

Spirit of Unfaithfulness

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[0 : 00] Thank you to Peter for leading the service so far, and Gary and Fiona for leading our singing. We aren't many gathered this evening, but it's been good to join our voices to praise our God.

My name is David Reimer. It's my privilege to be preaching this evening. And if you're visiting this morning, evening even, I did get up a little while ago.

If you're visiting this evening, this is our third sermon in the series on Judges, but it's still an introductory sermon. This is our third introductory sermon on Judges.

So although you might have missed something, you haven't missed a lot yet, and you'll see how that's the case. In fact, Judges, the book of Judges, has two introductions. And we started off with an overview of the book as a whole, so it's still an introductory material.

So if you've got your Bibles with you, please open them up to the book of Judges, or swipe to the book of Judges, however you read your Bible. If you're using the Pew Bible, it's on page 243.

[1 : 15] And the chapter divisions don't quite coincide with the section divisions here. So we start at Judges 2, verse 6, and we'll be reading, as Peter said, into chapter 3, finishing at 3, verse 6.

So let me then read God's word for us, and please do follow along. After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, or if I just tweak that slightly, sorry to pause already as we've just begun, so Joshua dismissed the Israelites.

You'll see why I've tweaked that in just a few minutes. So Joshua dismissed the Israelites. They each went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua, and of the elders who outlived him, and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel.

Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110, and they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath-Heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

After that, whole generation had been gathered to their fathers. Another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.

[2 : 49] Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt.

They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

In his anger against Israel, the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around whom they were no longer able to resist.

Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them.

They were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshipped them.

[3 : 58] Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord's commands. Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived.

For the Lord had compassion on them, as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers following other gods and serving and worshipping them.

They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. Therefore, the Lord was very angry with Israel and said, Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died.

I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the ways of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did. The Lord had allowed those nations to remain.

He did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua. These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan.

[5 : 31] He did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not previous battle experience. The five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains, from Mount Bel-Hermon to Lebo-Hermath, they were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord's commands which he had given their forefathers through Moses.

The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons and served their gods.

As we come to look at this section of God's Word, let's pause to pray. Gracious God and Heavenly Father, we pray now that you would speak, for we, your servants, are listening.

Help and strengthen us by your Spirit to be careful how we listen. And grant us not only to hear, but to receive your Word.

We pray in Jesus' name, who is the Living Word. Amen. Well, as I mentioned a few moments ago, seems a long time ago now, we've been through quite a lot reading this chapter already.

[7 : 13] Here we are with yet another introduction to the book of Judges. And I thought it would be helpful, while we're still settling in, just to have a couple of comments by way of preface to the introduction.

So we're not even at the sermon introduction yet. First of all, I thought it would be helpful just to locate us again in where we are in the Bible's story arc. When we're here in the book of Judges, just where are we in the story of God's actions with God's people?

Well, in one sense, the story runs from Genesis to Revelation, but we'll narrow it down just a little bit. And our story, the story arc that we're interested in, really starts at the book of Exodus, when Moses leads the people of Israel out of Egypt.

And it comes to rest. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth. First and second Samuel. First and second Kings.

The story comes to rest, if you like, at the end of Second Kings. And it goes something like this. You see, Moses lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. They leave Egypt and are wandering and have this period, a kind of confused period, in which a state is formed, a nation is formed.

[8 : 32] Thinking around the 13th century BC here. And from that point, they enter into the land and eventually achieve kingship.

And if you think, you know your kings, King David, this is a date and number I can remember fairly easily, David. And the year, 1000. That's one with three zeros after it.

Easy to remember. That's a marker for the king in Israel, the monarchy of Israel. His son builds a temple.

And as the biblical historian tells us, from the time of Solomon's building the temple, there is a steady decline. Decline. It's this people who were formed and came into the land now start to go wrong.

Eventually, that nation is dissolved. They leave the land, are taken into captivity in Babylon. And the last thing we read, might surprise us if we don't know this storyline very well, is that the last refugees of Israel go to Egypt.

[9 : 41] Egypt. It's the end of 2 Kings 25. So we have this story of out of Egypt, into the land, to this great moment of the dedication of the temple.

As the, then, things go wrong, the state dissolves, out of the land, and back to Egypt. So, we're interested in that period of slightly chaotic and confused state formation as the people of Israel are making their way into the land.

You can see it corresponds in some ways to that period of chaos and confusion as Israel is dissolved and loses its national identity again at the end of this story.

So, about, that's about four centuries later. So, here we are then at this period when the people of Israel are entering the land that has been promised to their fathers, promised to Abraham.

So, that's one thing. I hope that very brief survey of that long story helps to locate where we are in the book of Judges. And the second comment by way of preface is this.

[10 : 52] Those of you who were here last week were helped greatly by what Neil had to say about thinking through this difficult issue of genocide. You know, in the books of Joshua and Judges together, this is one of the places where we feel some tension with what's happening through God and God's people on the pages of Scripture.

And I'd like to add just a couple more comments as we think about this. More probably having to do with Joshua where the problem's a little more acute than Judges.

But the two quick comments are this. First of all, it isn't genocide in any case. This is just bad history. The term genocide might surprise us again to know this comes from 1944.

It was a response to the terrible experiences of the Second World War and the Holocaust in particular. In 1948, the United Nations put together its convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide.

And with its understanding of what genocide is, it just doesn't fit what's going on in Joshua and Judges. It doesn't fit at all, conform to the character of what happened in the Holocaust.

[12 : 09] That's one comment. And the second one is this. Especially when we look at Joshua that sets up what we see in Judges, we need to notice something that might surprise us if we have this sort of simple idea in our heads that, oh, isn't Joshua about genocide?

Because the first thing we notice very early in the book, in fact, obedient Canaanites live. Well, that doesn't happen in a genocide.

Rahab, who's in Jericho, she's a Canaanite, she lives. The Gibeonites, who are part of the cities of Canaan, they live.

Obedient Canaanites live. And yet, disobedient Israelites die. When Israel has disobeyed, they go up to fight.

It's the first time Israelite lives are lost. Then Achan, the disobedient Israelite, loses his life together with his family. Disobedient Israelites die. So it makes clear why this isn't about genocide then.

[13 : 17] It's rather about divine judgment and the relationship of every nation under heaven to the one true and living God. So with those couple of comments by way of preface in mind, we come to our introduction to this third sermon in the series on Judges.

Perhaps a multi-introduction seems a little less odd when we realize, as I mentioned a moment ago, that the book of Judges has these two introductions and in fact, the book of Joshua has two conclusions and the book of Judges has two conclusions.

So there's a certain symmetry here. And then we do well to consider, well, why? What's the relationship of these two introductions to each other and how do they relate to the conclusions that we see in the book of Joshua?

Well, the two introductions do two quite different jobs. The first introduction, as we saw last week, puts Israel's story in the foreground.

If you like, this is the historian's introduction. And the second introduction, the one we look at this evening, 2 verse 6 to 3 verse 6, puts Israel's God in the foreground.

[14 : 41] If you like, this is the theologian's introduction. Chapter 1, primarily historical. Chapter 2, primarily theological.

There's a couple more features that would be useful to pick up about the stories of chapter 1 and into chapter 2 that help us to dig into the theology of chapter 2.

Judah does well to take the initiative at the beginning of chapter 1, and Neil pointed this out last week. But on closer inspection, just as the book gets going, we think, oh, it's going well.

Well, is it really? they punish Adonai Bezek, the Canaanite king, by cutting off his thumbs and toes. And it might look like poetic justice because that's what Adonai Bezek did to other kings, but that's just to act the way a Canaanite acts.

Israelites don't name their captives. This is just not what Israelites do. And already, Judah is starting to look a little bit Canaanite.

[15 : 51] And one more observation that leads us directly into our passage this evening, and it's why I tweaked our text just slightly at 2, verse 6.

Joshua is alive. So maybe a little bit mind bending if we think that Joshua dies at the end of Joshua 24, the preceding chapter, the preceding book.

But I think we're, most of us in the room used to the idea that we can press the pause button, rewind a little bit, and then pick up the story again from a little bit before.

And that's exactly what is going on with the narration of the opening of Judges. And that as we read through chapter 1 attentively and into chapter 2, we're actually in the period when Joshua's alive.

Caleb and the springs, that's when Joshua's alive in Joshua 14. And we have the various notices about Manasseh, that's from Joshua 17.

[16 : 56] And we have the notice about Ephraim, that's from Joshua 16. And we realize that our theologian slash historian is wanting to bring these two stories of Joshua and Judges together.

together. And that's the thought then that should be in our minds as we begin our journey into Judges 2 verse 6. So keep your Bible open and bear in mind that we're thinking about Israel, God's covenant people.

And as our passage begins then, Joshua is alive and well. The passage falls into three parts and what I'll do is take a few minutes on each of the three parts and then have some reflection on the story as a whole at the end, well, towards the end.

So the three sections are these if you're just wanting to get a sense of where we're going. In 2 verse 6 to 10, we see an exchange take place.

2 verses 11 to 19, we see Israel exposed. And from 2 verse 20, to 3 verse 6, we see Israel examined.

[18 : 15] So there's an exchange, there's exposure, and there's an examination. So first of all, 2 verses 6 to 10, the exchange.

Well, this is the story of three generations and perhaps you picked them up as we read. Joshua's lifetime and the elders who outlived him and then verse 10, after that whole generation had been gathered, another generation who grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.

So we've got three generations, Joshua generation, the next generation, the elders who outlived him, and then their children, the grandchildren of the wilderness generation in verse 10, the next generation who grew up.

And what happens in the space of three generations then? The Lord is forgotten. Now there's analogy to this in modern immigrant studies.

An immigrant myself, this is not a native Scottish accent you're listening to right now, but at least I move from an English speaking country to an English speaking country.

[19 : 31] For those who move from a non-English speaking country into an English speaking country, it is a very, very strong pattern. First generation immigrants learn to use English to a degree, but remain dominant in their native language.

Second generation immigrants typically are bilingual and speak either tongue well. Third generation immigrants typically, a very high percentage, become monolingual in the language of the new country.

In an English speaking country, monolingual in English. It only takes three generations for that heritage language to be forgotten. That's very much like what we see here in verses 6 to 10.

As Israel moved into the promised land, it only took three generations for the Lord to be forgotten. We see a failure here then on the part of that generation that succeeded Joshua to pass on the tradition.

It reminded me of a Paul Oakley song that I heard years ago and came back to mind. It's from a song called Revival Sounds, if any of you want to Google it later.

[20 : 54] No more messing around, it's time for taking the ground. Not his finest moment as a poet. No more messing around, it's time for taking the ground. Wake up, wake up Joshua generation.

Well, Oakley's call to the Joshua generation to wake up makes a lot more sense to me now than it did in 1998. We have the sense, I think, when we read scriptures, that it's the generation that left Egypt that was the unfaithful, sinful generation.

And so it was, they died in the wilderness. But the next generation had their own failure, their failure to pass on the tradition to their children.

It was while they were in the wilderness that they failed to do what Moses instructed them. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses taught a song to Israel so that they would remember the ways of the Lord.

And he finished teaching them this song, the end of Deuteronomy 32, with these words and picking it up at verse 45. When Moses finished reciting all these words to Israel, all Israel, he said to them, take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law.

[22 : 29] They are not just idle words for you, they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

But Moses' expectation that contentment and prosperity in their new land would lead to spiritual complacency and eventually to apostasy, to abandoning their God, God, sadly that came to pass.

Sadly too, it fulfilled Joshua's expectation. Joshua 24 describes how Joshua put the question to the gathered people.

Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. When the people echoed this choice, yeah, we'll serve the Lord too.

Joshua came out with something quite startling, perhaps one of the most depressing verses in the whole Bible. Joshua said, you are not able to serve the Lord for he is a holy God.

[23 : 36] He is a jealous God. If you forsake the Lord, he will turn and do you harm. And that's precisely what our passage is reflecting on this evening as this theologian from Israel makes sense of what's happening between God and God's people.

And with this, we then pass into our middle section where we see the hard theological work being done in verses 11 to 19. There is here, having had an exchange of the God of Israel for the God of the nations, we have Israel exposed.

so these verses 11 to 19 give us the theological heart. What is it true to say about God in this passage?

And in a nutshell, it's this. The Lord, being a holy and jealous God, just saw in Joshua 24, fulfills his word to his people.

evil. It's precisely the way our passage puts it. So that's the theological understanding.

[24 : 53] God is faithful to his word. And there comes with it something we might call anthropology. That is something true about human beings, something true about us. And that is that the people were consistently inclined towards evil and sank more and more deeply.

into those ways. So what we see in these verses then is a sadly consistent people and a completely consistent God. God is holy and cannot tolerate idolatry.

But on the other hand, God is a covenant God, cannot abandon his people. So God acts in two ways here, two sides of the same coin really.

God and if you follow along in verses 12 to 15, you can see Israel did, the Lord did, Israel did, the Lord did. And in verses 12 to 15, he hands them then over to their desires, just like the exchanges of Romans chapter 1, when people exchange the truth about God for a lie and they're handed over to their desires.

so here, Israel decides that it prefers Canaanite gods and Canaanite ways. And so they're exposed to Canaanite gods and Canaanite ways.

[26 : 20] It's important to see this because the lesson that we take from this isn't that God punishes bad people. The lesson we take from this is that the failure of the covenant partner here is respected.

As one commentator put it, what appears to be divine punishment in an active sense is actually the people's experience of the destructive effects of their own selfish choices.

It leads us to reflect on the nature then of God's love. Where is God's love in this kind of respect? Well, it isn't just warm acceptance.

rather, put it this way, God loves you so much that he will make you fit to stand in his presence.

He loves you that much. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord, says in Hebrews. So in this sense, God's love isn't quite like our love.

[27 : 32] love. We see someone beautiful, we fall in love. But God looked at us and saw something quite hostile, something quite repugnant.

And God's transforming work will make us beautiful. That's quite different. So God's love will make you fit to stand in his presence.

God's work does a work of transformation to make me fit for his presence and to know his pleasure. And so idolatry must be excluded.

Anything rival to God must be excluded. So these verses show us that God's judgments are intended for this, to have the capacity to equip his people for holiness.

holiness. That's one side of the coin. We turn it over in verses 16 to 19. And again we see something else.

[28 : 38] The Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hands of their raiders. So the Lord raises up deliverers from their oppressors.

But just as the Israelites repudiated God's ways, so they repudiate the deliverers. Verse 17, they would not listen to their judges.

So they repudiate the judges and what happens in shunning the deliverer that God sends? People sink even lower. Now it's sometimes said that the passage we're looking at this evening gives us a template, a pattern for the stories of the judges that follow through the book.

But it isn't quite so. We see that pattern most clearly next week when we see the first judge, Othniel. That's the sort of template judge. So why do I say that this isn't the template for the book here?

Well, there's certain things missing that, in fact, Graham pointed us to a couple weeks ago. In this stark theological evaluation of this God and this people at this moment, there's no repentance.

[29 : 59] You might have noticed this last week at the beginning of chapter two, when they're weeping and crying at bochim, there's no repentance. When God, the Lord, raises up a judge in verse 16, there's no repentance.

God's action to raise the judge is his own divine initiative. And to sign it has to be said of God's sheer grace. The people's actions expose them to enemies, invite the enemy into their lives.

God's action brings a savior, which offers a space for repentance and return. But in fact, that's the second thing that isn't in our passage.

There is no period of peace, as we'll see as we move through some of the stories in weeks to come. There's only a relentless descent into a settled existence away from the living God.

And the third thing we don't have in our passage that we see frequently throughout the stories to follow is there is no spirit of God at work who will act to empower the deliverers.

[31 : 15] God's So in our middle section here, the theological heart of the passage, we see a consistent people drifting away from the living God.

And we see a consistent God who is holy, exposing his people to the pain that may turn them back to himself, but also sending them saviors.

If only they will listen. Which brings us then to the third section, which starts in verse 20 and runs through to the end of our passage at 3, verse 6.

The end result is that God determines to use Israel's enemies to drive his people to himself. Or rather, put it slightly differently, to use Israel's enemies to test Israel, to examine them, to see which way they will walk in.

And sadly, it's a failed test. Well, this represents another sign of grace, really. The oppressors are the enemies that the people have, in a sense, chosen for themselves to their own harm, but become in God's hands the agents to turn the people back to God.

[32 : 31] This isn't an isolated example of this in Scripture. It starts in the garden with Adam and Eve being tested to see which way they will walk.

It's echoed in the prayer of the psalmist. Search me, O God, know my heart, try me, know my thoughts to see if there be any grievous way in me.

Lead me in the way everlasting. Or even, as Jesus said to his disciples, as he said to Peter in Luke 22, Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you with wheat.

But I prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. This is the way God works with his people. And there is our passage as a whole.

And if we stand back for a moment, I want you to notice just a few verses in particular. There's a certain way in which the notion of service frames the passage.

[33 : 37] look at 2, verse 7. As the passage begins, the people served the Lord. And that's where we start. It's okay. But then as we've seen, there's this exchange, and the exchange comes at 2, verse 11.

The Israelite served the Baals. And then as we work into this exchange, it gets worse in verse 13. They served not only Baal, but also the Ashtoreths.

And then go down to the end of this section at verse 19. Their ways became even more corrupt than their fathers, following other gods, serving and worshipping them, in fact, the gods of the nations now.

Until in the last verse we read, they took their daughters in marriage, gave their own daughters to their sons, Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and served their god.

They start serving the Lord. The Lord's serving the Lord is replaced by serving Baal. To serving Baal is added serving Ashtoreth.

[34 : 51] Then they're serving the gods of the nations, and by the time we get to 3, verse 6, their service is just indiscriminate, and the Israelites are indistinguishable from the Canaanites.

We often think of the Exodus in terms of freedom, great Scottish word too, the freedom, Israel being set free from slavery to the Egyptians.

But if some have pointed out, that's a bit of a misreading of what's going on in Exodus. The Exodus is all about this. Who will Israel serve?

Will Israel serve Pharaoh, or will Israel serve the Lord? Once put it in those terms, I'm sorry, but Bob Dylan came to mind.

A 1979 album, Slow Train Coming, included the Grammy Award winning song, you gotta serve somebody. And a remarkable lyric which covers the vast majority of people on the planet, includes this verse repeated over and over again.

[36 : 07] You're gonna have to serve somebody. Yes, indeed, you're gonna have to serve somebody. well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody.

That's Judges 2 in a nutshell. And perhaps you're here this evening, recognizing in this living and true God, the one to whom you owe your life, and your allegiance.

And you're beginning to sense in the pleasures of the world around you snares that separate you from God. You wonder how you can stop being a slave to sin to serve this awesome and life-giving God.

Well, our passage, perhaps quietly, but still insistently, points forward to God's gracious provision of a Savior for his people, and in Jesus, he has provided the ultimate and only Savior for every nation on planet Earth.

Jesus bore the punishment for our wrong choices so we could share in his new life, living by his strength in the friendship of God.

[37 : 30] This captures something of your thoughts this evening. I'd love to talk with you after the service, prayer together so that you too can know God's grace at work in your own life.

Well, as we begin to wind down then, three things to reflect on that arise from the passage of the whole. I think if we had an agenda, this would be the matters arising section, which usually is at the beginning of the agenda, but we are towards the end.

the first matter arising is this. The notion that God tests us, tests Israel, tests Adam and Eve, tests Peter, might seem a bit unfair.

Unfair that our choices, good and bad, have consequences. It might seem hard, especially if we're making poor choices. But this has always been God's means to call his wayward creatures to himself.

God allowed these painful experiences into the lives of his people. God allows painful experiences into our lives. Why doesn't he just prevent it?

[38 : 46] Why doesn't he just stop us from making those choices? Of course, we're still thinking now about God's covenant people. And about us as Christians, who are Christians here this evening, why doesn't he just prevent us from having pain?

Well, difficult question. Here's one response from C.S. Lewis, who thought quite deeply about this. Lewis writes, pain is not only immediately recognizable as evil, but evil impossible to ignore.

We can rest contentedly in our sins and stupidities. And anyone who's watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite food as if they didn't know what they were eating will admit that we can even ignore pleasure.

But pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures. He speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.

It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. Well, the whole of Lewis's book, *The Problem of Pain*, is well worth reading and pondering if you haven't already.

[40 : 09] But here he goes on to discuss how God uses, even sends, pain into our lives as one of his means of shattering our illusions of self-sufficiency to conform us to Christ.

So much as Paul said in *Philippians*, the letter we're looking at in our morning sermons, not yet being perfect, we press on, straining forward to what lies ahead, to be conformed to Christ.

In the same sense, the writer to the *Hebrews* encourages us. And your hardship as discipline, God is treating you as his children.

For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined and everyone undergoes discipline, says the writer to the *Hebrews*, then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

But God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in his holiness. *Hebrews* chapter 12. Well, this is our God.

[41 : 21] He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We need to have ears to hear God's shouts in our lives.

So the second matter arising is this. Where did it all go wrong? we noticed at the beginning that Joshua and Judges, the two books are drawn quite closely together in our introduction.

Joshua, first glance, looks wholly positive. Not one of all the good promises that God gave to Israel failed. Every promise came to pass and so on.

And we look at Judges and it seems wholly negative. Just failure after failure. failure. But I don't think it's that simple. That's what our introduction is wanting us to see and bringing the books so close together.

How did what was so good turn out so bad? Well, it already goes wrong in Joshua is the answer.

[42 : 28] When something's going wrong in the house, you want to check the foundations. So we do here. And so we see that again and again and again, in Joshua chapter 13, chapter 16, chapter 17, Israel did not drive out the Canaanites who they were supposed to drive out.

And it's further, this impression is further reinforced when we see how often Judges 1 forces the reader back to text from Joshua till we find the situation at 2 verse 6 So Joshua dismissed Israel and they went to take possession of the land.

Joshua's still alive while things are starting to go wrong. There's this dovetailing of the two books. Spending time in this, in chapter 2, in this inspired theological diagnosis of the condition of Israel is an invitation for us to assess our own personal and domestic and communal foundations.

You should look back and if we see something wrong in the foundations, let's confess it, repudiate it, much like Daniel and Nehemiah of old, and turn from generational sin, cling to the holy love of God through Christ.

And we should look forward to the next generation, thinking about what Moses said to the Israelites of his day, there is another generation, and ensure that we are the ones.

[44 : 15] It's up to us to ensure that the foundations for the succeeding generations are stable, steadfast, not shifting, the words that Paul uses in Colossians chapter 1.

So let's use the opportunity of this passage to check our foundations and the foundations we're laying. And thirdly, it's also an opportunity for me to ask myself, perhaps for you to ask yourself, about my relationship to my wider world and culture.

Israel went sleepwalking into a destructive life, losing its identity as the people of God. Ultimately, as we saw by the end of our passage today, indistinguishable from their neighbors, invisible, and lost apart from the gracious intervention of a divinely sent deliverer.

recently I read something by Alan Jacobs that came back to mind. Alan Jacobs is a noted literary critic and author, recently pointed back to a piece that he'd written in the Wall Street Journal in 6th of June, 2008.

And here's a little paragraph from it. Jacobs writes, I am by most measures a pretty deeply committed Christian. I'm quite active in my church.

[45 : 56] I teach at a Christian college. I have written extensively in support of Christian ideas and belief. Yet when I ask myself, how much of what I do and think is driven by my religious beliefs?

The honest answer is, not so much. The books I read, the food I eat, the music I listen to, my hobbies and interests, the thoughts that occupy my mind throughout the greater part of every day, these are, if truth be told, far less indebted to my Christianity than to my status as a middle-aged, middle-class American man.

Although Jacobs uses this frank and transparent assessment to go on to make a slightly different point, his personal appraisal gives me pause.

Is there anything about me that distinguishes me from my neighbor? In what ways are you distinguishable from your neighbors?

What really about my daily life owes its origins to my allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ? As Bob Dillon said, you're going to have to serve somebody.

[47 : 22] So we face the question this evening, who are we serving? Who am I serving? Who are you serving? Let's pray.

as we pause in God's presence just now, although we are not many in the room, there's probably as many different thoughts as there are people.

Perhaps there's some this evening who are feeling a great sense of disquiet about the foundations. So it would be a good moment to say sorry to the Lord for those things that have marred his work in our lives.

Maybe some of us who are sensing that this world's pleasure has really marked too much of my life. Let's use this moment to pray that we would attend to the deliverer, to the Lord Jesus, the one who we sung of earlier, whose blood can wash away my sin.

love for us. And perhaps we're here this evening thinking about those yet to come, young children, grown children, the next generation.

[48 : 55] They're on our hearts. Let's commit them to the Lord and ask that we would have wisdom to build foundations well, whatever time left God has given us to be builders and workers in his kingdom.

And our Heavenly Father, as we gather in your presence this evening, we want to say thank you. Thank you that you graciously intervene to send someone to save.

Amen. Israel's deliverers lived only to die. Lord Jesus came to be a deliverer who died, yet lives again.

Help us to live in the strength that only he can give through his resurrection life. We pray for your glory. Amen.