

The Problem of Self-Centeredness

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[0 : 00] Father, we confess before you that we judge your word by the idols that Canadians serve. And we don't even recognize, Father, that we listen with idle ears often, idle ears of what often, too often, Father, we join with Canadians in giving far too much power to these false gods, non-gods, sometimes demonic idols.

So, Father, we ask that there would be a powerful but gentle and deep work of your Holy Spirit in us this morning, that we might hear your word and that your word, Father, might confront the idols of our hearts and the idol we make of ourselves, that your word might come deeply in us and so that we might give Jesus that proper place in our lives that he deserves, that the gospel will be more real to us and that we might live whole and free for your glory and not our own in this city and at the ends of the earth.

And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So, we're going through the book of Judges, which is a boring way to start.

We're going to talk about a woman who drives a tent peg through a man's forehead. Now, I've caught your attention. Yes, there are stories like that in the Bible.

I surprised some people this week when they asked me what I was preaching on. I said, I'm going to talk about a story in the Bible where a woman takes a man and he's asleep and she drives the tent peg through his head into the ground.

[1 : 42] We're also going to talk about other sort of dark topics. We're going to talk a little bit about rape and sexual predators and sexual slavery, all of which the Bible addresses, believe it or not.

So, if you have your Bibles, now that I've got your attention, we're going to look at Judges chapter 4 and 5, but mainly Judges chapter 4, which is in the Old Testament.

If you're wondering, if you're a guest here, one of the things that we do at Church of the Messiah is that we actually do something that Augustine did, Chrysostom, many of the early church fathers, probably Paul himself.

We preach through books of the Bible and we're preaching through Judges. Judges is a book that describes the time period between Israel entering the Promised Land and then Joshua dies and after his death until there's the first king, which is Saul.

That's the period of the book of Judges. And this story that we're looking at today, here's a little bit of a, sorry, geek moment, time out geek moment for grammar.

[2 : 46] I think it's only one of two places in the Bible where the same story is told twice, one by prose and one by poetry. And so chapter 4 tells the story by prose, like by a narrative, a story, and chapter 5 tells you the same story, only in poetic.

It's supposed to be sung and it's filled with imagery and all of that other stuff that goes on in poetry. So we're going to mainly, because it's 55 verses all together, it's a long bit to read, we're going to mainly look at the prose bit and I'll fill in a few blanks because the poetry bit supplements the prose bit to give you a fuller picture of what happened.

And here we go, chapter 4, verse 1. And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died.

That's the story that's sort of the main story just before this. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Heresheth Hagoyim.

Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help, for he, that is Jabin and his general Sisera, had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed, this is very important, he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for 20 years.

[4 : 07] 20 years is a long time. Now just pause before we read it. Those of you who might not have been here other weeks, you might wonder why this odd language of the Lord selling them into the hand of King Jabin, it's an image.

And it's a very, very important image because it actually helps to communicate how the Lord's judgment usually works. Because you see, this is going to sound very, very counterintuitive to people, but the way the Lord usually judges is by letting us have the sinful things we want. That's how he actually judges us. And so the image is that you're like a boat and you're on a river and the river has a fairly swift current, but the boat, you, are tied to the dock by some rope. And what can happen is that sometimes on this side of the grave, God gives you a bit of a wake-up call, hopefully a wake-up call, by, in a sense, letting the rope run for 100 meters. And as soon as he lets out 100 meters of rope, the boat goes down the stream. You get carried away by your sinful desires. And that's, in a sense, what his judgment is.

[5 : 20] And so what's happened to the people of Israel is the people of Israel, Ehud has died, and they long to worship the gods of the nations. They long to worship the god of war, the god of sex, the god of fertility, the god of conquest.

They long to worship the gods. And so what happens is the Lord says, I'm going to let them have it. I'm going to let them have what they want. But, you know, when you worship a god and a goddess, you don't just sort of worship the god and the goddess.

The god and the goddess, they come with a culture. They come with habits. They come with rulers. They come with laws. So you can't just sort of have the god without all the stuff that goes along with the god.

And that's what happens. He says, you're worshiping. You want to worship these gods and goddesses? I will allow that to happen. I will give you over to what you want. And what happens is it means that they're oppressed cruelly.

They are oppressed cruelly. Because ultimately what they desire is evil. And ultimately evil hurts us and others. Goodness is good for you.

[6 : 26] And so that's what this language of being sold is. And the other thing which is very interesting here is it's a very interesting sort of historical little moment where you see this reference to 900 chariots of iron.

The book of Judges takes place at the time that the age of bronze is coming to an end and the age of iron, the iron age. The bronze age is coming to an end and the iron age is beginning.

And 900 chariots of iron, those are the super weapons of the day. Like this would be, you know how in science fiction, you know, movies, there's some evil guy or some nation, they have weapons or like 20, 30, 50 years ahead of everybody else.

Israel won't actually have iron for several hundred years. So this is military technology several hundred years in advance of what Israel has.

You just try to think back to our military technology in 250 years ago or 200 years ago. What would that be? I have to do the math in my head. 18, 1821 and compare it to going against a top military power today.

[7 : 34] That's what this is signaling. Israel won't manage to have iron weapons until King David.

So, and you can see, by the way, and this, by the way, this is just so obviously powerful to us. I mean, it is obviously powerful for us as Christians to be wanting to maybe stop following Jesus because we look at other people and they have the gadgets, they have the toys, they're more successful, they just seem to be more prosperous, they know what to do, and that's what Israel is. They see in all these things, it's just so much better. So why wouldn't we try to be like them? But they try to be like them, it just means that they have this cruel oppression that they labor under. And once again, the cry out is not that they cry in repentance, but that the Lord, they're unrepentant, but their pain, their cry of pain comes to the Lord. And even without repentance, the Lord acts to save them and to deliver them.

So what happens next? What does God do? Now, one of the things you're going to see with the book of Judges, which is really important, is that God delivers them time and time and time again. But because the Lord isn't tame, he's not like dealing with a bank machine where you get programmed answers to the things you type.

[8 : 52] He keeps doing surprising things and he's going to redeem them in a surprising way. He's going to redeem them through three people, not one, two of them being women. He's going to

surprise them.

So that's what happens. So verses four. Now, Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim.

And the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. So it doesn't tell you how she's recognized as a prophetess, but a prophet and a prophetess, a simple way to understand them is think of them as God's mouth.

God's mouth living among people. God speaks through Deborah. And when she speaks, not everything she says. If she says, you know, bring me some tabbouleh, it's not God speaking. But sometimes she speaks.

And when she speaks, people recognize it's God speaking. And that's who she is. And so what's she going to say? Well, God is going to give a message that she sends. Verse six. She sent and summoned Barak, the son of Abinoham from Kedesh Naphtali, and said to him, here's the message.

[10:01] Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you, go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun, and I will draw out Sisera, notice here the Lord will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Caishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand.

Now pause. Remember I said chariots of iron? That, in a sense, is 200 years of weaponry earlier. So just to make it not even fully like that, it would be as if God gives us a message.

I'm going to pick the part of, my wife is the prophetess, so she's the one that God speaks through, and she says, Daniel and Andrew and Matt, take your single-shot .22s, and I want you to go after an army ranger unit, a thousand of them, and they're, by the way, going to have attack helicopters, the latest, and all the latest missiles, and a few tanks.

Daniel, Andrew, Matt, get a couple hundred of your buddies, your single-shot .22s. Oh, and by the way, because this is the significance of the Caishon, I'm going to have you go to a place that suits tanks and the other side.

There's going to be no coverage, no ditches, nothing. Nice, big, bare, open field with good shooting lines for the other side. Go do it. That's, in a sense, in today's language, what the Lord asks Barak to do.

[11:33] And here's what he says in verses 8 to 10. Now, I'm going to read it, and I'm going to tell you right now that there's a, in the history of interpreting this text, you come to a T-junction.

You have to go one way or the other. And the majority of interpreters, but not all of them, the majority of interpreters go one way. And I actually side with the minority of interpreters, and I'm going to go a different way with this text.

But I'll read it to you first. And here's how it goes. Verse 8. Barak said to her, If you will go with me, I will go.

But if you will not go with me, I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.

Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kadesh. And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kadesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.

[12:37] Now, here's the big divide. And by the way, the Hebrew, the original language is completely neutral on this. My minority interpretation fits just as well as the majority interpretation.

The majority interpretation is this, that God says to Barak, Take your guys, go fight this battle. And Barak says, I'm not going to do this, Deborah, unless you come with me, because I'm timid.

And then Deborah says, well, because you're timid, the glory is going to go to somebody else.

That's the majority interpretation. But it's not required. The Hebrew text also allows another way of looking at it, which I think actually makes more sense.

If you look at this simple point, godly faith desires to listen to what the Lord says in every facet of life.

Godly faith desires to listen to what the Lord says in every facet of life. And if you think about the fact that Deborah is a prophetess, Barak is responding, not, even if it was weak faith, by the way, weak faith is still faith.

[13 : 43] But he's actually saying what you'd actually want a person to say. He's saying, listen, I want to do this. I want the Lord to speak into my life at every single step of the way.

So you need to come with me. Because I don't want to just hear you once and then go off and try to figure this out by myself. I want you to speak into my life as I'm traveling, as I'm trying to find the right men, as I'm getting them provisioned, as we're waiting, when I know to leave.

I want the Lord to speak into my life at every moment. And then the second thing which he says, we'll go back to the text. The second thing he says, you know, and so when she says, this is what's actually very, very interesting.

So she says, not as a punishment, by the way, Barak, because you're weak in faith, no. But she then tells him a second thing, which is another check, which we're going to unpack for a couple of minutes.

She says, by the way, Barak, you need to know. Remember I said to you the Lord's asking you to do this, and I'm asking you to trust that the Lord will go before you, and the Lord will defeat the army, even though you're going with 1821 weapons against the peak forces in the world with 2020 weapons.

[15 : 02] But by the way, I want you to know you're not going to get any glory out of this. And Barak still goes. Now here's the first of two thought experiments about this. Imagine for a moment that tonight the Lord himself appears to you in a dream.

And it's more than a dream. You know that he's actually there. And the Lord says to you, I'm going to give you two options. And the first option is this.

I'm going to reveal to you right now, and I'm going to give you the money for it to happen, and I'm going to open the minds of the drug companies and the regulators and everything like that, but I'm giving to you in your hand something, a pill, and medicine, that if people take it, it will save 10,000 people who are going to die, will live.

10,000 people. Not only for this year, but for years to come. And you'll get all the glory. The CBC, they'll make statues for you on Parliament Hill.

You'll appear to Oprah. You'll be famous all over the world. 10,000 a lot. Or you can choose the second option. I'll give you a different recipe, a different medicine, and it'll save 20,000 people a year.

[16 : 14] But you'll get no credit for it whatsoever. Zero. And all the credit will go to somebody else. And when I say you'll get zero credit, I mean zero credit.

Like even your wife or your husband won't know. Even your kids, even your best friend, even your dog won't know that you are the one responsible for it. So which one are you going to choose?

Now, you came to church on a snowstorm.

You're all going to choose the 20,000 people a year. I know that. Right? But let's be honest. You're going to pause about it a little bit, aren't you?

10,000, all the credit, 20,000. And nobody will know. Like nobody will also know that I chose the 10,000 rather than the 20,000. Only God's going to know that. Like my wife and my buddies in the CBC won't discover that I could have saved 10,000 more a year.

They're just going to know about my 10,000. And many of us would pause. And if we don't, and even if our pause is just a little bit thinking, well, maybe I'll choose the 20,000, but surely with the Facebook and maybe I'll get a whole pile of young people to do a TikTok about it.

[17 : 25] And then they'll know just somehow that I had something to do with the 20,000. But at the end of the day, I mean, you people who come to church on a snowstorm morning, you're going to choose the 20,000. Here's the second thought experiment.

The Lord shows you up in a dream. Same type of thing. I'm going to give you the pill. It'll save 10,000 people's lives. And you'll get all the glory. And you'll get all the riches.

You'll get all the acclaim. There'll be statues about you. All that stuff. 10,000 people. That's option A. Option B is this. You'll save 10,001.

And you get zero credit. And zero, zero, zero, zero, zero, zero, zero credit. What will you choose? Now, for most of us, if we're ominous, we're going to really pause at that.

I mean, it's just one person. We're saving 10,000. It's just one. Nobody will know. Many of us would be very tempted by that.

[18 : 25] Very tempted. Nobody would know that I chose one person extra would die every year. You see, what this story opens us up to when Barak is told that he's going to do this and receive no

glory is something that touches very deep in the human heart.

You see, at the end of the day, I would like to suggest to you that Buddhism is wrong about the central problem facing human beings. And the central problem facing human beings is not desire, but self-centeredness.

Desiring glory for yourself. I'm going to suggest that Hinduism is wrong with how it understands the central problem facing human beings. That the problem isn't illusion of difference.

But the problem is that we human beings desire to be like God and have the praise and glory. And I want to suggest to you the central problem facing human beings is not like Islam and all other religions like that, including forms of Christianity and Judaism.

That it's all a matter of faith. That it's all a matter about obeying God and keeping the rules.

Because then the problem is often that you just don't know enough or you're just not motivated enough. But the fact of the matter is that that doesn't deal with the central human problem of self-centeredness and desire and of our own glory.

[19 : 41] And I want to suggest to you that the main way that all the Western world thinks about ethics, which is all a form of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is that you make the moral decision whereby you choose something that will minimize pain and maximize happiness.

That you look and you see if I do this option like these people are hurt. And if I do this option, less people are hurt. And so I'll choose the lesser option. And the fundamental problem with that and almost all the moral systems that you learn in university and you learn in high schools.

And that you hear on the CBC and you hear in the Globe and Mail. They're all versions of that. And they're all fundamentally wrong because they do not grasp the fact that the fact of the matter is, is that if ten of you are hurt and I am inconvenienced, I weigh myself more than the ten of you.

And so do you. So do you. And that's part of the reason we're so screwed up in this country.

Because the central human problem is self-centeredness. Is desiring to be God. Genesis 3 is true.

And one of the things that we're going to see as the story unpacks, despite the fact that it's going to talk, we haven't got to it yet, it's going to talk about rape and sexual predators and sexual slavery.

[21 : 08] Is that the story leads us in a direction that the cross will help us to understand why, given this is our problem, what happens in the gospel is what every human being desperately, desperately, desperately needs.

So let's see how the story continues. Verse 11. First, we have a little tiny bit of a pause. If you're watching this on Netflix, there'd be a little bit of a pause. The action's been going this way.

All of a sudden, there's this odd little vignette. But this odd little vignette sets up something that's

going to happen down the road. And here's how it goes. The vignette is now Heber, the Kenite.

Heber, the Kenite, had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oaks of Zananim, which is near Kadesh.

A little aside. It's setting up what's going to happen a bit. In other words, basically what happens is that not that far from the battle, this guy lives. And it's going to set up something that happens in a moment. So what happens?

[22 : 14] Verse 12. Remember, we've set it up. God has said to Barak, by the way, I want you to get all these soldiers. You're going to go fight. And you're going to fight in an area which is advantageous to Sisera. And you're not going to get any glory.

And Barak says, listen, I want to listen to you all the way along. And I'm going to do it. And I'm only going to do it listening to you all the time. All the time. Keep speaking. I need you to speak into my life.

And in verse 12, it goes like this. When Sisera was told that Barak, the son of Abinoham, had gone up to Mount Tabor, remember Sisera is the general, the pagan general, General Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him from Harasheth Hagoyim to the river Kishon.

The battle is going to be fought by the river Kishon. And Deborah said to Barak, up, for this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?

So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.

[23 : 27] And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harasheth Hagoyim. I keep pronouncing it differently.

And all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword. Not a man was left. Now, just sort of pause here. If you read, remember I told you the same stories told twice, once in poetry and song and once in prose.

I'm not going to look at it now because of the time constraints. But if you go back and you read later on, chapter 5, the beginning and towards the end, what you'll see is, well, actually, here's what you'll see. Many of you know I was in Israel on a tour at the end of October.

And the Israeli tour guide, as we were going through the desert, as we were going through the desert for the first time towards Jerusalem, and he was pointing out the desert and everything. And he shared with us one of his peculiarities. And one of the things he said I really, really love is, I love when rain comes, all of a sudden, a big rainstorm, and I dash out in my car to go to different areas because I love seeing flash floods.

[24 : 29] He said I'm a tour guide. I drive through all parts of Israel all the time for different groups. And I know where all the places are just dry and brown and nothing's living. And I love when there's a big rainstorm.

I say to my wife, you look after my kiddo. I'm going to go out. And there's this raging torrent where he knows that just like the day before, there was nothing, nothing at all, just dry. You could just dry. But now there's this raging torrent.

And so what you see if you look at chapter 5 is that Cicero is thinking to himself, Barak is the world's biggest idiot. Like, not only do I have more troops than him, not only do I have super weapons, but he's come and chosen to fight me in a place where it's a plane, where I can use my super weapon to their best advantage.

Like, this guy's a complete and utter idiot. And you know, and you look at chapter 5, it's the dry season. And another thing which is really important to know from having read all of this is that who would Cicero worship?

Cicero would worship the storm god. And so he goes and lines himself up for battle. And what does the Lord do in the dry season? He sends a storm. And he turns a tiny little creek into a raging river and into a floodplain.

[25 : 33] And all of a sudden, the 900 chariots, which are the super weapons, are stuck in the mud. And they can't move. And the entire battle plan is based around the 900 chariots. And they have no plan B.

Why do you need a plan B in dry season when you have super weapons? And everything's in chaos and they get slaughtered. The Lord brings a rain and a flash flood and everything turns to mud.

And Cicero rode to his doom. And the storm god failed him. Because the storm god does not exist, but the Lord exists.

And if you read the poem, it has all this language about the stars fighting. And it's all mocking language of the gods and goddesses that the Canaanites worship. That, in fact, these gods and goddesses don't exist and that the Lord is the one who controls all of these types of things.

And so they all die. So, but Cicero is still alive. And leadership matters. So what happens? Cicero, and here we're coming to the tough bit.

[26 : 44] Cicero fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite. Remember they mentioned this thing about Heber living not that far away? So verse 17 again.

Cicero fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite. For there was peace between Jabin, the king of Hazor, and the house of Heber, the Kenite. And Jael came out to meet Cicero and said to him, Turn aside, my lord.

Turn aside to me. Do not be afraid. So King, so General Cicero turned aside to her into the tent and she covered him with a rug. Now, this is all going to become very, very more significant in a moment.

But I just want you to notice again at the beginning of verse 17. It goes, but Cicero fled away on foot. Not to, there would have been lots of tents, but he goes to the tent of the woman.

It's going to be very important in a moment. But he goes to the tent of the woman. She knows he's there. She invites him in. And then, in verses 19 and 20, and one of the things to notice here, by the way, is sometimes people struggle over the fact that they claim that Jael lied.

[27 : 52] But if you actually read the text very carefully, she actually never says anything other than come in and don't be afraid. All the time Cicero says, do this, do this, do this. She doesn't say she's going to do it.

Like, not once. So look what happens. He said to her, now he's inside. He's covered with a rug. He's tired. He says, give me a little water to drink for I am thirsty.

So she opened a skin of milk, which is far more precious, and gave him a drink and covered him again. And General Cicero said to her, stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, is anyone here, say no.

What happens? Remember, now she doesn't say she's going to do that, by the way, does she? But Jael, verse 21, the wife of Haber took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand.

And by the way, in the ancient world at that time, setting up and taking down tents was woman's work. So she takes what would be woman's tools, not men's tools, but woman's tools.

[29 : 01] She took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to General Cicero and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was laying fast asleep from weariness.

And so he died. We're going to talk more about this in a moment, but let's just see how the story finishes. And behold, as Barak was pursuing, verse 22, pursuing Cicero, Jael went out to meet Barak and said to him, Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.

So Barak went into her tent, and there lay Cicero dead, with the tent peg in his temple still. So on that day, God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, before the people of Israel.

And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin, the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin, king of Canaan. In other words, the death of Cicero is the tipping point that the cruel oppression of Jabin cannot survive, that tipping point, and it comes to an end.

Now, about Jael and this gruesome act. Now, you need to have a bit of context here. Remember how the story begins with the fact that it just says very roughly that Jabin had been cruelly oppressing Israel for 20 years.

[30 : 28] And we're going to just jump, if you turn in your Bibles to chapter 5, the last four verses, chapter 5, verses 28 to 31, this gives you some context to help you to understand the cruelty of what was going on.

And I'll just read it, and then I'll unpack it a little bit, the significance of it. So it's talking about Cicero. Oh, here. Out of the window, she peered. The mother of Cicero wailed through the lattice.

Sorry. And she's wailing and wondering, why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots? Her wisest princess's answer.

Indeed, she answers herself. Have they not found and divided the spoil? A womb or two for every man. Spoil of dyed materials for Cicero. Spoil of dyed materials embroidered.

Two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck of spoil. So may all your enemies perish, O Lord. But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might, and the land had rest for 40 years.

[31 : 33] Now, this is still toned down. And the NIV and many other translations try to take away, they don't translate it, they don't, they don't, they're trying to hide or maybe unintentionally the shock of the text.

And in the text, womb is accurate, but it's actually way more shocking. It would be the rudest way of referring to a woman's sexual anatomy.

Like the type of thing that if you were saying at your work, everybody would go, what? What did you just say? It's rude, it's graphic, it's brutal.

And just to think about it, my wife's vastly better than me. Try to imagine for a second the type of leadership culture of a nation. If, you know, one of my sons was General Sisera, and my wife is looking out the window saying to herself, I wonder when, you know, fill in whatever one of my sons, I wonder when Tosh is coming home.

And then my daughters and daughters-in-law and the princesses, and they all say, oh, he's just delayed raping women. And capturing women as sex slaves and robbing.

[32 : 50] I wonder what nice things he'll bring home for me to wear. Like the callous, casual brutality at the leadership level of the country is revealed there.

How many of you are bothered that J.L. put a tent peg through his skull? That's what went on.

Now, a Christian is a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Very, very simple. I want to wrap this all up a little bit and bring it home and connect it to the gospel in a very way which is important.

And, you know, a disciple means that you follow Jesus. He's your Lord and your Savior, and you follow him. But there's a way of talking about that, and for many people in our country, when they hear about it, it just sounds like another type of religion that you just choose to follow Jesus, and

you think you're maybe a little bit better than other people because you follow Jesus. And then when you tell them all about grace and the cross and everything like that, it just sounds like it's sort of weird. It just sounds as if, you know what it sounds like for many of us? It sounds as if God just decides, look at George.

[34 : 16] You know what? I like the way he smiles. I'm going to give him a pass. He's not going to have to appear before my judgment seat because, you see, no human being can escape being judged by the triune God.

No human being can escape being judged by the triune God. But many people hear this thing of, you know, grace, and they think, ah, look at George. You know, God just says, I'm going to give George a bit of a pass.

And, you know, if it's all before the last throne of judgment, like, you know, my wife, my kids, you, other people, people throughout my entire pass, they might wave their hand and say, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

Don't let him off so soon. Like, surely, do you know he did this? You know he did this? You know he didn't do that? You know this is what he thought? You know that, that, like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Like, no, no. And then afterwards, if that was just the way grace worked, that you'd just say, ah, you know, I like George.

You know, I'm just going to give him a pass. Then everybody would say, God's not just. And that Christianity stuff, it just sucks. And it's just another way to think you're better than people.

[35 : 20] That somehow God gives you a pass and I'm going to go to hell. Like, how does that make any sense whatsoever? And they would be right. Any version of understanding the cross, which ultimately just says, ah, you know, I like George's smile.

I'm going to give him a pass. That's cheap grace. It's abhorrent. Nobody should worship a God like that. What we see here in the story, like we see in all of the Old Testament, is that sometimes we have a precursor of the judgment that all human beings will face.

And that precursor of judgment happens on this side of the grave. And none of us here probably have done anything even remotely as bad as what Sisera was responsible for.

But every single one of us, if we actually were to have every single thing we've thought, every single thing we've done, everything we've failed to do, and it became clear to a lot of people, we'd say even for the best one here, come on, you've got to do something about this.

They got away with this. They got away with this. They got away with this. They got away with this. They got away with this. And then you bring out the cross and people go, what? But here's the thing.

[36 : 29] No human being has an option about escaping the judgment of God, including you and me. But here is what God says.

God says, I have provided the means by which the judgment that should fall on you will fall on somebody else in their place. They haven't been compelled.

They truly can represent you. They do it freely, and they do it because they love you. And what we actually see in the cross is God's final judgment in advance on Jesus.

And the option that he gives is in a sense Jesus says, you're doom on me, my destiny on you. Come to me. Be mine.

Follow me. And that's what Jesus says. So on the cross, we see that God takes my wrongdoing in terms of the active sense and the passive sense, the wrongdoing of my mind.

[37 : 36] He takes that with complete and utter seriousness. But grace and mercy is offered at the same time because no one can stand under the judgment of God.

No one. So the choice before every human being is, you are going to be judged, George. Will you take my son who bears your judgment for you?

Or will you take it yourself? And you will not stand under that judgment. And you see, then what it means to be a disciple of Jesus is something completely and utterly different because it doesn't mean, well, now that he's just taking favorites with me because the same offer is made to every human being.

And it's not then that if I just do enough rules and go to church on snow, like when there's been bad snow and do this and then this, I earn some brownie points because the world isn't divided between good people and bad people.

No Christian should believe that. The line between the good and the bad, the good and evil, runs down the center of every single human being and every single cell of our body and all of our mind. [38 : 46] The difference between good and evil is in each of us. It's not between the good people in the world and the bad people in the world. It's between those for whom evil is a real part of their lives and they, in mercy and in gratitude, accept Jesus to bear that punishment that they deserve in their stead.

And the Christian life is lived then out of gratitude at his accomplishment and not out of promoting our own rectitude.

And in light of such a great offering of sacrifice and love, it is there that we can begin to have the help of the Holy Spirit as we're gripped by the gospel to have our self-centeredness brought to him and die that the glory might be his.

please stand. In the sense, the Christian life just begins if you just say to the Lord, Lord, may that be true of me.

Jesus, that is what you, Jesus, I say yes to that. Please come and take me and the Lord will turn no one away because he doesn't weigh your merits.

[40 : 11] He has done it all on the cross. And one of the things which makes church so wonderful is church is a weekly reminder on the Lord's day to have a bit of a reset.

I couldn't get the TV to work the other day the way I wanted to. I told my grandkids, here's the very, very top secret method of fixing it. I unplugged everything, plugged it back in.

And that's in a sense what church is. It's a chance for us to have that reset button before the Lord to respond in a worthy manner. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we thank you that you see how ridiculous and foolish we are as human beings going after idols, going after evil, going after false gods, trying to be a God ourselves, always wanting to be the center, always thinking for everything from our point of view of what helps us or hurts us the most.

And Father, you see the ridiculousness of us and still when we didn't see our own ridiculousness, you loved us and sent Jesus to be our Savior. So Father, we give you thanks and praise for your great love and that you would offer such mercy and grace and that your Son would do this for one as unworthy as me and for those unworthy as are here.

Father, we thank you for Jesus and his mighty work of love by which we are made right with you. We thank you for it. And we ask, Father, that the Holy Spirit would help us to be gripped by Jesus and gripped by what he did, so gripped that we might respond in a worthy manner and receive it in a worthy way and begin to live out of that, Father, as the center of our identity, the center of our past, the center of our present, the center of our future, and that we might listen to your word in every area and facet of our lives with new longing and yearning, hearing how you speak to us in light of being gripped by the gospel.

[42 : 18] Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would do this gentle but deep work within us. And all God's people said, Amen. Amen.