

1

The book of Judges JUDGES 21:25

“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

The book of Judges is unusual in that one of the key verses is found right at the end. The book is a conundrum because there is so much that seems confusing. Confusing characters, confusing situations, confusing morals, confusing politics. The book is a narrative of life where God is cast out, where others give lip service to His law. The people of Israel were meant to be a theocracy – they were meant to live under God’s rule. There was however in general, a rejection of God’s rule in their lives. Without God, people cast off restraint. Mayhem ensued. The Christian has a King, He is Jesus. His rule is perfect. Let us submit ourselves to His rule in our lives.

Prayer: King Jesus, the world is yours and everything in it. Let me hear your voice throughout the scriptures, and put into practice what you say. Amen

2

God’s word spoken

”This Book of the law shall not depart from your mouth” Judges 1:8

Notice that there is an emphasis on speaking God’s word. Colossians 3:16 reminds us that we are to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Why use the word ‘mouth’ except it refers to both what goes into us and comes from us, particularly conversation and speaking. God’s word in all parts is wisdom and life to us. His word should be so much in our lives that our very words will reflect that word that is in us. If our diet affects our health, then our spiritual diet will affect our speech. Is your conversation reflecting your spiritual diet?

Have you meditated on God's word today? Have you spoken from God's word this day?

3

Judges 1:27 "Manasseh did not drive out"

Repetition often gives us a clue to the purpose of a passage. Notice how many times the phrase 'did not drive out' occurs in this passage. God's people did not do what God had told them to do. As is always the case, if we do not do what God says, it will come back to bite us. For now the reason for God's command is not our focus. God told the Israelites to do something, and they did not do it. There could be a number of reasons or explanations for this, ultimately it boils down to trusting God. Whatever God says, we 'effectively' say that we do not trust Him, or believe Him, or think that His command is good, if we do not do it. Not obeying, places ourselves above Him.

Prayer: Our loving and good heavenly Father, give us the humility to listen to your word, and submit to it as it is, the word of God. Amen

4

Judges 1:33 "Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh"

The people of Israel continually failed to obey God's command. The command was to be ruthless towards those whom God called wicked. They were to fight until they had achieved victory. Sadly they failed, and their failure would cause serious problems. Christians are not called to promote their faith with the use of physical violence. We are however called to 'fight the good fight of faith' 1 Tim 6:12. As long as we are in this life, we will have to wage war on all that is not good in our own lives (see context of verse). It will be a constant battle, and we must not let up. Whenever we are caught napping, we will become like those Israelites and find to our cost that it is easy for the enemy of our souls to get a 'foothold'; but 'thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'. In Him we can know victory.

Are you struggling with some sin? Take it to Him who alone can give you the victory.

5

Why do we weep?

‘The people lifted up their voices and wept’ Judges 2:1-5

Our Lord spoke to the people about their disobedience. He affirmed that His solemn agreement/covenant would not be broken. It was also true however that the people had broken the requirements laid on them. Our Lord says that that they would become entangled by their own disobedience. God is not like a super benevolent Santa Claus, where we get the gifts however well we behave. They were going to find that instead of victory after victory, they would have many failures and difficulties. Why did the people weep? Did they weep because of their sin? Did they weep because of God’s frown? Or did they weep because they were going to find things difficult? Often we can be more concerned at the consequences of our sin to us, rather than our closeness to our Lord. I am reminded that our Saviour wept in the garden, not because of His own sin, for He was pure, but because of the consequences of our sin. The price He paid to rescue us from the clutches of hell.

Prayer: O Lord, give me tears for the things I need tears for. May my tears not be selfish, but rather honouring to you. Amen

6

Generation now Judges 2:6-10

It has been said that ‘if history teaches us anything, it teaches us that it teaches us nothing’. We never seem to learn from history, many generations make the same mistakes as their forefathers. Why is this? We all like to think that we know better. We see the wisdom of previous generations as obsolete, and some of it is. Sadly much of the wisdom of today’s generation will also be seen for what it is – foolishness. Why is this? Foolishness is bound up in our hearts, and that is far harder to deal with than we think. In our passage for today we are reminded that each

generation must know the Lord for themselves. We cannot rest on what happened yesteryear. There is encouragement in this, for we can know the Lord, because Jesus has made a way possible. He is the wisdom of God. God's wisdom is perfect, and is true for every generation.

Praise God. It is fitting that every generation praises Him

7

They abandoned the Lord Judges 2:12

We normally think of abandoning as something that the strong do to the weak. Leaving somebody that is less capable to fend for themselves. It is obvious that this is not what is meant here. Abandon is a strong word, and it really means to reject God's authority over us, and our need for fellowship with Him. It is to reject God for something else. When we abandon God we forget our total dependence on Him. In a sense it is opposite to the common meaning today. In this instance, the weaker reject the stronger to do things in their own way. Revelation 2:4 uses the same English word 'you have abandoned the love you had at first'. Have you walked away from the love you had when you first knew the Lord?

'Kindle a flame of sacred love on the mean altar of my heart.' Charles Wesley

8

Is God ever angry?

They provoked the Lord to anger Judges 2:12

Is it possible for us to have a lopsided view of God? I believe that it is. Political parties often have this problem. Nothing they do is bad, and nothing their enemies do can be considered good! Those of us who are sensible know that is unlikely to be the case. Some people however view God in a similar way. They either see God as all wrath, or all love, and both views are equally wrong. The tendency in the western world is to have a picture of God as love, and this picture trumps all other possibilities. This is of course wrong. Abandoning the one who rescued you is wrong. Reneging on a covenant is wrong. Choosing to walk away from your own

promises is wrong. It is right when God gets angry at sin – it would be wrong if He did not. It is because of this fact that His love for sinners is so astounding. Romans 5:8, “But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” Think about that!

9

“They were in terrible distress” Judges 2:15

It would be easy for us to say, ‘how could God do such a thing?’ If we do, we have missed the point of the text. The Lord is the only lasting hope that we have in both this life and the next. The distresses that we know are sometimes the result of us abandoning Him. The pattern that the book follows at the beginning is a series of distresses and deliverances, the deliverance often coming after the people cry out to the Lord. God is after their souls. He wants them to see their utter need of Him. There are times in our lives when distresses hit us hard. They can be exceedingly bitter – how are we to continue? We are to continue to prioritize our relationship to Him. To know that the Lord will deliver His people from all their trials.

Read and find encouragement in Psalm 34.

10

God actions Judges 2:16

“Then the Lord raised up judges”

One of the repeated themes of the Bible is that God intervenes. It is possible that this verse is a summary of the next chapters. What do a lawless people need? They need good justice. Justice that favours neither poor nor rich. Justice that cannot be bribed or bought. Justice that is not political, these are the marks of true justice, and when a people have such justice they are blessed indeed. At a time when everyone was ‘doing what was right in their own eyes’, God gave the people what they needed, ‘judges’. These people also had the dual responsibility of leading the people as well as administering justice. God gave what was needed. We all need to be saved from our sins, and from a future where we would have to pay for our sins. In God’s mercy He sent His Son, our saviour Jesus Christ who paid with His own life. God cannot require payment twice, that would be unjust. God gave us just what we needed, a saviour.

If you are a Christian you can thank God for His great gift.

11

Ears that will not hear Judges 2:17

“Yet they did not listen to their judges”

You would think that when God gives us something that is good we would receive it with thanks. Unfortunately we often fail to see the good gift for what it is - good. Again this is a continued pattern in the Bible. The good gift of judges was rejected, the people would rather be ruled by some other power. If God is perfect then any other judgement by definition can only be less than good. In fact the people were selling themselves to trouble. We are told that the long awaited for Messiah, God's special king, was also rejected. “He came to His own but His own did not receive Him” John 1:11. The perfect was rejected by the imperfect. May we have the grace to accept the good gifts that God gives to us. John's Gospel however offers a great encouragement. “As many as received Him, He gave the right to become children of God”

Have you received Him?

12

Going our own way Judges 2:17

“They soon turned aside”

One of the words for sin in the Bible means to stray from the path. The picture is of going on a journey, but instead of sticking to the tested path, you wander from it. Wandering from the path might seem like a good idea at the time, but can be fraught with danger. There might be unstable ground, there could be cliff edges to navigate, there could be bogs. The path might keep you away from a whole host of dangers, but sadly all too often wandering seems appealing. Going our own way seems to come so naturally to us. Isaiah reminds us ‘we all like sheep have gone astray’. We have wandered from the true path and chosen our own route, we have deliberately wandered from the care of the shepherd. How can we get back on the right path. Jesus said ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’. Only in Him will we know the true path, and with it the way to heaven.

Do you feel that you have lost your way? Seek afresh Jesus.

13

God hears our groaning Judges 2:18

“For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning”

When do we groan? For the Israelites it was at times when things seemed to be completely out of their control. They were afflicted with seemingly nobody to help. Their pain was palpable. We groan when we hardly know what to say or do. We groan when we are afflicted in our hearts. We groan when we feel like there is none to help. Take comfort from this verse, for God hears the groaning of His people. He really does.

Is there a situation in your life that seems beyond help? The Lord will hear when you cry out to Him.

14

Don't follow the man Judges 2:19

“But whenever the judge died, they turned back”

God gave the people some great leaders, but the willingness to obey seemed to be on account of their regard for their leaders more than their Lord. When people look up to people more than to God, it is a recipe for disaster. It means when the leaders go astray, the people will go astray, or when the leaders move on, the people will go astray. Sadly it can occur in Church life. Our commitment must always be first to the Lord, before anything else. It is only in this way that we will be able to stand through all of the trials and temptations of life. This is why we need our own personal walk with God, rather than relying on another personality, however valuable that person may be.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for all the leadership that has had a positive impact on my life. We ask you to bless each one. Help me to keep my own walk with you healthy, that I might be able to discern the good will of my Lord in all things, in Jesus name I pray, Amen.

15

Knowing and being known Judges 2:10,20**'This people have transgressed'**

One of the most terrifying set of words spoken in the Bible and in various forms is given in the parable of the ten virgins. Matthew 25:1-13 This story is about ten women waiting for the bridegroom to take them to the wedding feast. Five were ready because they had enough oil for their lamps, and five were not. Those who were not ready, tried to obtain the oil and then come back to gain entrance into the marriage feast. Upon their return the bridegroom declares to those who did not have enough oil, 'I never knew you'. They were shut out! What does this have to do with judges? The text tells us that a generation arose that did not 'know the Lord'. The text also has God call 'His people', 'this people'. There was a relationship breakdown. They did not know Him as they should have done. They knew about God but there was no relationship. In order to know God, you must meet with Jesus.

Read John 1:18 Have you met the Lord? How well do you know Him?

Bonus verses Philippians 3:8-10

16

Why does God test us? Judges 2:21-3:4**'They were for the testing of Israel'**

These are difficult verses, partly because we have the wrong idea of testing. We use the word in various ways. A test could be like an exam where we are graded, or there is a pass or fail like a driving test. Or we could use it when a product is tested to see that it will do the job that it is made for. Bridges will often be tested by driving over them. God however does not need to see what we are like, He knows every detail about us. The testing is not for His benefit, but for ours. We are the ones that need to know what we are like. When God tests us, both the genuine and the fake are exposed. 1 Peter 1:7 has a picture of our faith being tested in a similar manner.

Will your faith make it through the test? Psalm 139:23-24 is a good prayer.

17

Being led astray Judges 3:5-6

'their gods'

Be careful who you have close relationships with, but the most critical factor is not social, economic, or ethnic. The Bible makes few comments about the matter. (It is interesting that some of the great heroes of our faith had relationships that would have been considered taboo. Moses did not marry an Israelite. Joseph had an Egyptian wife. Ruth who married Boaz was a Moabitess, Esther, Rahab etc) The Jews were to marry within their own nation, and Christians should marry Christians. The reason is spiritual. It is easy for our hearts to be tugged away from doing what is right by those closest to us. Divided loyalties have a tendency to turn our hearts to evil. Solomon the wisest person who walked this planet, (with the exception of Christ), was corrupted by his foreign wives. Guard your close relationships lest they be the means of turning your heart.

Thank God for your relationships with others, particularly those who encourage you in the Lord.

18

Living in the mix Judges 3:5

'So the people of Israel lived among...'

It is easy as Christians to want to hark back to the glory days. Times of revival, days when the culture was closer to Christianity. We can have the fond remembrance of what is past. In some senses it is easier to live as a Christian when it is like that. What this verse describes, apart from the Israelites failing, is a multicultural world. It might be harder to fit in as a Christian, but it is also easier to be more distinctive. The light shines brighter in the darkness, and it is easier to see where the light is. Stand up for Jesus and you will be noticed, not just by the world, but your heavenly Father will also see.

Thank God for the opportunity to live to His glory in your situation.

19

How can you forget God? Judges 3:7

“They forgot the Lord their God”

To forget your wife’s anniversary is never a good thing. To forget to pick your child up is worse. To forget God is calamitous. How did it happen? Well it seems from our text that the people got too comfortable with their neighbours. The restraints put on them seemed so burdensome compared to the requirements of the gods of the nations. For one thing there did not seem to be any need for heart holiness, and lots of what God had forbidden, the people rather liked. Their gods were much more fun to worship, and their gods let them carry on pretty carelessly. The worship of Baal and the worship of Asheroth (both fertility gods), didn’t come with so many strings attached. But Israel had forgotten who it was that rescued them. They had forgotten that truth does actually matter. They had forgotten His mighty hand. Fake gods might be easier to please, but they profit a person nothing. In the end truth will matter.

Remember what Christ has done for you, then think about the final judgement.

20

Getting what you want Judges 3:8

‘and He sold them’

The Israelites had broken the covenant, they were meant to be wholly for the Lord. Instead of serving Him they were serving the Baals and the Asheroth. They wanted out. So God gave them what they wanted. It is not always a good thing to get what you want. Many people have been ruined because they got what they wanted. The Titanic was the largest luxury ocean going liner of her time. Many people had saved up, and fought to get the tickets for her maiden voyage. They were the hottest tickets in town. Yet everyone who got their desire, did not know what awaited them. For Israel, God sold them – they wanted a different owner, and for a time God gave them that experience. It took them eight years to

realise their error. Maybe you have gone away from the Lord Jesus, your desire has been for other things. It is not too late to turn back to Him.

Prayer: Lord God Almighty, I come again to you as a sinner, I have made many wrong turns. Forgive my sin, and give me the power to live for you. Amen

21

His deliverer Judges 3:9

“The Lord raised up a deliverer for Israel who saved them”

As far as God is concerned we do not get to choose the means of our own deliverance. It is God’s doing. He chooses the person and the method according to His own infinite wisdom. When the time was fully right God sent His own Son to rescue us from our sins. Until Christ came every deliverance that God worked was temporary. Its impact was significant but not decisive. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 3:8b His work is final. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Are you facing a trial or problem that seems too big to solve. Remind yourself that Jesus has already dealt with the hardest problem.

22

Family connections Judges 3:9

“Othniel the Son of Kenaz. Caleb’s younger brother

We know that the spiritual life cannot be passed on father to son, or mother to daughter. We do not get bonus points for having other godly members in our family. Each of us must know the Lord Jesus and walk with Him personally for ourselves. The prophet Samuel had children that did not walk in his ways. Eli’s children were monsters. Yet this is not the whole story. We can influence members of our family in a positive way, we can bring the good news to them. When family members see the devotion of an individual, that person’s faith and commitment, it can often affect them. Paul says to Timothy, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” 2 Tim 1:5 Three generations! Caleb had a younger

brother – he was also used mightily of God. God calls us to be the best example we can be to those who are dearest to us.

How can we be an influence for spiritual good in our families? Be godly. Put God first in all your decisions, even when it is tough and it will cost you. Let the Christian life be a mark of all your life. Faith, Love, Worship, Forgiveness, Compassion, Genuineness etc.

23

God's power in our lives Judges 3:10

The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him

Can you remember how Jesus began His ministry? “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...” Luke 4:18. It has never been any different. If Jesus’ ministry was marked by the power of the Holy Spirit, ours needs to be as well. What is utterly vital however, has become a subject of controversy, the devil has caused something that is vital to become something that people are wary of. May God forgive us. We need His influence over every area of ministry in the Church, just as Jesus had an anointing for all of His ministry.

Prayer: Lord without your giving, we can do nothing. Come to us again. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen

24

40 years rest Judges 3:11

“So the land has rest forty years”

Peace in a nation is God’s gift. It is something that we take for granted too often. At the end of the first world war it was said that it was the war to end all wars. Sadly just twenty years after that there was war again. We are truly blessed of God when we live through days of peace. However much we enjoy times of peace, history teaches us that the absence of war does not last. The Christian looks forward to that final day when Christ comes again. His coming will usher in the perfect kingdom of peace.

Thank God for the peace we enjoy. Pray for your government today. Ask that our Lord would grant wisdom to all in authority.

25

How do you measure up? Judges 3:12

“And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord”

The Bible is very consistent about how we measure our moral standards. It should be entirely according to God’s standards. In addition the standard of God is consistent, it applies equally to all people. What we personally think about somebody is of no lasting relevance, but what God thinks is crucial. Our text reminds us that God sees the evil things we do. Perhaps we can cope with the word sin, we think that is just a human trait and as such is excusable. Our sin however is evil, and God sees it as such. How can we escape God’s sight? We cannot. There is however another thing that God sees, His own Son as a sacrifice for sinners. “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:2

Prayer: Father God thank you that you see what Jesus did for me. Help me to always live with gratitude in my heart. Amen

26

Dispossessed! Judges 3:13

“And they took possession of the city of palms.”

The city of palms is usually identified with Jericho, or at least a town in the general vicinity of Jericho. This area stood on the border of Israel, so it was always likely to be one of the targets for any invading people. It is of interesting note because it was the first town to be defeated under Joshua and was not to be rebuilt (Joshua 6:26), except at great and tragic expense. (Students of history will know that there have been various town sites for Jericho, and it may well explain why the title ‘city of palms’ was given) This place was the first to be captured by the enemy. Surely God was reminding the people what He had done for them. Seeing this event should have been a tragedy that reminded them how victory was won.

When you see an old church building taken over or in ruins, ask God to do a new work. Such works are the hallmarks of Christ's work. Ask that God might do a new work in your church.

27

A discrimination tax Judges 3:15

“The people of Israel sent tribute by him”

Tribute was an horrendous form of discrimination based on race (sometimes with protection offered). It was basically an additional tax that was imposed on a nation, just to stop the conqueror from attacking you. Thus it impoverished a race of people. Discrimination based on race is something that the Lord opposes. When Israel had people from different backgrounds the same moral and governmental rule was to be for both groups, there was to be no distinction. Tribute was discriminatory. All people are made in God's image. All people are accountable under God's law in the same way, there should be no distinction. In the Church we are called to love all equally. I am reminded that the Lord did not redeem any person with a different price. Each one is purchased by the precious blood of Christ.

If we are to become like Jesus our Lord, we are to see people as our Lord sees them. Ask Him to help you in this.

28

What motivates you? Judges 3:15-30

“But he himself turned back at the idols”

The account of the killing of Eglon at the hand of Ehud is full of questions of all sorts. Ehud was left handed, and industrious. It would have taken a lot of effort to make his sword, and it seems that it was not detected. The party delivered the tribute, and were on their way back when something triggered Ehud. It had no doubt been his plan to do something, but for some reason the sword remained sheathed. On his way back he came to the place of idols and turned back. These 'idols' were a geographical landmark. Near to Gilgal there was a place where false gods were set up, and it spurred him into action. We see something similar with the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:16,22ff. 'He was 'provoked in his spirit.'

Are you provoked when you see idolatry and evil around you? Like Paul will you use that provocation to proclaim the good news?