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The Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day

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In light of the passing of JEOPARDY's Alex Trebeck last Sunday, I had wanted to have a large Game Board on the Chancel with categories of ABRAHAM, MOSES, GIDEON, BARAK, SAMSON and JEPHTHAH, and DOUBLE JEOPARDY with categories from the New Testament: Cloud of Witnesses, but even I know to not challenge how special Alex Trebeck has been to us, invited into our homes every night of the week for 36 years. The Clue for FINAL JEOPARDY would have been **"Some look forward to Being with God; some await as Resurrection; what others name to be A Terrible, Awful, No Good, Very Bad Day"** (Theme Music) and the answer is "What is The Day of The LORD?" But even more than answering correctly the related question is always and how much did you invest? Some would put down NOTHING; some only a token investment, some a little more than the next guy, According to the Prophet Amos Rivers of Oil, Mountains of Gold, versus Justice and Mercy; while yet others: Go All In on a True Daily Double!

The preacher of The Letter to the Hebrews affirms that we have had a Great Cloud of Witnesses. No one has ever decided for themselves "I think I want to believe in God" without having persons along the way who mentored and inspired and challenged us. Possibly they were that neighbor in Green Valley who asked you to come along to worship, who invited you to volunteer for the Patio Sale, perhaps it was that Sunday School or Bible Study Teacher, Members of the Choir, Stephen Ministers. When I first arrived, I had great trepidation about having my portrait added to that Rogues Gallery in Charter Hall of all your former Pastors, in part because I had not been here long enough, but more because more than the Pastors there are many of you who deserve to be recognized for your ministry and witness far more than we do.

I am intrigued that in the Cloud of Witnesses, most of us remember Pontius Pilate, King Herod, even Judas Ischariot; yet do not recall the stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah; which the Preacher of Hebrews says he does not have time to narrate. We recall the stories of faith of Abraham... We recall the Laws and stories of Moses... and after Moses there were the years of leadership of Joshua son of Nun. Last week we named that at age 110, Joshua placed his trust in the Lord and died. After Joshua, before the Temple and Monarchy of Kings David and Solomon, came an important time in the history of Israel. This **is a time in which each person decided for themselves what they believed, what was right & wrong** and what they would do. Periodically during this time, after people turned away from God and sinned, they turned back to God and God appointed Judges, Warriors, Tribal Chieftains who led them in battles against the Midianites, Philistines, Amonites, Hittites, Perizites, who were the indigenous tribes in Canaan. This was brutal time, we tend to avoid reading because of the death and destruction, but it was an important time, **in many ways like our own**, where EVERY PERSON DID WHAT THEY IMAGINED WAS RIGHT FOR THEMSELVES, OFTEN TURNING AWAY FROM GOD, Yet time and again, GOD FORGAVE.

SO In the Great Cloud of Witnesses, your FIRST CLUE is
The First of the Judges who Tested God 3 Times and was Himself Tested 3 times.

The Bible describes Gideon responded to God with 3 Tests of Proof and God then responded to Gideon with 3 Tests of Faith. First Gideon required proof of God's existence, Gideon spread a sheep's Fleece on the floor, and he will believe if in the morning there is dew on the fleece, but not on the ground...and there was. Next that he will spread the fleece on the floor, and if there is dew on the ground BUT not on the Fleece, Gideon will believe, and there was. Then once more with the ground dry but the Fleece wet with dew. God then tested the faith of Gideon, by commanding Gideon stand up to the Midianite Army with 32,000 men of Israel. But then God directs Gideon to ask: If any of these 32,000 are afraid or have doubts, they go home, and 22,000 left him. Among the 10,000 who stand with Gideon, God has them: Drink water from a lake. 300 men cup the water to drink from their hands, while the remaining 9,700 crouched like dogs to lap at the water with their tongues. Because they were acting as animals and not as men of God, these 9,700 were all sent away as unworthy. But God has one final instruction for Gideon: Do not invade or attack the Midianites with human weapons, Blow your Trumpets, smash Jars, Pray and Sing. The Midianites were thrown into chaos by all the noise, and wound up killing each other, while Gideon and the Israelites had no blood on their hands.

SECOND CLUE:

Israelite General whom Deborah told to chase the Philistine General until the Philistine got Hammered! WHO WAS THE ONE NAMED BARAK? And No, before you buzz in, this Barak's last name was not Obama! There was a Philistine Army led by Sisera, who used his Chariots to attack Israel. So Deborah told Barak as General of the Army of Israel to give chase, and Barak and his soldiers killed all the soldiers of Sisera. But Sisera escaped, hiding in the tent of a slave-girl named Jael. Jael offered Sisera a drink, and while he was sleeping comfortably inside her tent, Jael took a Tent Peg and hammered it through his skull.

THIRD CLUE:

The NAZARITE RIDDLER,

Out of the EATER came something to Eat; Out of the STRONG came something Sweet.

WHO WAS SAMSON? Samson is often recalled as the last of the Judges, and in many ways a foreshadow of John the Baptist and Jesus. Before Samson's birth, an Angel of the Lord appeared to his mother Manoah, describing that she make a sacrifice, drink no strong drink, for the baby born to her would be a Nazarene: meaning holy and set apart. All Samson's life he was set apart, never cutting his hair. Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman, and on his way to see her saw the carcass of a dead lion, which bees were swarming about, and he followed them to their honey. When Samson went to her people to ask her to marry him, they tested him by seeing how smart he was. He offered them a Riddle "Out of the Eater came something to eat; out of the strong came something so sweet" and Samson gave them 7 days to solve this. They could not, so told the woman to pester him to tell her. For six days he refused, but relented the night before the seventh. On the 7th Day, Samson asked, and they replied "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a Lion?" In anger for being tricked Samson caught 300 Foxes, tied them together in pairs, lit their tails on fire and sent them into the fields and vines of the Philistines. He then fell in love with another daughter of the Philistines, named Delilah. She begged Samson to reveal his strength. When finally he told her he was a Nazarene, who had never cut his hair as his devotion to God; Delilah had him tied up in his sleep and cut off his hair. Then the Philistines blinded him and tied him to a pillar in their Temple. Enough time had passed for his hair to grow back. Tied as a Sacrifice Samson prayed to God that his strength return for one more act of faith, at which he pulled the temple down upon himself and all who were inside.

THE LAST CLUE IS THE JUDGE WHO MADE A FAITHLESS VOW TO GOD

WHO IS JEPHTHAH? Actually Jephthah was a son of Gideon, but by a Mistress not his wife. Jephthah

became an outcast from his brothers yet a fierce warrior. When the Ammonites attacked Israel, although Jephthah was an outcast his brothers begged him to defend them. Jephthah wrote to the King of the Ammonites asking why he attacked Israel, and the King responded that Israel had taken his lands. Jephthah responded with his own letter of faith, that there had been a time in which God may have given this land to the Ammonites, but they had turned from God, so God had given the Land to the Israelites. A war escalates and Jephthah is continually victorious; until the final battle, when Jephthah has a crisis doubting whether he can continue to conquer others. Instead of asking God for wisdom, Jephthah chooses to make a Vow. Jephthah recognizes that at times a sacrifice has to be made, sometimes there is a debt that is owed to the balance of injustice in the world. So if he is allowed to return home victorious, whatever is the first thing he sees from home, he will kill as an offering to God. Jephthah goes into battle and is the Victor, but when he comes home, his little daughter, his only child rushes out to greet him. He tells her his vow, and she asks that Jephthah keep his vow but first she be allowed to go into the hills with her girlfriends to mourn her childhood, and they do.

The World often imagines Faith in GOD as being Sweet and Harmless, a Day that will never come. We have celebrated THANKSGIVING as a CIVIC Holiday for Parades, Football Games and gorging ourselves; this year, we have little choice but to reflect on what we do THANK GOD For. JUDGES was gruesome, painful stories, too much like life today, they are stories of faith and trust in hard times, when we know not what else to do but pray, trust, hope and believe. When EACH PERSON CHOOSES WHAT THEY WANT TO BELIEVE, WHAT IS RIGHT & WRONG, and at times when sacrifices have to be made for people to listen, for the world to find a balance. When the WORLD could not, God loved the world so much, as to enter in, demonstrating MERCY and JUSTICE and THE FAITHFUL COVENANT To GOD IN JESUS CHRIST.