessons so that they can be successful in life exams like school exams. Help us to raise good children.

O God, lift up our brothers and sisters who were baptized today to your presence and we ask you to keep the flame of faith burning inside them and to anoint them with your holy oil so that they can rely on you alone in the lows and highs of life, bearing fruit in you

Lord, we pray for Abbey church and we ask you to always witness people who are baptized and step into your freedom and peace. We ask you to bless Abbey's family and help us.
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

HYMN MP 1072:

In Christ alone, my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my all in all,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died,

The wrath of God was satisfied,
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain,
Then bursting forth in glorious day,
up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine,
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny,
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

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THE BLESSING:

Go from this place in peace and love.
Go from this place with hope and courage.
As you have received from God, so **give** and **be** to others.
And may God accompany you and bless you every step of the way.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

THE GRACE:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Dates for your Diary:

Special Church Anniversary weekend –

- **Church Vision Day 3rd August**
- **Anniversary Service 4th August followed by a Church Lunch**

If you would like to contribute financially to Abbey International Baptist Church electronically, please use the card reader at the back of the church or scan the following QR code below to pay:

QR Code for Offering: