

“From Apathy to Annihilation”
Judges 18:7-10; 27-28
Preached at Trinity, August 9, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I pointed out last time, the final five chapters of the Book of Judges describe a nation that had completely forsaken their God. While maintaining the outward symbols of religion it was nothing more than gross idolatry.
2. **Chapters 17-18** show this clearly. Israel had forgotten God. Every man was doing what was right in his own eyes without regard for what was right in God's eyes.
Judges 17:6 NAU - "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes."
3. In **Chapter 17** we are introduced to a young man named Micah. I believe the details of his life are given to describe the extent of their apostasy. While remembering the outward details of the worship of God, they were so influenced by the pagan religions it was only a shadow of what God demanded.
4. Micah sets up the image financed by his mother but in the end it is stolen by the Danites leaving Micah empty and hopeless. His false idol had no power to deliver him, even though he pretended it was for the honor of God.
5. Now in **Chapter 18** we find the entrance of the Tribe of Dan seeking to enlarge their territory. Soon after entering the land they stole Micah's idols for their own. We find just how far Israel's apostasy had spread. Like a terrible plague the infection was consuming them. Along with stealing Micah's idols they also enticed the Levite to go with them.
 - A. He was more than eager to do so. After all it was a much more lucrative field of ministry.
Judges 18:19-20 NAU - "They said to him, "Be silent, put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" ²⁰ The priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image and went among the people."
 - B. How this reminds us of many pastors today who easily leave their church for a larger, better paying ministry. They are nothing more than hirelings who offer themselves to the highest bidder.
 - C. This doesn't mean a pastor can never change churches. He certainly can. But his motivation must be carefully examined. The decision must be Christ centered. Christ may have him spend his entire ministry where he is.
6. As the tribe of Dan entered the region seeking the place of their possession they came upon a very fertile area, rich in vegetation and well watered. It was populated by a people who had built a city called Laish. We read of them in **Verse 7**:
Judges 18:7 NAU - "the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating *them* for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone."

- They were comfortable and secure.
- They are described as living after the manner of the Sidonians. Sidon was a commercial center known for its craftsmen, purple dyes, and fine embroidery. It is said of the neighboring city of Tyre that the commerce of the whole world was gathered into the warehouses of Tyre. They enjoyed the wealth of materialism. The idolatry of these cities was frequently denounced by the prophets:
Jeremiah 25:27 NAU - "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Drink, be drunk, vomit, fall and rise no more because of the sword which I will send among you."
- The people of Laish were comfortable and wealthy—satisfied with their possessions.
- The narrator describes them as having no ruler. They were lawless. Just like Israel they were without a king. They had no ruler. Everyone was doing that which was right in their own eyes. Nations and cities and people without rule do not fare well. Such is the case with this city called Laish.
Matthew Henry – “Never was place so ill governed and so ill guarded, which would make it a very easy prey to the invader.”

7 One of the purposes of the Book of Judges is an apologetic for Israel’s need of a king.
Judges 17:6 NAU - "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes."

Judges 18:1 NAU - "In those days there was no king of Israel"

- a. The narrator describes Laish as a city quiet and secure, and yet they did not perceive the great danger that was looming before them.
- b. The point is they needed a king. The presumption is had they had a king to rule them and fight for them they would have not been destroyed.
The narrator is making the point that Israel also needed a king.
- c. We can also see Christological significance. Jesus Christ is the ultimate King before whom all people must bow. Most people live with a false carnal security. They want moral autonomy without the restriction of God’s law. Those who will not have Christ as their King will be destroyed.

8. As we examine these chapters, the *meaning* of the text is clear. Israel needed a king. Without a king nations are easy prey. But what about the application of the text for us? Does the city of Laish have anything to teach us?
First, we noticed they were without a king. We also need a King. And we have a glorious King, but we are always in danger of becoming content without Him. I want to make some application to the church—some timeless truths that forever stand as a warning. I despise sloppy exegesis of the Scriptures. The narrator did not have the church in mind. But sometimes we can make some salient points of application that prove beneficial to God’s people.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

9. It is possible for a church to become quiet and secure and satisfied. This is the greatest danger for a church. It was the condition of the Church of Laodicea. They had become apathetic but blind to their condition.

Revelation 3:17 NAU - "Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"

10. Tonight I want to consider the great danger of apathy for a church or individual – or for this ancient city that was destroyed. The people of Laish could not have imagined their imminent danger. Will we recognize when we are in danger?
 - I. We are in danger when we become content and comfortable vainly thinking we are secure
 - A. Laish made no plans to protect the city. They gave little attention towards their safety. Churches too fall into this false comfort.
 1. There must be doctrinal protection. Great emphasis must be placed upon doctrinal truth with safeguards against falling into error – that’s why a church should have a historic confession. That is one of the reasons we belong to a confessional association of churches. In our day churches despise confessions—to their own peril.
 2. There must also be internal protections – a solid written by-laws that define how we must function as Christ’s church, membership. officers
 3. There must be Biblical leadership – a plurality of elders
 - a. God has purposed that all men be under rule. This is the essence of the 5th Commandment. And all men naturally despise it. There are various realms of authority – the authority of the home, civil authority, ecclesiastical authority.
 - b. Laish had no one to rule them, no leadership, no one to defend them or protect them. It was to their undoing.
 - c. In our hyper-individualistic society many churches reject leadership in favor of a strict democracy. Christianity is not a democracy. God establishes leaders. The natural inclination is to despise the authority.
 - B. The people of Laish were careless not preparing for future possibilities “the people who were in it living in security”
 1. Laish didn’t really consider the need to prepare for the possibility of attack. They had no walls around their city, no army, no armaments. They just lived for today.
 2. Many churches simply exist. They don’t think about the future—the next generation. How are we equipping our young people? How are we laying foundations in our church?
 3. When we become satisfied with the status quo we are on the road to destruction.
 4. Every year 4000 churches cease to exist while only 1000 new churches are formed. Half of the churches in the US did not add a single member in the last two years. The church in the US is becoming more and more irrelevant.
 - C. There are many warning signs of a church’s decline but three in particular symbolize a church living like Laish—a people “quiet and secure”.
 1. There is great danger when most of the energy of the church is focused upon the desires and comforts of the congregation. When greater attention is place upon the inward life of the church than upon the outward the church is in danger. It is easy for a church to forget its witness to the world. A church must maintain a presence in the community. The church without an evangelistic emphasis begins to die.

2. When references to the past begin to overshadow talk of the future the church is in danger. Memorials begin to spring up as further evidence to a focus upon the past. People can begin to dwell upon the way things used to be.
3. When prayer is given less importance and significance in the life of the church. Or when there is prayer the focus is always limited to members, their friends and families, and their physical needs.
A church that makes prayer a low priority makes God a low priority.

II. We are in danger when we cease to recognize how needful we are of others

A. The people of Laish saw no need to forge relationships

1. Matthew Henry: "They scorned to be either in subjection to or alliance with any of their neighbours, and so they had none to protect them nor bring in any aid to them. They cared for nobody and therefore nobody cared for them. Such as these were the men of Laish."
2. It was really a matter of pride. Proud people see little need for other people

B. At the heart of Christianity is the idea of union

1. We are united with Christ. We have become one with Him.
2. We are also united with one another. We NEED one another.

LBC Chapter 27: Of the Communion of Saints

1. All saints that are united to Jesus Christ, their head, by his Spirit, and faith, although they are not made thereby one person with him, have fellowship in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory; and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, in an orderly way, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.
3. We need one another. We are in covenant with one another. Our church covenant sets forth our relationship with one another.
4. There are many who are content with their own little sphere. They and their family separate themselves and are quite content. Although they are a member of the church their contentment is found outside the church. They are seldom involved in the affairs of the church. They are a people dwelling secure and content with themselves living their own life according to their own plan. Christ is really not central in their lives. They don't truly care about His kingdom. And the church has little significance in their plans.
They have little awareness of their imminent danger.

C. Churches are also in great need of one another. We can't afford to isolate ourselves.

Judges 18:7 NAU - "they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone."

1. From the very beginning we can see this commitment to connectivity
2. The Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 demonstrated a commitment to churches working together.

3. Associations of churches working together strengthen the whole and provides accountability and fellowship.

LBC Chapter 26: Of the Church

14. As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, so the churches, when planted by the providence of God, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.

III. Left unchecked it will lead to our ruin

A. Their isolation and vain contentment left them helpless

1. They were quiet and secure, and yet their destruction was upon them
2. They were unable to defend themselves and unable to secure help
3. They were annihilated

Judges 18:27-28 NAU - "Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire. ²⁸ And there was no one to deliver *them*, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone"

B. We too can have imminent destruction before us and not even see it

1. Many churches in decline actually believe they are healthy.
2. And many individuals in decline fail to see their spiritual weakness and sometimes fail to see the great harm they do to the Church of Christ. Jonathan Edwards in his excellent work, *Religious Affections* speaks of the danger of mere religion:
"By this means Satan deceives great multitudes about the state of their souls; making them think they are something, when they are nothing; and so eternally undoes them: and not only so, but establishes many in a strong confidence of their eminent holiness, who, in God's sight, are some of the vilest hypocrites. By this means, he brings to pass, that men work wickedness under a notion of doing God service, and so sin without restraint, yea with earnest forwardness and zeal, and with all their might. By this means, he brings even the friends of religion, insensibly, to do the work of enemies, by destroying religion in a far more effectual manner than open enemies can do, under a notion of advancing it."
3. **Matthew Henry** – "Many are brought to destruction by their security. Satan gets advantage against us when we are careless and off our watch. Happy therefore is the man that feareth always."

Conclusion:

1. The Christian never sits idly by in comfort and security. We must always be on guard, watchful, prepared.
Paul warned of those who fall into carnal security
1 Thessalonians 5:2-6 NAU - " For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³ While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober."
2. The Christian never segregates himself from other believers.
Acts 2:41-3:1 NAU - "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."
3. As a church, may we guard against being consumed with ourselves, only looking inward quiet and secure. Instead may we continue to keep an eye to the outside. God has entrusted us with the Gospel.
And now He is giving us a new field, a new community. May God bless us to resist the great decline that's plaguing so many churches today.
4. I once said in a sermon many years ago, just before God blessed us to leave our old buildings on Plank Road – "We will grow, or we will die." This must never be forgotten.