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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

January 21, 2018

Gideon and God's Holiness

Judges 6

Prayer: *Father God, we just again thank you for the fact that you are our Father. We thank you for the gifts that you have given us, not the least of which is your Son. And Lord, this morning we want to look again at the life of Gideon and to draw some parallels there between what it is you're doing, what it is you did in his life and what it is you're doing in our life. And again as I say each week, without the presence of your Holy Spirit, this is a fool's errand. And so we pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us as we open up your book, as we look into it, as we read and understand more of what it is you've done for us. We pray that we would have the presence of that Spirit and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as I said, we are looking into the life of Gideon, the mighty warrior for the nation of Israel. And we've been introduced to Gideon at a low point in Israel's history. For 40 years now they've enjoyed peace and prosperity after this incredible victory over the Canaanites while they were under the rule of Deborah, but

now rebellion has set in as it always does. Now Israel has welcomed false gods and false worship and they've refused to obey the God who saved them in the first place, and God's response is to allow the Midianites to overwhelm them. *Judges 6:1* 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.* God has allowed the Midianites to grow strong enough to subjugate Israel to the point where the Israelites are now living in caves and dens in the mountains eking out whatever kind of living they could, knowing that the Midianites could steal their crops literally at will. And so we find Gideon and he's hiding out against the Midianites trying to thresh wheat in a winepress so that he won't be noticed and have his crop stolen. This is *Judges 6:6*, it says: *And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD.* It's a sad state of affairs for Israel and it's a sad state of affairs for Gideon. This has taken literally seven years of harassment and turmoil and finally Israel is turning to God for relief. But this has been Israel's pattern for decades. You see, when things go well they tend to ignore their God and it's only when things go south in a major way that they -- and they run out of options that they turn once again to their God. They're no different than you and me. That's the way we operate. So God sends them a prophet and the prophet tells Israel that their sad state of affairs is a direct result of them

refusing to obey their God and then God himself in the form of an angel has this confrontation with Gideon. This is verse 11. It says: *Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."* Well, we pointed out last time how deeply ironic it was that Gideon would be bitterly complaining about God's absence when he's making his complaint directly to God. God announces he is with Gideon and Gideon responds in verse 13: *"Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"* Gideon can't believe that such terrible things would be happening to them if God was really with them because he's conflating the presence of God with earthly success. It's something that prosperity preachers do right now here today. And God is taking great pains to tell us that his presence with us is no guarantee of health or wealth or prosperity but it is a guarantee that no matter what we face, God is telling us he will walk through it with us. As the scripture says in *Psalm 23: Yea, though I walk through -- and again, not above, not below, not around but 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.*

You see Gideon has made an elemental mistake. Life has become extremely difficult so therefore God must have abandoned us. All Gideon had to do was take a long, honest look at his nation and see where they've gone. It would have been apparent that it is they who had abandoned God and not vice versa. But Gideon is so consumed with bitterness over the sad state of Israel at this time that he responds to God himself telling him that he is there with him by saying this in verse 13: *"Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all of this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do I not send you?" And he 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, this is where we left last -- last left Gideon last week. I mean God is calling his bluff. God had come down and appeared to Gideon in the midst of Israel's trials and Gideon, after unloading on God saying that all the wonders that God has done in the past didn't matter because now he had forsaken them into the hands of

Midianites when the angel of the LORD challenges him and Gideon's bluff has been called. But Gideon wants to know a little bit more about who this angel is. This is what happens in verse 17: *And he said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return." So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. Now Gideon has just witnessed something very few human beings have ever, ever had the privilege of witnessing, but his response, well it's anything but joyful. Instead his response is one of absolute terror. Verse 22, he says: *Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."**

What I want to examine this morning is something that Gideon clearly gets but it's something that I think we clearly often forget. See, Gideon understood that God is holy and that he was not. And he also understood that to come in close contact with the holiness of God would be normally absolutely fatal. It would require an assurance from God himself to Gideon that he would not face instantaneous death for getting too close. Verse 23, it says: *But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."* You know, Gideon was not the only one to have such a reaction to God's holiness. Prior to Samson's birth, his mother and Manoah, his father, were visited by a similar theophany. Now a theophany is an appearance of God himself in the form of an angel. Well he appears to Samson's mother and his father Manoah and they have a very similar reaction to Gideon. *Judges 13:21* says: *Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God."* See Manoah had an understanding of God's holiness. And as bad as Israel was during the time of the book of Judges, they at least understood who they were and who God was. They knew that God's holiness would not in any way allow God's perfection to come in contact with their fallenness unless some steps had been taken. *Judges 13:23* says: *But his -- that's Manoah's -- wife said to him, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering or a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now*

announced to us such things as these." You see, the idea of God as my pal, God as my buddy, God as my co-pilot, that was completely foreign to these Old Testament saints. You know when Jacob met and wrestled with the angel of the LORD and he survived it, he said this in *Genesis 32:30*, he said: "*For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.*" When God spoke the ten commandments at Mount Sinai, his people heard and replied in *Deuteronomy 5:24*, they said this: "*Behold, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of fire. This day we have seen God speak with man, and man still live. Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, we shall die.*" What is it that they know that we seem to have forgotten? It's the holiness of God. Gideon and Manoah and Jacob and all the people of Israel all understood who God was far better than we do. And so did the prophet Isaiah. I mean, understand Isaiah was one of the most godly men who ever lived. He was an anointed prophet of God who lived during the reign of King Uzziah, and Uzziah reigned for 52 years over Israel. And his reign was marked by wisdom and great growth until at the very end, pride got the best of Uzziah and he took for himself the role of priest that God had given only to the sons of Aaron. God's response was to strike Uzziah instantly with a leprosy that never left him until he died because you don't trifle with God's

holiness. And when King Uzziah died, Isaiah came to the temple and he was met there with far more than what he had anticipated, and this is what his description is in *Isaiah 6*. It says: *In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim, each one had six wings: With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.*

R.C. Sproul in his book *The Holiness of God* points out that as lofty as these angels themselves were, in the presence of God they first had to cover their own faces. In the face of God's holiness they had to cover their own feet. Because as holy as these angels were, they were standing on yet holier ground. Ground so holy that even the inanimate doorposts were quaking at God's presence.

Sproul points out just how significant it is that the angels were shouting, "Holy, holy, holy!" and this is what he says. He says: "Repetition is a form of emphasis. When we want to emphasize the importance of something in English, we have several devices from which to choose. We may underline the important words, or print them in italics, or boldface type. We may attach an exclamation

point following the words or set them off in quotation marks. These are all devices to call the reader's attention to something that is especially important. The Old Testament Jew also had different techniques to indicate emphasis. One such device was the method of repetition. We see Jesus' use of repetition with the words "truly, truly, I say to you." Here the double use of "truly" was a sign that what he was about to say was of crucial importance. Only once in sacred scripture is an attribute of God elevated to the third degree. Only once is a characteristic of God mentioned three times in succession. The Bible says that God is holy, holy, holy. Not that he is merely holy, or even holy, holy. He is holy, holy, holy. The Bible never says that God is love, love, love or mercy, mercy, mercy; or wrath, wrath, wrath; or justice, justice, justice. It does say that he is holy, holy, holy, and that the whole earth is full of his glory."

Well, what about Isaiah? Isaiah himself in the presence of God's holiness said this, he said: *"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."* See, what Isaiah was trying to communicate in this passage is something that we in the 21st century know very little about. It's that in the presence of God's holiness, the holiest man of his era was literally disintegrating. He was coming apart at the seams.

He was literally saying I am undone at the sight of God's glory. Gideon understood it and Manoah understood it and Jacob understood it and Isaiah certainly understood it. I don't think we even remotely understand it.

I'll never forget the very first time that I was reading in the Old Testament the story about Uzzah and the ark of the covenant. The story's in 2 Samuel 6, it says this: *And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from the Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab drove the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was on a hill accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark. Then David and all of the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.* Let me just give you a little background here. You have to understand, the ark of the covenant was the one sacred place on earth that God had actually consented to dwell within. It was sacred and it was holy. But this was a

time of celebration for Israel. You see, the Philistines way back had stolen the ark thinking that it was some kind of magical charm that was going to help them in battle and disaster and curses soon followed. They wanted nothing more than to get rid of it and eventually they sent it away and it had lodged in the house of Abinadab for some 70 years when David decided to take it back and to make it the centerpoint of worship in Israel. So with the very best of intentions and a huge celebration, David and his men load the ark on a cart. Well that was their first mistake. See, God had given very specific instructions as to how the ark was to be transported and it was never to be put on a cart. Instead it was to be transported one way and one way only according to Exodus 25, it says this, God says: *"You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side. And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it."* So the cart was to be moved only by these special poles set aside for transport, and the only ones who were allowed to do the transporting were the offsprings of the sons of Kohath who had been chosen by God specifically for that task. Now it had been 70 years since the ark had been moved, and you well know in 70 years, memories tend to grow dim. But God never forgets

and 70 years of time did nothing to negate his command. So here we have this huge celebration. At the height of the celebration there's songs and singing and timbrels are playing and the cart with the ark moves out, not carried by poles but sitting on a cart. Well at some point the footing becomes unstable. They go into a stream bed and the cart starts to tip. There's a real danger here that the ark of the covenant is going to slip off the cart and land in the mud at the bottom of the stream. So Uzzah instinctively reaches out to steady the ark to prevent it from falling and he touches it. And here's how God responds. In verse 7 it says: *Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.* I know when I first read this passage, I was reading along, I thought whoa, whoa, something's not right here. Whoa, God, this must be a misprint, I mean, by my reading Uzzah was just trying to help. And then I read further and I realized I wasn't alone. It was David himself who had basically the same reaction. In verse 8 it says: *And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?"* So David was angry and he was also afraid.

And I wonder how do you feel when you hear that God struck Uzzah

down? I mean, doesn't it make you a little angry with God? Doesn't it make you a little fearful of this God? I mean at the very least you're probably thinking this is not the God of the Bible that I've been taught. But it is. You see, Uzzah is probably an excellent barometer of how much I truly understand the holiness of God. He was struck dead by God. But you know, I wouldn't be the least bit surprised when I get to heaven to see Uzzah up there as well. You got to remember New Testament or Old Testament, we are saved by grace through faith. And Uzzah by virtue of the responsibility that he was given by David was probably a person of faith as well. He's probably a person of faith who made a mistake and he paid for it with his life but not necessarily with his eternal life. You see, God had a lesson to teach David, and Uzzah was part of that lesson. And God has a lesson for us in all of this. And you can gauge, if you need it, by how unfair you think God was.

Again, R.C. Sproul has a very helpful perspective on how to react to God's treatment of Uzzah. This is what Sproul says about Uzzah's death. He says: "We must ask the question, what was the ark doing on an oxcart in the first place? God was so strict about the holy things of the tabernacle that the Kohathites were not even allowed to gaze upon the ark. This too, was a capital crime. God had decreed that if a Kohathite merely glanced at the ark in the

holy of holies for instant, he would die. Not only was Uzzah forbidden to touch the ark, he was forbidden even to look at it. He touched it anyway. He stretched out his hand and placed it squarely on the ark, steadying it in place, lest it fall to the ground. An act of holy heroism? No! It was an act of arrogance, a sin of presumption. Uzzah assumed that his hand was less polluted than the earth. But it wasn't the ground or the mud that would desecrate the ark; it was the touch of man. God did not want his holy throne touched by that which was contaminated by evil, that which was in rebellion to him, that which, by its ungodly revolt, had brought the whole creation to ruin and caused the ground and the skies and the waters of the sea to groan together in travail, waiting for the day of redemption. Man. It was man's touch that was forbidden." So say what you will of Gideon and his failings. At least he understood that to appear before a holy God could be and should be fatal to a fallen, sinful man.

You know someone recently asked me if Jesus was God in the flesh, how is it that so few people acknowledged him as such? I mean how is it that God himself whose mere presence would strike men dead, how is it that that God could appear among us not as an object of terror but as a person known as Jesus of Nazareth whose standing was so extraordinarily ordinary that even his physical appearance wouldn't rate a second look? I mean Isaiah prophesied that the

Messiah's physical form would be exceptionally unimpressive. He said in *Isaiah 53*: *He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*

So how did the angel of the LORD who would invoke such terror in Gideon become the Lord Jesus Christ with no form, no majesty and no beauty that we should desire him? Well, God answers that question in *Philippians 2*. He says: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

So what does it mean that God "emptied himself?" We know that all the while that Jesus was in the flesh he was 100 percent man and 100 percent God. So what did Jesus empty himself of? Well, Jesus took on some things and he took off some things when he became a man. First thing he emptied himself of was his authority, becoming completely submissive to his father. He also emptied himself of his glory that had been part of who he was for all eternity. You see, Jesus could interact with us because he actively subdued his glory. What we don't often realize is the amount of supernatural effort that was required by God to curtail his glory, the glory

that belonged to Jesus enough for him to lead a thoroughly earthbound life. You know we get these tiny little glimpses of what Jesus was capable of doing during some of his miracles. When Jesus stood up in the middle of a squall and demanded that the howling wind and waves cease and they stopped instantly. It was that power that proved more frightening than the storm to the disciples. And Jesus emptied himself of that power using it only according to the Father's will. And what Jesus took on was all the limitations of being human. You know, God never hungers or tires but Jesus grew hungry, Jesus grew tired and sick and frustrated and all of the other stuff that comes with being human. But Jesus took on flesh for one reason and one reason only. You know people say Jesus came to be a great teacher or a philosopher or a leader or a political ruler or whatever it was that they think. Jesus came to this earth to die. We had lost our perfection in the Garden of Eden, Jesus came and he's the only one that ever lived a perfect life. And he lived that perfect life in order to come to the cross and offer up that perfect life as a substitute for our life of sin so that we, by faith, could stand before God now clothed with his righteousness instead of our own. Make no mistake about it, Jesus was here to die.

There was an incident that happened toward the end of Jesus's ministry shortly after he began to explicitly explain to his

disciples that he was going to suffer and be rejected, that he would be killed and then rise after three days. Peter refused to believe it. He was rebuked by Jesus. It had to have been an incredible shock to the disciples who still had images of Jesus taking earthly control and them having a measure of that same success. And so we see Jesus standing that notion on its head and it's Jesus' detailed description of the horror that he was about to undergo that provoked Peter to object and Jesus to tell him, "*Get the behind me, Satan.*" Well now shortly after the disciples heard that devastating news, Jesus encourages three of them. And he encourages three of them to understand that all of this is according to plan by taking them up on a mountain to witness what we call the transfiguration. Mark's gospel describes what happened. It says this: *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."* For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "*This is my beloved Son; listen to him.*"

Mark's description of Jesus' transfiguration is as limited as a first century understanding can describe it. He's trying to get a picture and he's trying to picture it to us and it's not quite getting there. Jesus apparently took on an internal glow that grew more and more intense by the second. Luke's gospel only says Jesus' face was altered. Matthew's gospel said that his face "shone like the sun." And what they were describing was the very beginning stages of Jesus momentarily assuming some of the glory that had always belonged to himself. And the disciples, just like Isaiah or Jacob or Gideon, they're absolutely and completely terrified. Mark goes on to say in verse 3: *And his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.* Well you know, none of those statements even begins to give justice to what was actually taking place. And suffice it to say that if Jesus had assumed the full glory that was his for all time, all that would have remained of Peter, James and John probably would have been scorch marks on the earth. And Moses and Elijah come to join Jesus and they represent the law and the prophets and the totality of the Old Testament gathered to encourage the Lord Jesus Christ right before his passion. And the entire scene reminds me somewhat of Isaiah's response when he had this vision of heaven. Remember Isaiah says, *"Woe is me, I am undone."* Well you know, Peter who's seldom at a loss for words said, *"Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you one for*

Moses and one for Elijah." You look and you say, what in the world is that? Well, you know what Peter was doing here? What Peter was actually doing here, he was babbling. You see what he was seeing was so mind-boggling that he was literally at a loss for words and his mouth just got ahead of him.

I remember one time my brother was telling me about an incident he had, he was in a cabin in Yosemite and he heard a loud noise outside of his cabin and he got up and he looked and there on the porch he saw in the window of his cabin the head of a grizzly bear. I said, "How big was it?" He said, "It took up the entire window." He said, "I started praying so loud and so fast I thought I was speaking in tongues." That's what Peter was experiencing, except what he was witnessing was far more glorious and terrifying than a grizzly bear. It was the Lord Jesus Christ beginning to assume the glory, the glory that he had kept under wraps every single day that he was here on earth. And even the scripture acknowledges that what Peter was saying, he was saying out of mindless pure terror. It says: *For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.*

Peter, James and John, Isaiah, David, Manoah, Jacob and Gideon, they all experienced the sheer terror of the holiness of God and they lived to tell of it. Uzzah forgot God's holiness but for a moment and it cost him his life. Now for almost a century we have

been given what I think is a skewered picture of the gospel. We have generations that have been raised to think that God is nothing but love, love, love. God tells us that he is Abba Father. He tells us that we are welcome to come into his presence. But you know we've turned that into, you know, strolling into his sanctuary, putting our muddy boots up on the table, putting our hands behind our heads, saying, "Yo, what's up, pops?" I don't think that's what God intended at all. Scripture doesn't lie and it insists that God is holy, holy, holy. And until you grasp the holiness of God, you will never begin to understand the depth of the love that drove him to the cross. You see, that angel that challenged Gideon to go out and take on the Midianites because he would be with him, that terrified him with a presence that could have killed him just like Uzzah was the very same Jesus that Peter, James and John saw transfigured. And they like Gideon saw only a hint, a tiny hint of his glory, but they saw the entirety of his shame. And the more they understood his holiness, the more they understood how great a sacrifice he had made. You see, sometimes the enormity of the cross tends to overwhelm us and we think of Jesus mocked and flogged and crucified and sometimes the sheer enormity of what he underwent for us obscures the details of his suffering. Consider the fate of Uzzah: Struck dead for touching the ark. God demanded that his holiness be respected. And I'm sure Uzzah's sudden death put an immediate end to what was a huge

celebration of life and light and now thousands of years later there's an entirely different celebration underway, it's the forces of darkness and death and they've finally gotten Jesus arrested. Jesus himself acknowledges it when he says in *Luke 22*: "*When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.*" We all know what followed. There was the arrest, the trial, the flogging, the crucifixion.

I'd like us to take for a minute to consider someone who was perhaps as obscure as Uzzah was but he worked for the other side. John's gospel gives us a description of this man and what he did shortly after Jesus' arrest. This is *John 18*, it says: *The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I've said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."* When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "*Is that how you answer the high priest?*" This should cause you to hold your breath because this is something that is beyond astounding. You know God responds to Uzzah's momentary lapse of judgment in touching the ark with a sentence of instant death. Now God sees the very one who he has

just called his beloved Son slapped in the face by a lowly court official and he restrains his hand. How much distance is there between Uzzah's desperate but presumptuous attempt to prevent the ark from falling and this fraudulent two bit court official trying to impress his demonic overseers by slapping God right in the face? But God restrains his hand because it is not a time for discipline, it is a time for sacrifice. So God watches his Son's disgrace and he does nothing. No other father had a son more innocent and more deserving of divine intervention than the Father, but he refused. And we know why. Because he so loves the world. He knew this was our only hope, our only chance. We know this is only the beginning. Jesus is assuming the role of the bearer of our guilt. So the night progresses from this one random slap to a rain of blows and spitting and mocking. And still the Father restrains his hand because he so loves the world. The blows lead to whips, ripping the flesh from his body. The Father watches holiness itself in human form reduced to a bloodied pulp and still the Father restrains his hand because he so loved the world. The scourging leads to the cross carried, the cross erected, the Son stripped and nailed to a cross only to be mocked by the religious leaders until he dies. And still the Father restrains his hand. Why? *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* My guess is the greatest force that's ever been exerted in the

history of the universe is the force that God himself placed upon himself while he watched us slaughter his Son. If you've got children, just try to imagine what it would take to watch your child tortured and killed knowing you could stop it in an instant and make those who were doing it pay dearly. But God restrained his hand. And for that display of unimaginable love, God often gets accused of being the heartless one. But trust me, God is used to empty accusations.

Gideon's biggest complaint about God was that he and his people had been abandoned by God to the Midianites. Gideon failed to look inward to realize that it was his own people's corporate wickedness that caused God to allow the Midianites to bring Israel to their senses. And even with that in the midst of their abandonment of him, God was still faithful to them. Gideon pours his heart out about God's absence to the very God who's sitting there with him. What is astounding in all of this is God's willingness to stand accused of the very abandonment that Gideon and his people were guilty of and to apply a mercy that Gideon experienced firsthand. You know the same applies to us. How many times have we considered God to have abandoned us when things don't go well. How many times do we accuse God? How many times does God have to point to the cross before we finally grasp the death of his Son marks not just the love of Jesus that we can't fathom but a love in our father God

that also goes unnoticed and unappreciated. I'm sure we think, hey, if God appeared to me like he appeared to Gideon, I'd have no problem following him and believing whatever he says. But that's simply not true. And next time we'll see. We'll see Gideon's immediate response to God sitting down with him and doing this spectacular miracle is to then doubt the very miracle he has just witnessed and asked God could I have another test? See, Gideon's just like you and me. God has some mighty tests for Gideon to go through and we're going to see some mighty miracles that God does in his life, but God also has some mighty tests for you and I to go through, and he's fully prepared to hear us accuse him just like Gideon did. So the next time you're tempted to accuse God of abandoning you, remember, remember, the miracle Gideon never saw. Think of the same God who took Uzzah's life for forgetting God's holiness now watching in silent and full restraint as the holiness of his Son is stripped naked and nailed to a cross, because it's the greatest proof we have that *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* Let's pray.

Father God, we just praise you and thank you. I can't count the amount of times I've heard people refer to God as the mean God, the Old Testament God, the nasty God, the scary God. Lord, I just, I think of your restraint that you had, the restraint that you

exercised while you watched your Son go through what he had to go through in order to purchase righteousness for us, and I stand amazed at that love. I thank you, Lord, for that love. I thank you that you've given it to us. I pray you would give us the ability to share it, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.