

June 26, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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GOD PROVIDED OTHNIEL **Judges 3:1-11**

The story of Judges is the story of human inconsistency and failure contrasted with God's incredible grace. We read about God's people failing to keep their promises, abandoning the covenant vows they made to God. It happened over and over. In contrast to that, we read about God's amazing grace as He raised up deliverers for them when they cried out for help, and even at times when they did not cry for help. What a compassionate God is presented in this story.

However, the story of Judges is also a very accurate illustration of the dangers and subsequent problems Christians face while living in a world of sin. We have known too many who professed to love Christ, but who also were lured by the siren song of the world, followed the world, fell in with the world, and are no longer identifiable as distinct from the world. Those are sad stories. We hear about them and see them regularly, especially because we live in a city of professing Christians and because we are acquainted with multiple Christian schools and colleges that attract professing Christians.

In a sense, we live in a God-ordained dilemma. We know that God the Father sent God the Son into this world to pay the penalty for sin because He loves the world (John 3:16). We know that Christ our Savior told us to love our peers enough to tell them the good news of salvation by going into all the world to preach the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20). Yes, He even told us to love our enemies. At the very same time, God warns us not to love the world. *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).* How is this supposed to work?

How are we supposed to love the people of the world but not the world?

One response to this paradox is for Christians to build spiritual forts, as it were, in an effort to protect themselves from the evil people and influences of the world by hiding inside the fort. Calvin tried that in Geneva and it failed. Cromwell attempted it in England and failed. It even failed at Plymouth Colony on our own shores. Still churches and schools inadvertently teach and encourage this kind of seclusion. That is not God's plan. The Christians in Corinth struggled with this balance and Paul explained to them, *"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one" (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).*

But if God doesn't want us to become like the world, why does He leave us in the world? That seems unfair, doesn't it? God leaves us in a world of sin, living in a body of flesh that is tempted by sin, in order to give us opportunity to grow in faith by His grace. If we never had to fight sin's temptation, if we never had to deal with persecution from sinners, if we never had to take a stand, we would learn nothing about God's provision of grace in the time of need. God leaving us in a sinful world provides manifold opportunities for us to learn how incredibly gracious and merciful He is.

That is what God was teaching His people as they lived among the Canaanites. Sometimes they didn't learn very well. God was gracious to them in spite of their delinquent learning.

God's People Live Among Sinners (vv.1-7).

The writer of this book tells the reader that the LORD left sinners in the land specifically for testing (vv.1-4). He left certain nations there for that purpose. In fact, we have a list of the nations. *Now these are the nations that the LORD left, (v.1a). These are the nations: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians*

and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath (v.3).

We should find it interesting that God would leave some of these people around when we know that God is powerful enough to destroy all of the enemies with a word. He was certainly powerful enough to use the Israelites to drive every last one of the enemy out of the land. But God left these people. There were the five Philistine lords who ruled over the five chief cities (which will plague God's people through David's time). He left the Canaanites which is an inclusive term for many of the inhabitants of the land. The Sidonians were Phoenicians who lived in the northern part of the land among the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. The Hivites were also in the north around the Mounts Hermon and Lebanon.

Did the people of Israel think it strange that God left these people to harass them? God had a reason for leaving the nations (vv.1b, 2, 4). He left them to train His people in war. Or *to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before (vv.1b-2)*. This statement must not be confused with the warring aggression some false religions encourage in their followers. God did not intend for His people to learn how to wage or conduct war or how to start war. Rather He desired for them to learn the purpose and significance of this particular war.

What did God want them to learn? God instructed His people to drive out the inhabitants of the land. This was not intended to be an ongoing war against everyone who disagreed with the Jews or refused to accept their religion. God had promised Abraham that He would give this precise piece of land to Abraham's posterity, which required the removal of the inhabitants. Furthermore, the inhabitants were so deeply entrenched in wickedness that God did not want them to be a temptation to His people. Removing that influence was the purpose of the war. But at the same time, if there were no sinful inhabitants who would tempt God's people to sin and serve other gods, how would the people know the importance of the battle? That is why God left some of the sinners in the land.

The lesson is clear for us. How do we understand the importance and significance of spiritual warfare if we are completely

quarantined from Satan's power and sin? Yet that is the apparent goal of some Christians or groups. Dominion theology, which sets forth the goal to make the whole world followers of Christ, is an idealism that God never intends for us to achieve.

There was a second reason God left sinners in the land. He left the sinners to test His people regarding obedience. *They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses (v.4)*. The forefathers of these people we read about in this chapter had vowed to obey God's commands. In response to Joshua's last challenge to them before he died, *The people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey" (Joshua 24:24)*. That is a wonderful confession; But it was only words.

We cannot honestly claim that we trust God until we have been found in circumstances that test our faith. We really cannot claim to be obedient until we have passed a test that opened the door for disobedience. If there is no temptation toward or opportunity for disobedience, how do we know for sure that we are obedient? This is the same truth we know concerning submission. We cannot claim to be submissive to an authority until the authority does something with which we disagree. Therefore, God left sinners in the land so that the people would have opportunity to prove they were faithfully obedient to the covenant.

Too often God's people fail the test (vv.5-7). We should not criticize God for leaving sinners around because living among the pagans is expected. *So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (v.5)*. All of those tribes or nations of people had descended from Ham (Genesis 10:15-20). Abraham had descended from Ham's brother Shem. Neither of the brothers or their posterity were likely sterling examples of Godliness.

We know that God called Abraham out of a pagan culture that worshiped idols and gods made from man's imagination. The Canaanites who lived in the land were no worse than the Chaldeans from whom God called Abraham. But God sanctified Abraham and set His descendants aside for His own purposes. Therefore, there was

a huge difference between the typical, common pagan and the descendants of Abraham.

God always intends for His people to live among those pagans and have an influence on them. For example, God drew Pharaoh into conflict with His chosen people in order to show His power to the whole world. To Pharaoh God said, *“But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth”* (Exodus 9:16). Also, Joshua pointed out that God intended to use His people to show His glory to the world. *“For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever”* (Joshua 4:23-24).

To that same end, we live among sinners. Therefore, we must *Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world* (Philippians 2:14-15).

Living among pagans is God’s will for us. Becoming like the pagans is not acceptable. God’s people intermarried with the sinners. *And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons* (v. 6a). This is one of the things God specifically warned the people not to do. Some of Moses’ last instruction was, *“When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons”* (Deuteronomy 7:1-3).

This is actually the same principle we find in the New Testament that warns Christians not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). But we know the arguments, don’t we? “I can be a good testimony to this man.” Or “She promised to go

to church with me after we are married.” Or “We are so in love that we will be able to work out the differences.” And we who are older can recall the many shattered lives, broken marriages, scarred children, the carnage of the battle lost scattered along the highway of life. God intends for us to live among sinners but not become like them.

Not only did the people intermarry, or maybe because they intermarried, they also embraced the pagans’ religions. *And they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth* (vv. 6b-7). God also warned specifically against serving pagan gods. Joshua warned, *“If you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you”* (Joshua 23:16). The angel of the Lord had been very direct about this failure when He met the people at Bochim. He reminded them of God’s rule and their failure: *“And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars. But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?”* (Judges 2:2).

It is almost frightening or at least painful for us to stop to name some of the gods of our culture. The list might include, leisure, materialism, sports, Hollywood/tv/gaming, and most insidious of all, ourselves. It is so easy for us to add these gods to our faith in the one true God and not even realize that is what we have done. But the next generation always seems to know what we have done, and they often run fully and completely after those gods to the abandonment of the true God.

God warns His people that we will live in a sinful, tempting world where we have opportunity to learn about spiritual warfare, learn how to grow in faith toward Him, and learn to draw on His grace. But too often people who profess to love God intermarry with the sins of their world or embrace the gods of their world. That is never good if we are truly God’s children. It can be downright painful.

God's People are in Trouble When They Become Like Sinners (vv.8-11).

God chastises His people when they live like sinners (v.8). That is because when we sin, the LORD's anger is kindled. *Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel (v.8a)*. The Hebrew word pictures God's nostrils flared against His people. It is the picture of His passion burning hot. Such a picture ought to strike fear in our hearts. This is the Creator being made to burn in anger against His chosen people. This is the God who poured out astonishing, devastating plagues against Egypt. This is the God who came down to meet with Israel in Mount Sinai in fire, earthquake, smoke, lightening, and the blast of a trumpet. This is the God whose law they broke. This is the God who created hell, the lake of fire. If you really believe in the God of the Bible, you don't want that God to be angry with you.

The LORD sold His people. *And he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years (v.8b)*. God turned the tempters into tormentors. Though we have no clear biographical sketch of this oppressor, we can tell he was no small peanuts. The name Mesopotamia means "between the two rivers," which would indicate that he was from east of the Euphrates. That was a long ways away. Probably the man was king of the Arameans or maybe the Assyrians. And he was a mean ombre. The name *Cushan-rishathaim* might have been a nickname because it literally means "Cushan of Double Wickedness." The first oppressor God raised up against His people was a world leader.

How many professing Christians have dabbled with sin, embraced the gods of this world, forgotten God until God sold them into slavery to their sin? Our jail ministers run into these men and women at the detention center regularly. The rescue mission works with men like this all the time. When God releases a person to the temptation he or she so desires, that person soon discovers the horror of slavery. Though the story here does not tell us the details of the chastisement, or the particular tribe or tribes involved, we do know that it was a painful experience for the people.

The good news in this story, as in all the stories in Judges, is that God delivers His people from sin (vv.9-11). In response to the oppression from the wicked king, the people cried out to the LORD (v.9a). The trial thrust upon them was enough to bring them to their senses. They remembered that they were the people of the LORD. God had made a covenant with them through their forefathers. They were His special people. They certainly had not acted like His people for some time. But when life unraveled, they cried out to God.

The next time our nation experiences a real national disaster, like the attack by terrorists on the twin towers, will people cry out to God? Do we find it odd that people who worship rock stars, movie stars, and sports heros don't cry out to them in the time of crisis? Doesn't it strike anyone else as strange that when a real disaster strikes, the very leaders who ban God from public schools, the courtrooms, and the public parks encourage us to have a moment of silence to cry out to God? So much of the sin that has enveloped America has begun and been promoted out of California. But if the San Andreas Fault actually opened up and did serious damage (more serious than the wild fires), would those same people cry out to God?

People in America cry out to God, not Buddha, not Allah, not their earthly idols, because America really was founded on the truths about the true God—regardless of the denial of our leaders. We know from our history that as a culture we once worshiped the true God.

The Lord graciously provided a deliverer. God Himself, who sold His people to the oppressor, raised up the deliverer. *The LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother (v.9b)*. In his kindness and mercy God responds to rebellious sinners who cry out to Him. How incredibly compassionate and patient He is. The story of Judges paints a picture of God as patient and longsuffering beyond human comprehension.

And notice that God did not raise up a king or a ruler. He raised up a deliverer. The Hebrew word is *yawshah*, which means one who delivers or saves. It is translated "savior" fifteen times in the Old Testament. The only One who can help us when we are enslaved to sin and being badgered by it is the Savior who our gracious God raises up to give us deliverance.

God's Spirit was with the deliverer. *The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim(v.10).* No doubt, to the people Othniel appeared to be just an ordinary guy, the nephew of the famous Caleb. But the Holy Spirit working in Othniel's life made all the difference. God working through this man provided miraculous victories and deliverance from the world leader. No matter how well known or powerful the enemy of sin is in a person's life, God the Holy Spirit can give deliverance.

The result of God's intervention was that God's people enjoyed rest. *So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died (v.11).* Rest is a good word to describe living in fellowship with God. Forty years is a generation of fellowship or right worship with God. But there is something almost ominous about the final words, "Othniel died." That is how the cycle began: *And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel (Judges 2:10)*

God is so great and human nature is so fickle. How does He endure us? And yet we know that God patiently draws, teaches, and disciplines those who listen to His voice. If we wander, He will correct. When He corrects, we are wise to cry out to Him who is able to deliver us.