

November 27, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Judges 10.

1. What lesson about living in times of ease could Jair teach us?
2. Why would people who have witnessed or experienced so much of God's good works forsake Him to serve false gods?
3. Which, if any, false gods do you deal with?
4. Are you ever tempted to serve a false god?
5. Why did God continue to allow the Ammonites to oppress His people after they repented of their sins?

HOW TO GET OFF SIN'S CAROUSEL **Judges 10**

Probably almost everyone here has ridden a carousel at the local fair or the amusement park or even in a mall or shopping center. They provide enjoyable entertainment for young and old alike. I still enjoy going to the amusement park with the grandkids and getting on the rides with them. In a few days, Pat and I will be going to visit our newest grandchild in Portland, Oregon. While we are there, we will go to Seaside Beach where there is a carousel in the center of a little mall. Mommy, Grandma, and the two older grandchildren will ride the carousel. Daddy and Grandpa will stand outside the fence and every time the ride makes a cycle the children wave and smile, and

we will wave back. And around and around they go, repeating the same waving and smiling in each cycle.

A nightmare would be to imagine yourself on a carousel operated by a sinister villain who refuses to stop the ride to let you off. Around and around you go. Each time you pass the man at the controls, he sneers at you and laughs with the classic villain kind of laugh. It would look like something from one of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* novels where the poor children live from one nightmare to the next.

That is a good picture of sin. Many are the victims of sin who are plagued in their consciences by sin. Because God has written His law on the conscience, people instinctively know that they are doing wrong. They would like to stop. They would like to break out of the cycle of trying to do right, but continually sinning, being convicted, trying to escape, but finding their efforts to be futile again.

That is the story of the Judges. The people of God sinned by failing to depend on God and turning instead to the gods their neighbors served. God graciously disciplined His people by sending enemies to oppress them. Finally, God's people would realize the connection between their sin and oppression and cry out to God for help. God would graciously raise up a deliverer who He would use to throw off the oppressors. The people would enjoy fellowship with God for awhile, but then go through the cycle again.

How could the people of God get off the carousel of sin for good? Chapter ten is unique compared to the rest of the story of the judges. In this chapter, we find a brief account of two of the judges with very little information about them or their work. The bulk of the chapter contains a description of the carousel ride. We will work our way through the account driving to the last verse of the chapter where we find this very important question, "*Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites?*" (v.18).

That is the question every sinner must ask if he or she will ever get off the carousel of sin. "Who is the man?" God gave us the answer. The man is Christ Jesus! That really is the story of the Judges. It is a story that shows how futile it is for people to try to find peace with God by keeping His law. That never works. The law continually reminds us that we need a Redeemer. Our Redeemer is

the Man Christ Jesus. He stops the nightmare ride of sin and lets us get off.

Judges named Tola and Jair (vv.1-5).

A judge named Tola. After Abimelech this man rose up to save Israel. *After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim (v.1).* We are probably not surprised to read that after the disaster of the “bramble king” Abimelech, Israel needed saving. Abimelech really did not serve as a leader of God’s people. He simply caused division and strife because he was so narcissistic. It would appear that much of the nation served Baal in one form or another. The whole culture needed healing and they needed to return to serving God.

Did Tola help them do that? We cannot tell. Tola was an obscure leader. We know nothing about his father Puah. We know nothing about his grandfather Dodo. We do know the general region of Issachar but that doesn’t give us any real information. But we do not know where Shamir was. We do know about the hill country of Ephraim which was about twenty miles south of Issachar where Tola must have been born. Obscurity also rules regarding Tola’s work. The text says that Tola saved Israel, but we do know from whom, nor is any war or battle attributed to him.

Nevertheless, God used this obscure servant for twenty-three years. *And he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried at Shamir (v.2).* The word translated *judged* means to sit in judgment. In other words, the people of Israel would go to Tola who sat somewhere in the hill country of Ephraim to hear his decisions. And that is about all we know of God working through Tola.

Then there was a deliverer named Jair. He led God’s people for twenty-two years. *After him arose Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years (v.3).* Unknown Tola served as a connector to the well known Abimelech. Likewise, unknown Jair serves a connector to well-known Jephthah who will follow him. Both were from Gilead. Gilead was a region east of the Jordan River stretching from the northern tip of the Dead Sea almost to the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. It was one of the first sections of the Promised

Land settled. It was rich, fertile farm land good for crops and for grazing flocks and herds.

We might conclude from that little bit of knowledge that times were pretty good for Jair. The prosperity of his day might be revealed in the number thirty which appears to have been an important number to Jair. *And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities, called Havvoth-jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died and was buried in Kamon (vv.4-5).* Probably this was one of those periods of rest we read about in the Judges. Those periods would last sometimes as long as 40 years (3:11) or even eighty years (3:30). That his 30 sons rode on 30 donkeys and oversaw 30 cities probably speaks of the peace and ease of that day.

That picture might also remind us that in times of peace and prosperity, we have a tendency to become careless and lethargic in our walk with the Lord. In the easy time, we are not as dependent on God as we should be. When we are not dependant on God, we walk away from Him. When we forsake the Lord, we wander on to the carousel of sin. That is where the nightmare begins. This is why you should never pray that God will allow you to win the lottery.

The Description of the Nightmare (vv.6-18).

God’s story reveals that around His people go again (vv.6-9). The people sinned. How? What did they do this time? Same old same old. They chose to serve their neighbors’ gods. *The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines (v.6a).*

God assessed the peoples’ choice as evil. Evil is the opposite of good. God’s law sets the choice before us. *“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15).* Life lived to its fullest in fellowship with God is good. Rejecting God results in evil which leads inevitably to death – physical and spiritual. Evil is bad, damaging, causing pain and misery, not just according to God’s assessment but as experienced by people. Satan and human sinfulness seek to reinterpret “evil.” *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter*

for sweet and sweet for bitter (Isaiah 5:20)! We witness this attempt at foolishness continually in nearly every aspect of our culture from judges to celebrities.

Better for us to identify what God calls evil and avoid it so that we will not taste the bitter fruit in our experience with consequences. It is easy for us to get agitated and even angry with the continual barrage in our culture to do evil. Evil is packaged so attractively and offered as a “must have” by the beautiful people, the smart and successful people. But what is the result of it? Often the bright lights, the beautiful buildings, the entertainment, the feeling of success and power found in our major cities is attractive. That is how they are presented. But have you been reading about the homeless people and vagrants who are a nuisance to the visitors and citizens of the cities? Have you seen videos of the garbage in the streets and the back alleys littered with syringes left by the drug addicts? It is only going to get worse because what God calls bad and unpleasant (*evil*) will eventually prove to be bad and unpleasant.

What was bad and unpleasant for Israel is that His people chose to serve false gods. The identifying terms, *Baals and the Ashtaroth*, were common gods of the Canaanites. Baal was the male god who was worshiped in various idols or gods. Ashtaroth was the female counterpart to Baal. In addition, Israel chose to serve the false gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, the Ammonites, and the Philistines. These were all neighboring cultures to Israel. The people of Israel wanted to be acceptable to their neighbors. How could the people impact their neighbors for Yahweh if they refused to be like them? Whatever their excuse, God’s people chose to live like sinners and that was evil in God’s eyes.

By choosing other gods, they forsook the true God. No one can serve two masters. When the people turned to other gods, at the very same time, *they forsook the LORD and did not serve him (v.6b)*. God does not share His temple with any false god. God chose Israel to be His special people as devoutly as a man chooses a woman to be his bride. Only a pervert would think about sharing his wife with another man. God was jealous for the people who forsook Him and refused to serve Him.

Sometimes we need to sit down and do a careful assessment of our lives. Are we trying to serve the gods of our neighbors while at

the same time trying to serve our Savior who delivered us from the bondage of sin? What is the loving, gracious God going to do when His people forsake Him for make-believe gods that offer only evil?

God disciplined His people. He sold them to the enemies again. *So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites (v.7)*. Because God is perfectly holy, He is jealous for His people. Because God is jealous for His people, He will get angry when they walk away from Him. God’s anger is always righteous anger. But it is nonetheless experienced as anger. It is not wise to make the Creator of the universe, the Judge of eternity who can do anything He chooses to do, angry with you.

In the discipline He meted out, God allowed His people to be crushed and oppressed for a time. The Philistines and Ammonites *crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead (v.8)*. In a given time, a particular year, God gave His people over to the Philistines and the Ammonites. The attack against Israel was crushing. Then for 18 more years God allowed the Ammonites in particular to oppress His people.

But God was not satisfied to allow local oppression or even tolerable oppression. Therefore, God broadened the discipline and allowed severe distress. *And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed (v.9)*. Having successfully subjugated God’s people on the east side of the Jordan River, the Ammonites crossed the river and suppressed two of the most important tribes of Israel. In a word, the whole nation was distressed because of God’s discipline through the Ammonites.

If you are claustrophobic, you can understand this word translated “distressed.” It means to be pressed into a place that is too small so that you cannot go forward and you cannot turn around. It is like the nightmare of the technician putting you in an MRI scanning machine and then forgetting you are there, turning out the lights, and going home.

Becoming sick of sin, God’s people finally cried out to God (vv.10-18). They were sick of the consequences of the sin they

committed by forsaking God. The people acknowledged their sin. They admitted that they had offended the LORD. *And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against you" (v.10a).* They agreed with God that they had missed His standard of righteousness. They agreed that their choice was an attack against God.

The people did not offer a broad, generic, and meaningless "Oh, sorry we sinned God" kind of confession. They clearly identified the sin. They said they sinned *because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals (v.10b).* God's people offended God by failing to trust God which is manifested by us failing to depend on God. Nothing has changed since that day. We certainly prove that we do not trust God when we turn to serve make-believe gods.

Okay, being sorry for sin is good. Saying the same thing about sin is good. But because the people tended to go round and round on this ride, God rehearsed the cycle for them to remind them of how fickle His people were. He told them that He had graciously delivered His people many times in the past. *And the LORD said to the people of Israel, "Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand (vv.11-12).* God had been so gracious to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt. Even after He situated His people in the Promised Land, He delivered them from oppressive enemies time and again.

But in spite of God's grace, the people forsook Him. Therefore, He laid down a severe ultimatum. *"Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more" (v.13).* No one could argue that they had forsaken God. But what about God's response? Would God really save them no more? Some of those people died, undelivered from Ammonite oppression. Years later thousands of God's people who forsook Him died at the hand of the Assyrians and Babylonians. In the broader scope, God will save the remnant. But individually, God can choose not to deliver.

But God's incredible grace drives Him to be compassionate toward us. Nevertheless, to test His people's sincerity God gave them a painful challenge. *Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress" (v.14).* Is it fair

to make a modern application of this challenge. When you discover that you have a serious illness, consult whatever it is or whoever it is that keeps you from spending time reading the Bible and praying. When you lose your job, go and plead with whatever it is that keeps you from meeting with God's people to learn more about Him. When your family begins to crumble, ask for help from whatever is more important to you than God.

In desperation the people tried to do right. They confessed sin and begged for help. *And the people of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day."* This plan seemed to work in the past. Didn't God encourage His people to forsake sin and cry to Him? To that end these people abandoned their sin which moved God's heart. *So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD, and he became impatient over the misery of Israel (v.16).* We can debate whether they forsook their false gods through their own strength or by God's grace working in them.

Whatever the source of strength, the people did turn to serve Yahweh. When God saw His people's distress, their confession of sin, their repentance, and their ongoing misery, His heart was moved. The translation saying that God became *impatient over their misery* is a good translation. It teaches us that God does send the misery to His people to help us see our sin. He does not like to discipline, but He knows it is good and necessary for us. Therefore, He is glad when we confess and repent so that He can begin to remove the pressure.

All that is good and encouraging. But sin's consequences still plagued God's people. *Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead. And the people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah (v.17).* Why would God allow this after the people had confessed and repented? Lessons, lessons, lessons. God our great Teacher knows our spiritual condition and our need. God knows how deficient we are in practical knowledge of Him. Sometimes this is a matter of a sinner saying all the right stuff and doing repentance kind of stuff, but not being born again yet. And so our kind Teacher brings continued pressure into the sinner's life to bring the sinner to the end of himself or herself.

A good indication that we are reaching the end of self-reliance is when we ask like those ancient people asked, "Who is the man?"

Who can deliver us? *And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said one to another, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead"* (v.19).

In the judges' cycle, this question will be answered temporarily by a man named Jephthah. The people longed for another one of those judges who would rise up to deliver them. Maybe at this point they even realized that God would have to provide the deliverer for them.

Ultimately, the answer to the question is Jesus Christ. The whole story of Judges is that people cannot please God by living under the law. Nor are we able to please God when He puts human authorities over us. The next section of Israel's history will reveal that even in a theocracy where a good king rules over God's people with a heart for God, the people still cannot please God. All of this history was paving the path toward the perfect Deliverer, the only One who can deliver us from the power and misery of sin.

Pilate answered the question, "Who is the man?" when he presented the tortured, suffering Savior clothed in the mockery of a purple robe and crown of thorns on His way to the cross, and said to the crowd, "Behold the Man." Behold the Man indeed, because He is our only Deliverer. We come to Him enslaved to our sins, offensive in the eyes of God and confessing our sins, begging Him to forgive us. Our Savior washes us with His own blood, cleanses us from our sins, and clothes us in His own righteousness.

But it does not end there. As we live in this sinful world, saddled with a sinful flesh, we tend to wander out of dependence on our God. When God graciously calls this wandering to our attention, we quickly return to our Savior, confess our sins, and restores our fellowship. John assured us with these words: *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous* (1 John 2:1-2).

We are made of the same stuff as Israelites. Therefore, we really do know how easy it is to wander. We need to be sure that we have come to the Savior, the eternal Deliverer and confessed our sins, expressing complete faith in Him alone for salvation. Daily from that time on, we need to come to Him and confess sin knowing that He is

pleading His blood for us so that our sins are covered and we can enjoy fellowship with Him, with our Father, with each other. That is how we get off the nightmare carousel.