

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 1 May 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Faith of the Judges

Hebrews 11:32

Oftentimes in my Christian walk, I pause to do a self-examination of my faith in God; and whenever I do, there is a question that haunts me. The question is this: if Scripture were still being written today, and if *my life* were being recorded in Scripture, what would my record look like? How would *God* evaluate my faith, for all future generations to read about? I shudder to think! However, at the same time, I am encouraged when I remember that there have been many times when my faith *was* real, and *was* strong enough for the Lord to use me for His glory.

That is why the “Hall of Faith” in **Hebrews 11** is so encouraging to us today! As we read through **Hebrews 11**, we are reminded that the “heroes of faith” were very human, just like you and me. Oftentimes, I find striking similarities between these people’s weaknesses and my weaknesses. Yet, I also find striking similarities between their faith and my faith. To be sure, their faith was far from perfect. All these people were vessels of clay, just like you and me. They faced the same fleshly obstacles that we face every day. Nevertheless, God was able to use them whenever they exercised even the smallest bit of faith in Him.

This morning, we will be focusing on one verse--**Hebrews 11:32**. From this verse, we will be examining the lives of four men who exercised faith in God. All four of these men were leaders of Israel during one of the strangest times in Israel’s history—a 400-year period called “the time of the Judges.” The Bible says that during this time in Israel’s history, “***every man did that which was right in his own eyes.***” The people of Israel were constantly turning away from God; and God was continuously raising up enemy nations to oppress them, so that they would see their error, repent of their sin, and turn back to Him. Whenever they did repent, God raised up another judge to deliver them. These judges were both spiritual *and* military leaders. God used them to deliver Israel from their enemies; but He also used them to lead the people back to faith in God, and obedience to His Law. The first judge of Israel was Moses; and the last one was Samuel.

Now, these men were not kings. They didn’t collect taxes from the people; they did not receive payment from the people for their services (unless people wished to give them a voluntary gift); nor did they draft the men of Israel into a standing army. Their sons didn’t succeed them as rulers, either. These men were simple shepherds, farmers, prophets, and priests, who answered God’s call to be a “shepherd” to God’s people. In the Law of Moses, God had designed Israel to be a theocracy, under His direct rule; and the local patriarchs, priests, prophets, and magistrates were there to teach the law, and to make sure that the Law of God was observed. These judges did not try to change the Mosaic system to their advantage. They didn’t try to change Israel into a monarchy, so that they could set themselves up as kings. They were humble (and usually very ordinary) men who listened to God’s call, and who let God use them to accomplish His will.

Prepare to scratch your head as we look at the strange ways that God moved in the days of the Judges, and at the even stranger faith that these judges sometimes displayed. Prepare also to be convicted of your *own* small and wavering faith. Above all, prepare to be challenged as to how you can exercise *true* faith, and be used by God. The title of this message is ***The Faith of the Judges.***

Read Hebrews 11:32.

I. The mustard-seed faith of Gideon

Before we examine Gideon’s faith, let’s turn to **Matthew 17** and see *how much* faith is needed in order to serve the Lord.

Read Matthew 17:14-21.

In this passage, we find that Jesus, Peter, James, and John were coming down from a mountaintop; and when they came to the base of the mountain, the other nine disciples (whom Jesus had left there) were trying to cast the demons out of a young man. However, they were powerless against these mighty demons; and Jesus walked in on this scene right as it was unfolding. Can you imagine how humiliating this was for the disciples? In the Gospel of **Mark**, we are told that the scribes, and other people in the crowd, were “questioning” the disciples. They were probably saying, “So you are the men who are supposed to rule over Israel in the Kingdom, eh? Your Master doesn’t seem to have given you much power. Perhaps your Master is in league with the demons, Himself!” One can only imagine what kind of ridicule was being hurled at the disciples! Meanwhile, the desperate father was trying to tell Jesus the sad story about his boy’s demonic possession; and the disciples were probably cringing, and hanging their heads in shame. Where had they gone wrong? Hadn’t they done and said the things that Jesus had instructed them to do? Yes, they had; but they didn’t have the *faith* that was needed. After Jesus had cast out the demons from the boy, and He was alone with His disciples, He explained that some demons come out only with prayer and fasting. He then made an amazing statement. He said that if they only had faith the size of a mustard seed, *they would be able to move mountains!*

Folks, the Lord doesn’t exaggerate. (If He did, He’d be guilty of lying.) A mustard seed is very small--only about a millimeter in thickness. Yet, Jesus says that if our faith were only that large, God could do earth-shattering things through us! It doesn’t take a tremendous amount of faith to please God: *it merely takes enough faith for us to do what He had commanded us to do.* This doesn’t mean that there will be no fear in our minds, or trembling in our hearts, as we set out to do His will. What it does mean is that we will find the strength to do what He has commanded.

By the way, before you go out there and try to command the nearest hill to move out of place, please realise that faith is not power to do “magic tricks.” Faith is not the power to do whatever you want to do, whenever you want to do it. Faith is dependence upon God; and *it is always in response to what God has specifically commanded you to do.* Has God *commanded* you to go out to a hill and say, “Be thou removed”? Then don’t do it. God has not, to my knowledge, ever commanded anyone to do this—yet! However, such things *will* happen during the future Tribulation period! The Bible specifically tells us that the two witnesses in Jerusalem will have the power to turn water into blood, and to smite the earth with plagues as often as they will! I wouldn’t be surprised if some of the catastrophic earthquakes during the Tribulation will happen at the command of God’s two witnesses. Mountains *literally* will move at their command!

Now, let’s get back to Gideon. Did Gideon have great faith? Well, judge for yourself. Let’s see how Gideon reacted when God first revealed his mission to him.

Read Judges 6:11-24.

Gideon doesn’t exactly look like the best candidate for this mission, does he? He doesn’t appear to be “judge material”! First, he questioned that God was even *“with”* the children of Israel at all. As he looked at Israel’s poverty and oppression, he didn’t seem to understand that God was *chastising* them for their sin, for the purpose of bringing them back to Himself. The way he saw it, God had *abandoned* His people altogether. Gideon even doubted that he was *having* this conversation with the Angel of the LORD; and he asked to see some kind of sign to prove it!

Now, remember: who is the Angel of the LORD? He is Christ Himself, appearing as a man in pre-incarnate form. Christ Himself was speaking to Gideon! Do you think that Christ was grieved at Gideon’s unbelief? I’m sure He was. Yet, Christ graciously permitted him to see the

little supernatural “sign” that he required! When Gideon was finally satisfied that this really was the Angel of the LORD speaking to him, the LORD then proceeded to give Gideon his first task. The first thing that the Lord wanted Gideon to do was to tear down his father’s altar to Baal. Now, think on that one for a minute! Gideon was from a family that was divided between Jehovah worship and Baal worship. (Since his father was an idol-worshipper, we would assume that Gideon had been influenced by a mother who worshipped the true God.) Yet, despite Gideon’s idolatrous background, God still wanted to use him. Folks, God doesn’t only use people from “good” family backgrounds. He doesn’t use only people from Christian homes. He uses people from unbelieving homes, and alcoholic homes, and abusive homes, and broken homes. He uses *anyone* who is humble enough to let God use him!

Well, that night, Gideon broke down his father’s image of Baal, and chopped down his grove, just as God told him to do; and in the morning, the men of the town nearly killed him for it. However, God used Gideon’s courageous act to open his father’s spiritual eyes, and to turn his heart to the Lord. His father realised that if Baal were truly a god, then he would be able to take vengeance on his son for what he had done; yet, there stood Gideon, alive and well. For this reason, Joash gave his son the new name “Jerubbaal,” which means “Let Baal plead.” This new name was a reminder of the powerlessness of Baal. After Gideon took this important step of faith, we are told that ***“the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon.”*** This was something that few Old Testament believers had the privilege of experiencing—the actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We Christians in the New Testament age have this privilege 24-7! Never take it for granted, Christian! Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we have the power to do exploits for God.

So, what did Gideon do next? He blew a trumpet, and sent messengers throughout the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and called them to battle. It seems that his faith was where it needed to be now, right? I mean, he was making some big moves. Tearing down the altar of Baal was a big move. Calling the tribes together was a big move. Surely if he had gone this far, he couldn’t have any more doubts, right? Or could he? Let’s find out.

Read Judges 6:35-40.

What do we see here? We see Gideon, the one who is supposed to save Israel, doubting, once again, that God could save Israel by his hand. Once again, he required a supernatural sign to convince him. What’s more, he required it two times! You would think that God would be getting indignant at this point! Yet, He didn’t. God was merciful and longsuffering with Gideon.

I’m glad that God bore with Gideon, because from this point onward, Gideon did God’s will, seemingly without fear. When God narrowed his army from 32,000 men down to 10,000, and then down to a paltry 300, Gideon didn’t question God. With 300 men, he miraculously slaughtered more than 120,000 Midianite warriors! Impossible, you say? Of course it’s impossible—with men. However, with God, all things are possible. Do you believe this, Christian? If you will have *just enough* faith to do what He has commanded you to do, He will be pleased; and He will do even greater things in your life, too—if you will continue to trust Him.

Perhaps you’ve “put out the fleece” with God before. Is God upset with that? Perhaps. Perhaps not. However, the question is: *Did you trust Him enough to do what He commanded you to do?* Perhaps He *did* grant your request for a “sign.” Or perhaps, instead of granting your request for a “sign,” God simply reminded you of all that He was done for you in the past. Did you listen to Him? Did you remember God’s faithfulness to you in the past, and take courage? Did you trust that He would come through for you again? Did you trust Him enough to *obey* Him?

There are all kinds of situations that require faith. Going through hard times without complaining requires faith. Continuing to tithe and give to missions when your income is slim requires faith.

Witnessing to that tough dude who looks as though he could rip your head off requires faith. Teaching a Sunday School class requires faith. Answering the call to be a pastor or missionary requires faith. For a pastor, preaching on subjects that might step on people's toes requires faith. *Anything* that counts for the Lord requires faith. Perhaps it's time, Christian, for you to start exercising "mustard seed" faith!

II. The humble faith of Barak

(Read Hebrews 11:32 again.) The second judge that Paul mentions here in **Hebrews 11:32** is **Barak**. What was Barak's faith like? Well, like Gideon's faith, his faith looked shaky at first. However, in the end, his faith prevailed. He did what God told him to do; and as he did so, he demonstrated a great deal of humility. That's why I call Barak's faith "a humble faith."

Now, faith, by its very nature, *is* humble. One who is acting in faith humbly submits himself to God's will. *Submission* to God and *humility* before God go hand-in-hand. In **James 4**, James reminds us that "**God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**" Humility requires submission; and submission requires *faith*. Why? Because we don't *know* what will happen tomorrow! Faith humbly says, "Lord, I don't know if tomorrow will bring gain or disaster; but I trust you."

There is no one who has ever exercised a *proud* faith. It is possible to exercise faith, and *later* (perhaps even a minute later) become puffed up with pride; but faith and pride can't be exercised at the same time! Barak's faith was no different. Like all true faith, his faith was humble. Let's go back to Judges and examine how faith and humility showed themselves in Barak's life.

Read Judges 4:1-10, 15-23.

As we read this account, Barak's faith may, at first glance, seem weak. His request for a woman to go with him *appears* like weakness, and not faith. However, was it *really* because of a lack of faith that he asked Deborah to go with him? What if Deborah had been a man? Would Barak have appeared to be "weak" if he had requested a *male* prophet to go with him? I don't think so. The fact is, Deborah was a true prophet of God. It wasn't often that God gave the prophetic gift to a woman; but these were sad times in Israel. Because there were so few faithful men in Israel, God chose to reveal His will through a woman. Barak *recognised* that the Spirit of God was mightily upon Deborah; and he was not too proud to ask her to come along with him to the battle. He just wanted God's blessing.

However, Barak's humility was about to be put to a further test. Not only did Barak receive God's instructions through a woman; he was also informed that the battle would not be to his honour. Instead, a *woman* would get the ultimate credit for Jabin's defeat. Yet, how did Barak respond to this information? Did he say, "Actually, I think I'll go by myself, after all"? Did he back away from this mission altogether, because he was too proud to let a woman get the honour? No. He humbly accepted that a woman would receive the honour in the battle instead of himself, because he simply wanted God to be glorified in Israel. When the battle was done, Barak and Deborah praised the LORD together, and led the people in praising the LORD.

Read Judges 5:1-3.

How much faith does it take to please God? It takes enough faith to swallow your pride and submit to God's will. Unfortunately, many times Christians refuse to do what they know God wants them to do; and they justify themselves by putting on a fake humility. They say, "Who am I to do this thing? I'm nobody. God can't use me." This *sounds* humble; but in reality, this is pride, not humility! For example, many Christians say that they can't witness to others because

they just “aren’t good at talking with people.” However, that’s not the problem at all. They can talk *ad infinitum* about hobbies or personal interests: but when it comes to talking about the Lord, it’s a different story. The reality is that they are too proud to do something for which they may be ridiculed by others. A Christian who is living by faith will swallow his pride, accept the scorn that he must endure for Christ, and do what he knows will bring honour and glory to God.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:9-14.

Which do you seek? Men’s smiles and acceptance? Or God’s glory? Until God’s glory is your objective, you will not be able to exercise much faith. By the way, aren’t you glad that the Author and Finisher of your Faith was willing to endure shame for you? Christ is our ultimate example of humility. Paul said, ***“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”***

III. The hit-and-miss faith of Samson

The third judge that Paul mentions is **Samson**. Let’s read our **Hebrews** passage again. (**Read Hebrews 11:32.**) Of all the heroes of faith in **Hebrews 11**, Samson is the most puzzling. He is the one who seems least worthy of being there. I call Samson’s faith a “*hit-and-miss*” faith, because it was very inconsistent. At times, he showed amazing faith in God, with not the least mixture of fear or uncertainty. At other times, he showed great fleshliness. Yet, even in those times of fleshliness, God still used him. Samson was a complicated man; but he *was* a man of faith (*at times*). Let’s start at the beginning, and see what God’s will for Samson’s life was.

Read Judges 13:1-5.

For years, Israel had been in bondage to the Philistines; and Samson knew, from earliest childhood, that God had chosen him to deliver Israel. Undoubtedly, his parents had told him about his life’s mission many times. How did he handle that knowledge? Let’s take a look.

Read Judges 13:24-25.

At this point in the Bible record, we aren’t told much about Samson. However, it does appear that Samson (at this early stage in his life) was responding to the Lord in faith. The Spirit of the LORD **“moved”** him at times while he was at a military camp, which was right on the border of Philistia. Samson was in the right place. He was in a military camp, where young men from his Danite tribe were training for battle against the Philistines. With Samson’s superhuman strength, he might have already risen to the rank of a military leader.

However, Samson soon began to allow sin to bud in his life. He allowed himself to be controlled by fleshly desires. Instead of looking for a godly Hebrew woman to marry, he was more concerned with physical beauty; and he ended up casting his eye on a Philistine woman.

Read Judges 14:1-4.

What could Samson have done for the LORD if he had surrendered his will to God? One can only imagine. When the Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson, he was literally a one-man army! If Samson had let God *completely* have His way in his life, Philistia might have been wiped out completely. (After all, God *had* promised to give their land to Israel!) Sadly, though, Samson fooled around with sin; and as the result, his victories over the Philistines were few.

Yet, was God's will thwarted? No. God still used Samson. Even though Samson foolishly chose to marry an idol-worshipping Philistine, God still used the situation for His purpose. In **verse 4**, we are told that this situation was "***of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines.***" Since Samson was determined to *marry* a Philistine instead of leading Israel in *battle* against the Philistines, God used Samson to fight the Philistines single-handedly, in personal skirmishes. These skirmishes were, for the most part, the result of Samson's own foolish decisions; but God used him, nonetheless. God showed His power through Samson in such an astounding way, that there could be no doubt that it was the LORD who had done it.

It all began during Samson's wedding feast, when his Philistine "friends" threatened his bride into revealing the secret of a riddle, so that Samson would have to pay them for the bet that they had won. Samson paid his bet, all right: he paid it by going to the city of Ashkelon, slaying 30 Philistine men, taking their clothing from them, and giving the clothing to his friends in payment for the bet. The Bible specifically says that "***the Spirit of the LORD***" came upon Samson, and empowered him to do this. Later, when Samson's Philistine father-in-law gave his daughter to another man, Samson retaliated by taking 300 foxes, tying their tails together, putting firebrands between their tails, and letting them loose in the Philistines' wheatfields. The Philistines retaliated against Samson by burning Samson's wife and father-in-law to death; but then Samson retaliated by smiting the Philistines hip and thigh with a great slaughter. Things escalated until Samson finally slew 1,000 Philistine warriors at one time, with the jawbone of a donkey!

Every time Samson did these superhuman feats, he was being empowered by the Spirit of the Lord. Although Samson had his own selfish motives for slaying the Philistines, he was still exercising faith in God at the moment when he did it. Samson knew very well that God had raised him up to destroy the Philistines; and when the Spirit of the LORD moved him to do these things, he acted in faith. God didn't *force* Samson to fight against 1,000 men. Samson wasn't in some kind of trance: he had free will. He *could have* resisted God's will, just as Jonah did; but he didn't. It took *faith* for Samson to take on hundreds of men single-handedly! It also took *faith* for Samson to cry out to the LORD after the battle, and to ask for water. He said, "***Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?***" He believed that God could provide the water that he needed; and God miraculously provided it. A spring of water bubbled up from the earth, and burst out through a hole in the donkey's jawbone; and Samson drank, and was revived. Despite Samson's fleshly impulses, he had fleeting moments of incredible faith; and God honoured his faith.

Now, the Bible tells us that Samson judged Israel for 20 years. We have no idea what Samson did for most of those twenty years. Perhaps Samson got right with the Lord, and truly acted as a spiritual leader for much of that time. More likely, he fluctuated back and forth between fleshly living and faith living. What we do know is that by the end of his 20-year judgeship, he was having an immoral relationship with a Philistine prostitute named Delilah. Of course, God is not mocked. Because of Samson's rebellion (and his breaking of all 3 parts of his Nazarite vow), God allowed him to be captured by the Philistines, and his eyes to be gouged out. Yet, God wasn't done with Samson. In prison, Samson repented, and got right with the Lord; and God used him one more time. This time, Samson struck a massive blow to the government structure of Philistia.

Read Judges 16:16-31.

For the most part, Samson was a poor example of a believer. Yet, if we were to be honest, I think we all could find much more in common with Samson than we'd like to admit. Hopefully, no Christian in this room has sunk so low as to visit a prostitute; however, we all know what it is like to sin against God one minute, and exercise true faith in God the next minute. When Samson indulged his flesh, he brought shame to Israel, and to God. Yet, when he acted in faith, God used him mightily. How much more could God have used Samson if he had acted in faith *consistently*?

Samson was a strange man, with a strange mission; but he did act mightily in faith, at times. Is your faith like Samson's faith? Is your faith real at times, yet sporadic and inconsistent? Perhaps you need to ask God to help you exercise faith all the time!

IV. The hasty faith of Jephthae

The last judge that Paul mentions is **Jephthae**. What kind of faith did he have? Well, I call Jephthae's faith a *hasty* faith. What do I mean by "hasty"? In a few moments, we will answer that question. First, though, let's look at Jephthae's background, and his call.

Read Judges 11:1-10.

Like Gideon, Jephthae did not come from a good home. He was the product of an illegitimate relationship with a harlot. Because of his illegitimacy, his half-brothers hated him, and expelled him from their clan. He became a sort of "outlaw," like David was when he was running from King Saul; and he became a leader of a band of men who, like himself, were "outlaws" for one reason or another. Yet, somehow or other (perhaps through the influence of a godly mother), Jephthae had come to know God personally; and in God's own time and way, He put Jephthae in a position to be a military leader to the Gileadites (the tribes on the east side of Jordan).

Now, God did not personally appear to Jephthae in a theophany, as He did with many of the other judges. However, **verse 29** does tell us that "*Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthae.*" In some way, God revealed to Jephthae that he was to lead the Gileadites in battle against Ammon; and in faith, Jephthae obeyed God. His one big mistake, though, was that he made a hasty and ill-advised promise to God.

Read Judges 11:30-40.

What does this passage of Scripture telling us? Did Jephthae offer his daughter as a human sacrifice? No! God would not permit such a thing. His daughter's fate was that she had to remain unmarried. The Bible specifically says that she "knew no man." For the rest of her life, she was a living sacrifice. Perhaps she went to the Tabernacle to serve and assist the priests. Whatever she did, she did it willingly, and without complaining. That, in itself, is a credit to Jephthae's faith! She followed in her daddy's footsteps, and submitted herself to God.

Oftentimes, Christians, in their zeal, make vows to God that they have not thought through; and when it comes time to pay up, they find it too hard to do. Jephthae was hasty in his vow; nevertheless, by faith, he followed through with it. **Ecclesiastes 5:4-5** says, "*When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*"

Everyone who knows Christ as Saviour is a "work in progress." Sometimes, in our desire to live by faith, we make hasty promises to God. That's understandable. However, true faith will compel us (and enable us) to follow through with what we promised to God with our lips. God does not accept, "Sorry, Lord. I made a mistake. I can't do what I promised after all." Perhaps you have made some specific promises to God, Christian. If so, follow Jephthae's example, and defer not to pay it!

Conclusion: God isn't looking for people who "know all the answers." He isn't looking for people who can look down the road and see exactly how His plan is going to work out. There is no such person! We have no idea what tomorrow holds; but God does! Christian, if you will just trust Him enough to do what He has called you to do, He *will* use you! **Maybe you are not sure that you are really saved.** If so, today is the

day to get it settled. Don't put it off! Christ has taken your punishment in your place. He has paid the full debt for your sin. Won't you simply receive His gift by faith? If you will come to Him in repentance and faith, He will come into your heart, and start transforming you into the kind of person He wants you to be!