

The Story: A Few Good Men...and Women

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my privilege to be the lead pastor here. So a few quick pastor announcements. Michelle and I are not fighting. I think she's in the kitchen making a veggie tray for the training.

So yeah, we're doing just fine in case anyone's concerned. Connor's at a play practice. Emily's probably still asleep. Teenagers, what do you do? So Michelle and I will be away at our denominational pastor and spouses retreat this week in Banff.

So yeah, poor guy. It's so sad. It is work. There are sessions that we'll be attending. So we're representing Bramard there and looking forward to an opportunity.

Michelle's working in the evenings a lot, and so we don't get a lot of time together. So we're going to drive down and back, and it'll be a good time. So please pray for safe travels and pray that Connor and Emily do not drive each other bananas because they will be home alone.

At least our house is insured. So next Sunday, we're looking forward to, I'm looking forward to my friend, Major Howard Rittenhouse, coming to bring a sermon in our series on the story.

[1 : 16] I will be here to introduce him to you. So Howard will be here. I'll say this to you now. He's a major in Canadian Forces.

He's a chaplain. So I'll talk more about him when he actually comes, but I will talk about him now. I always call him a major pain. Come on.

Give me something. He is a major pain, but he's an absolutely excellent guy and a very godly man. So Howard will be bringing a sermon next Sunday. Howard's a chaplain with the Canadian Forces. So he's based here in Edmonton, and he also represents our denomination, the CBWC, in his capacity as a chaplain. So let's dive in right away this morning.

What ideas or maybe even other words come to mind when you hear the word judge? This is audience participation. Judge.

[2 : 12] Judge. Oh. Interesting. Authority penalty. Sig? Okay. Wrinkled brow.

Nice. Interesting. Others? Guilt. Court.

Defense. Lawyer. Guilt. Innocence. Legal. Jury. Sentence.

Prosecutor. Punishment. How about that one? Justice. Nice. So this morning we come to, in our series on the story, we come to the book of Judges.

And our sermon this morning is titled, A Few Good Men and Women, The Judges. And we're going to see this morning how our common or contemporary understanding of the word judge, certainly the role of a judge, isn't really what's reflected in the concept in the Old Testament.

[3 : 26] So you may be familiar with the book of the book of the book of Bible. You may not know it that well. And either is fine. You'll find it between the book of Joshua, where we spent some of our time in the sermon two weeks ago.

And the book of Ruth, where Howard will be preaching from next week. So this morning we'll take quite a high level look at the book of Judges together. And we're going to explore some of the main themes that we find there.

And it's been suggested by, there we go, been suggested by biblical scholars that the theme of the book of Judges is this. Obedience brings God's blessing and disobedience brings God's discipline. You can say that with me. Obedience brings God's blessing and disobedience brings God's discipline. And that theme can be summed up actually in one key verse.

The Bible says in Judges 21, 25, let's read this together. In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

[4 : 35] No king doing their own thing. That's our theme. So that theme is echoed over and over in Judges.

In chapter 17, verse 6, 18, verse 1, 19, verse 1, just as some examples. And we've talked a bit before about repetition in the Bible.

Because I think a lot of people see it as redundancy. But it's not that at all. It's reinforcement. And when we see themes or words or numbers or ideas repeated, that's because they are significant or important to the writer and ultimately to God.

So repetition is essentially saying, over here, pay attention to this. This right here is important. So it's important to recognize that the repetition of a theme happens right here.

No king doing their own thing. That's important. So let me shed a bit of light on this idea and the role of the judges that we see at this point in the Old Testament.

[5 : 49] While these judges certainly would have had some sort of legal authority and could have thrown someone in jail, as we would understand that in our very limited understanding of a judge, they're actually better known for a sense of how they could, in a sense, get God's people out of jail.

So this morning we find ourselves 700 years after God's promise to Abraham, where God told him that he would make him into a great nation.

And the people are living in their own land. Things are pretty good. God is present in the tabernacle. We talked about the ornate structure that the Israelites built for God to dwell in.

A law guides their lives. The Ten Commandments guide their lives as God gave them to Moses. And a sacrificial system exists for the forgiveness of sins.

They've got it pretty good. And the people were truly blessed by God. We can recognize that here. But there's still a problem.

[7 : 02] Any guesses? Sin. Sin still reigns in the hearts of the people. And sin still continues to raise its ugly head over and over.

So what happened this time? Sin still reigns in the heart of the people. Israel made two big mistakes after God led them in conquering the promised land. First, they did not drive out all the Canaanite people from the land.

God was clear. So by not doing that, that led to a sin of idolatry. And the Bible says in Judges 1 verse 28, let's read this together.

When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely. Oops. Oops. And let's continue reading in Judges 2 verse 12.

As they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers. Oops. There we go. As they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.

[8 : 13] They went after other gods from among the peoples who were around them and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. So what can we learn from that?

Our environment, the people we hang around with, and the things that we focus our time and attention on, will influence us.

It's not a maybe. It's guaranteed. Indeed. So if we hang around, you're going to get this. If you hang around with the wrong people, or focus your time and attention on the wrong things, we're influenced in the wrong direction.

Does that make sense? We see something else here that was a critical issue with the Israelites. They didn't teach their children about God.

They didn't teach them about the great acts of deliverance that God had given them, had bestowed upon them. Under Joshua's leadership, God had gone before his people into battle.

[9 : 24] We talked about this. He helped them win victory after victory. God worked miracle after miracle for them. But the people had not taught their children about God's faithfulness.

They'd not passed on worshipping God as a foundational part of their way of life. So how does that apply to us?

I don't think many of you would argue with the idea that, at least in some parts of the world, Christianity seems to be maybe one generation away from extinction.

Think about that. Surveys in the U.S. show us that nuns, not as in Catholic wearing habits, but nuns, I'm having trouble with, there we go, sorry.

Nuns are defined as people who would say they have no religious affiliation. They state that either their religion is nothing particular, they may say they are agnostic, they don't necessarily believe or not believe, or that they are atheist.

[10 : 44] They recognize the concept of God and choose not to believe in that. That population, that nuns population in the U.S. represents, catch this, 20 to 30% of the population.

20 to 30%. And since the early 90s, independent polls have shown that demographic is growing rapidly.

That's the U.S. And we might realistically imagine that the growth of that demographic may likely be even higher in Canada. One statistic I read recently said that roughly 49% of younger adults consider themselves to be Christian.

49% actually. 49%. Well, that's almost half. 49%. 49%? That's not a lot. And that that generation is actually, and we can all recognize this, is replacing the generations before them.

So, who were the judges, and why did God raise them up? With no kings to rule the people, God gave the people leaders who would guide them through this new period as the inhabitants of a new land.

[12:17] God had blessed Israel in the eyes of all other nations, and he wanted other nations to know his goodness and blessing, to recognize him.

God also powerfully intervenes when his people cry out to him for help. Do you remember when I talked about the importance of prayer during our sermon two weeks ago?

The importance of a Christian in prayer. They should be inseparable. And yet, are they often?

Because when God, God will deliver when we pray.

When people pray, God responds with deliverance. Remember, we've talked about the importance and patterns and repetition this morning.

We've talked about that. And then there's a clear pattern here, or a cycle that we see in the book of Judges, that repeats six times throughout the book.

[13:19] And as the pattern repeats, we see the same actions by the people. Sin. The consequences of these actions.

Oppression. The people's reaction. Repentance. And God's response. Deliverance.

This pattern, six times in the book of Judges. And most often, those sins, the sins of the people, show up as the worship of pagan gods.

The Bible says, in Psalm 37, verse 4, at the top, let's read this together. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Matthew 6, 33 says, let's read this together. God wants to be first in the lives of his people.

[14:23] That's the right order of things. That's the plan, if you will. And only that will bring balance in our lives. Putting God first.

So in the book of Judges, when the people turn away from God and turn to idolatry, God removes his hand of protection and allows surrounding nations to oppress his people.

There's the pattern. Sin, oppression. And Judges 2, verses 19 to 23, explains that in greater detail for us.

So I encourage you to read that on your own at some point. Judges 2, 19 to 23. The book of Judges recounts how God used six pagan nations to oppress his people.

The Mesopotamians oppressed them for eight years. The Moabites for 18 years. The Canaanites for 20 years.

[15:27] The Midianites for seven years. The Ammonites for 18 years. And the Philistines for 40 years. Wow.

And as we've talked about, the people's reaction to being oppressed each time is repentance. The oppressed people cry out to God.

Save us. Help us. They turn, as we've talked about in the past in sermon series. They turn or return to the Lord. God. They chose to do differently after.

Do you remember me framing repentance as that? Do differently after. They make a decision to take a 180 degree turn in their direction and behavior.

And throughout these repeating cycles, God raises up a judge each time who serves as a deliverer for his people. Othniel delivers them from the Mesopotamians.

[16:33] Ehud delivers them from the Moabites. Deborah from the Canaanites. Gideon from the Midianites. Jephthah from the Amorites.

And Samson from the Philistines. Not sure who delivered them from the Termites, but perhaps someone worked that out. But there are lots of ites on that list.

Isn't there? Lots of ites in those days. But as we follow the sin, we follow the oppression, we follow the repentance cycle, we come to deliverance.

It's important to recognize that it is God who selects a human judge and orchestrates that deliverance. It's not simply a human action. It's not something they've done, but God is doing. We also need to recognize that these judges were not somehow sinless and perfect leaders. Not at all. They were in fact very flawed and human people just like the rest of us.

[17 : 36] We see flawed humanity in two judges in particular, Gideon and Samson. The story of Gideon happens in Judges chapter 7.

And we learn that Gideon was from the weakest clan and was the weakest member of his family. We also read that even though Gideon amassed an army of 32,000 men on his own, God stepped in and reduced the army to, does anybody know?

300. 32,000? No, 300 will do. So that's the deliverance that comes from God.

God chooses the action, not Gideon and the army. The story of Samson, lots of you will know it, happens in Judges chapter 13 to 16, where we learn how Samson revealed the source of his strength to a woman named Delilah.

And that it was ultimately Samson's pride and immaturity that led to his death. Have you ever stopped to consider society around us?

[18 : 53] Do you ever wonder if we're seeing the same theme that we've seen this morning in the book of Judges? Are we seeing that cycle? In a society that doesn't have a true king, or a judge to guide them toward God's will?

To give them context and a greater purpose? Are people seeking to do their own thing? Sometimes are we seeking to do our own thing?

Because here in the lower story of humanity, life isn't always easy. Or fun. or encouraging.

And so we find people, likely even ourselves, trying to find our own way. Trying to find the answers to questions we may not even be able to put into words in the first place.

And I have a challenge for us this morning. Are we, as people who claim to be followers of Christ, Christ, any different?

[20 : 06] I can confess that too often, I seek to find my own way. I seek to find my own answers and solutions.

To do my own thing. And yet, unlike the Israelites, we have a king. And his name is Jesus.

We sin. We don't keep God on the throne of our lives. We're oppressed. Our fellowship with God and others becomes broken.

We repent or confess and thank God we are restored through the blood of Jesus. And we experience deliverance.

We experience joy and wholeness again in our lives. My friends, our judge, our king, our high priest and good shepherd will help us find our way and stay on the path to which he has called us.

[21 : 22] We only need to ask him, return to him and we will find our way.

as we celebrate communion together this morning, we recognize that Jesus alone is the answer in our lives.

And that only through his sacrifice can we find true forgiveness and rescue from our own cycle of sin. This morning we approach this table together not as a Bramard Baptist church table but as the Lord's table to which he calls us to freely come.

The Bible tells us that we need to take a good long look at what's going on in our hearts when we participate in the Lord's Supper.

In 1 Corinthians 11.28 the Apostle Paul wrote let a person examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

[22 : 29] I have erred on the side of grace in communion so far since I've been here and that is absolutely a correct way to do it. But I've also felt that it's important for us to recognize the context in which we partake of this and the importance of it.

In Corinth the intended act of communion with the Lord had become a thoughtless and even selfish church ritual. their minds had clearly shifted from Christ's substitutionary sacrifice which we sang about this morning and had wandered elsewhere.

We must never let that happen to us. We must stay mentally engaged when we partake of these elements. 1 Peter 1 18 and 19 reminds us that they have been ordained to soberly remind us of the high cost of God's forgiveness.

Eating and drinking them vividly depicts our union and solidarity with Christ as our Savior, our Lord, and our source of spiritual life.

We should also take the time to examine ourselves to ensure that our relationship with Christ is authentic and genuine.

[23 : 59] Not only recalling the beginning of our relationship with Christ, but also seeking to discover through the insight of the Holy Spirit if there's any unconfessed sin that's getting in the way currently with our relationship with God.

And lastly, it would be wrong for us to eat the bread and drink the cup of Christ without a heart that is purposely thankful. The Lord's Supper is not only a reminder of his brutal death, but it is also a celebration of our incredibly generous, gracious God and the invaluable privilege of being forgiven by him.

God's love. So as you take the bread and cup this morning, do it with a grateful heart. They can say along with other generations of Christians, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

I'll be serving communion this morning as I have been doing and I would invite you to come forward when you're ready as the music plays. Or there's silence. I'm not sure.

It's up to you. If you're sitting with someone who's not able to come forward, I'd ask that you take the bread and the cup with you back to them before you return to your seat. So please wait to eat and drink and we will do that together.

[25 : 32] Come forward when you're ready.