

So, who will save us?

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Preacher: Rob Patterson

[0 : 00] Okay, I'm not sure if you're aware, if you're up on the current art scene, but there's an artist called Banksy. And he started out as a bit of a street artist, a social commentator, a social critic, really, but entered into mainstream art as well.

But he still remained almost anonymous. We're kind of not really sure who he is. And this guy, Banksy, has painted a whole bunch of paintings all over different buildings all throughout Europe and America.

He's actually the artist of Britain's favourite painting. Why should that matter to you? Well, it's Britain, in their opinion, should matter to us.

They, after all, are still our overmasters, yes? No? And this particular painting is it, The Girl with the Balloon. That's Britain's favourite painting of all time.

Now, interestingly, it sold at auction about a week and a half ago. And at auction, something crazy happened. You see, at this auction, Banksy had actually built into the frame of the painting, two years before, I think it was.

[1 : 10] He built a shredder into the frame of the painting. So when it sold at auction, it triggered an alarm, which then the painting descended through the shredder at the bottom and shredded this painting. 1.04 million pounds, like a trillion dollars in our money, isn't it?

About nearly \$2 million in our money just started to drop through this shredder at the bottom of the frame. And all these people are just staring, watching this favourite painting of Britain disintegrate before their very eyes.

And you can see, I think, in the pictures, there's some of the photos. This is actually a cut-down version of the photo that Banksy actually posted on his Instagram feed of the auction itself.

What he was doing? Well, he was actually critiquing the consumerist approach to life that people seem to have. In particular, obviously, as an artist, the consumerist approach to art.

So he decided to destroy one of his most loved pieces of art at the point at which someone tried to make a massive profit out of it.

[2 : 15] People were horrified for about a day or so. And now people are saying, artists and critics are saying, it's actually increased in value because of the statement that was made about consumerism.

Isn't that wonderful? The poor guy must be scratching his head wondering what he can possibly do to get the message across to us that we are just caught up in so many things that if we really soberly looked at them would prove to have absolutely no value, really.

He's trying to expose our flawed values to show us how we're going so wrong as a society and we just don't want to get the message. Friends, what I want to say to you today is that as we go into these last five chapters of Judges, this is what the writer of the book of Judges is wanting us to do. He's wanting us to take up that mirror again and look at ourselves afresh. He's wanting to... There's two key stories in this section. And he's wanting us to actually really reflect on who we are. Our flawed values. And he's wanting us... He's wanting to promote the right direction to be looking in. So this is a conclusion to the book of Judges.

[3 : 35] And in this conclusion, we need to pay homage to the very beginning of Judges, which in chapter 1, verse 1, we learn that Joshua has just died. He's... Why is this important? Well, because Joshua had held the people together, not just as a military leader.

Joshua pointed them toward God. He was a spiritual leader too of sorts. He actually famously said these words. And I remember these from being a child and hearing them in church and at Sunday school.

He's the man who said, Choose this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. The whole section is... More of the section is this in verse 14 and following of Joshua chapter 4.

Now, therefore, he says to the people of Israel in the Promised Land, Fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the river in Egypt and serve the Lord.

And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

[4 : 41] And all the people say, So will we. And Joshua says, No, you won't. Yes, we will. And that's kind of the thing that the... A bit of an argument that goes on at the end of Joshua.

But I can tell you now that Judges is the story of how their argument continues. No, we won't. Yes, we will. No, we won't. What we have in the book of Judges is no Joshua, no leader to lead the people toward God.

And they have no king to lead them toward God. See, as the book of Judges progresses, we don't find another leader like of the caliber of Joshua. We just don't see him. Lots of different leaders arise with all kinds of different attributes.

But none of them match up to Joshua in pointing them toward God as successfully as Joshua did, even though that turned out not to be as successful as they'd hoped.

And as the book of Judges progresses, the writer begins to turn to thoughts of a king. And in this section is where this really comes to the fore.

[5 : 46] So in chapter 17, verse 6, 18, verse 1, 19, verse 1, and 21, 25, the very end. So the beginning and the end and twice in the middle. The writer says these words.

In those days, there was no king in Israel. Now the writer's desire here is for a king to solve the spiritual problem. Someone that would actually draw them back to worship of their God, faithful worship of their God.

Because everyone's basically doing what they want. So they have no Joshua, they have no king. They don't even have a judge to save them. This is the book of Judges and five chapters passes without there being a judge to come to the fore.

Five chapters. Israel spirals down. But no one arises to save them. Then again, in five chapters, there is no external threat.

The last five chapters are an awful, bloody mess. But it's a self-inflicted mess. There's no enemies from the outside oppressing them. They're oppressing each other from within.

[6 : 56] No Joshua, no king, no judge. Spoiler alert though. No spiral either. No cycle.

No downward spiral. You see, what actually happens in these last five chapters is we discover that the ending is actually the beginning. The first story that we'll look at, the first Levi, is actually the third generation from Moses.

The second story is the third generation from Aaron, Moses' brother. They're kind of roughly in the same time frame. We like to think of things getting worse.

But what these two stories, only like the third generation from Moses and Aaron tell us is that things were always bad. The last five chapters are the first five chapters.

Israel is already fully bad from the inside out. This conclusion has no Joshua, no king, no judge of any kind, not even a spiral.

[8 : 00] What it does have is this. It has one rule, two Levites, and three generations. First, the one rule. In Judges 17, verse 6, we actually see this rule explained after he declares that there is no king in Israel.

And it reads this. So Judges 17, second half of verse 6. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. This is basically the rule that has been functioning throughout the book of Judges.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Doing what is right in my own eyes is when I become the reference point for what right and wrong is.

I decide how I'm going to live my life. But friends, a point that the writer to the Judges is trying to say here is this. When we live our own way, we have replaced God and become God ourselves.

So this is one rule. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Judges. The second, the two Levites. We need to bear in mind as we open up these stories that the Levites were actually meant to teach and guide Israel.

[9 : 09] They were the ones who were supposed to guide people toward God. First, in how we relate to God in terms of religion. And second, in how we relate to each other in terms of morality. Teaching us what God's word actually says.

That's what they were meant to do. Judges concludes with two stories of two Levites. And these Levites are meant to expose our own values.

To challenge us to examine our religion and our morality. As you read these five chapters, you are meant to judge yourselves. One rule.

Two Levites. Three generations. The Levite in the first story is Moses' grandson. As I've already said, the high priest in the second story is Aaron's grandson.

Only three generations from Moses. The point is stark. It's meant to be saying, look at the depth of the problem that's already there among you. How will a king resolve this?

[10 : 11] Well, let's just start and have a look with the first story. That's Judges 17 to 18. And this is the introductory part of this was actually read out by John.

Okay, so let's start with some of the characters. We've got Micah. He's introduced right up front. And there's so much irony in this story. Micah actually means who is like Yahweh.

Well, not Micah, as we discover in the story. He's a thief. He's cursed by his mother. He's an idolater. He already has his own shrine set up in his house. But he's religious.

He's sensitive to his mother's curse, which is probably why he came forward in the first place, to own up to his sin. He has a shrine in his home. So he's obviously got some desire to actually please God and seek God's favor.

And in the story, we discover that he wanted a priest, a father figure he describes, to guide him in the path of righteousness. Now, maybe if we replace his idols for the idols that we choose in this day and age, we discover that he was actually very much like us.

[11 : 24] Perhaps so close to being like us that if he was here in this room, we couldn't tell him apart from us. We have Micah.

And then we have his mother. His mother who worships the Lord, Yahweh, sort of. Yeah? She's eager to forgive, which is quite nice, and horrified that she's cursed her son and tries to turn that around by replacing that curse with a blessing.

But then she ensures with her actions that they're both cursed by God. Firstly, in misappropriation of money dedicated to God. She dedicates all the money to God, only gives about a tenth of it to make the idol.

In Leviticus 27, 28, you can read about the issue of money or goods or anything that's actually devoted to God. You cannot even buy it back.

You cannot replace it with something of like value. If it's devoted to God, it's God's. It stays God's. And not only that, but with that 10% that she does give to Micah, is to make a carved image and a metal image.

[12 : 34] Deuteronomy 27 has a list of curses and reasons that you can bring these curses from God on yourself. And it uses this exact phrasing in verse 15 to describe anyone who makes a carved image or a metal image.

Anyone who does that is cursed by God. So she tries to worship Yahweh her way, not God's way. What we're meant to discover from this story is that it doesn't matter whether her heart is in the right place.

It's almost comical how far wrong she's gone. It doesn't matter whether your heart is in the right place. We worship God on his terms.

And then the Levite finally comes into the story. And he's an interesting character too. He's an opportunist. He has an inheritance. And he has a key role within God's people.

And yet he moves from the place that Yahweh has given him to look for something better. Ironically, his name is Jonathan. And Jonathan means Yahweh has given.

[13 : 49] Jonathan, son of Gershom, grandson of Moses, we find out in chapter 18, verse 30. So we know this is happening early in the time of Judges. And yet he's not Aaron's son, so he should not have been made a priest.

That role was not given to him. But he took it anyway. And we read in verses 11 and following of chapter 17, everyone was happy.

The Levite was content to dwell with the man. And the young man became to him like one of his sons. And Micah ordained the Levite. And the young man became his priest and was in the house

of Micah.

And then Micah said, My goodness.

Could things get worse? Well, they can because a tribe turns up. A tribe of Danites. The Danites couldn't take possession of the land that they were giving. And we discover this is where it kind of builds from the very beginning of Judges.

[14:54] See, in chapter 1, verse 34, we discover this. The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. So the Danites couldn't actually take possession of the land that God had given them.

In chapter 2, verse 2, we discover it's because of their idolatry. They couldn't take possession of the inheritance that God had given them. So they went looking for another one. And the result?

Well, as we read in the story, the scouts find Jonathan. In chapter 18, verse 3, we actually recognized his voice. Some coincidence.

They actually knew him. And so with the scouting done and the main force on the march, they decided to take Micah and the idols with them. They failed to take the land they were given because of their disobedience.

So they slaughter a peaceful people to take a land that they weren't given because it was easier. Jonathan becomes the priest of a religion of convenience.

[15:56] He and his descendants, we discover, served at the shrine of convenience. All the way until the Assyrian conquest in 722. This shrine that the Danites set up was meant to be a center of worship of Yahweh to prevent the Israelites from having to travel to the temple in Jerusalem.

But it became a center of syncretism. Worship God, or virtually worship any God you want, however you want. Friends, what the story is trying to teach us here is it's trying to teach us the ridiculousness of pursuing our own religion on our own terms.

You see, when we worship God our own way, when we do this, when we worship God our own way, we have replaced God as the focus of our worship. Worship that indulges my personal preferences.

Worship that is more convenient to me. Indulging ourselves becomes the pathway to judging each other as well.

Our church, the people in it. Our preferences, if we indulge them, can become the standard by which we judge each other.

[17:12] Music, too loud, too soft, not enough hymns, not enough rocky stuff, too much drums, not enough bass.

There can be all kinds of different things, issues and concerns that come into our perceptions of how things are. And if we start to judge things by that, then we'll find them wanting.

I can guarantee you. If you have a preference, it will not be met by every song we sing. What about teaching style? I find this one, it's a difficult one, isn't it?

I'm actually teaching it now. I find this one a difficult one to address on that basis. But I can tell you now that if you promote your preference in terms of teaching style, you will be guaranteed to be able to find someone whose teaching you resonate with better than myself, David, Boe and Adam and other people who we share this pulpit with.

You will be guaranteed to find someone. I think it's a wonderful thing that different churches are putting their preaching up on websites and it's a great thing that there are so many different teaching resources to engage in.

[18:31] And if you actually want some advice on that, we'd be more than happy to point you to folk who are actually really faithful at teaching God's word. No question. But when we exercise that preference, we indulge it, we'll find each other lacking.

I've been asked to preach like Alistair Begg. Alistair Begg's a great preacher. I'm not Alistair Begg. He has a Scottish accent. I can't even do David's accent and I've been working with him for four years.

What about spirituality? You see, if we're not careful, we'll actually start to develop a concept, an expectation of what it looks like, what a spiritual person looks like.

An expectation that we impose on the people around us, superimpose on them. And if they don't fit that concept of spirituality that we have, we find them lacking.

One of the... another area that comes up quite frequently, all too frequently, is the issue of reconciliation. reconciliation. How do we reconcile to each other? How do we move toward each

other in love?

[19 : 52] How do we actually recognize when there's a problem between us and what does it look like to actually move toward each other through that? To allow what Christ did on the cross to teach us and inform us on how to actually resolve our differences with each other.

We'll have all these different views. We'll be frustrated with it. We'll build in frustration for one another.

And you know the crazy thing is that we will be convinced that we are right, just like Micah did. Now God will show me favor, he says. I've got everything. I've got all my ducks lined up.

Except listening to God and his will. We can be convinced that we are right, even though God's word does not support us. Friends, this story is meant to be saying this.

Look at the ridiculousness of how far wrong they go, and yet how much they celebrate how right they are. Let's look at ourselves.

[20 : 57] Judge ourselves. Judge our religion. Expose it to God's word and allow God's will to prevail. That's the lesson that we're called to learn here from this first section of the conclusion of Judges, the first Levites.

Judge yourself. Judge your religion. And he goes on with the second story straight away. And judge your morality. This next story, Judges chapter 19 to 21, is meant to be seen against the backdrop of the one rule that I brought to your attention earlier.

The first verse, 19 verse 1, explains the context of this story. And the fact that there was no king in Israel implies that the other half of that statement, everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.

What does that look like? Well, that's what the next Levite actually brings to our attention. You see this new Levite that enters into the story.

This time the Levite enters up front in the story. We don't learn much about him initially, but we certainly learn a lot about him as the story goes on. We don't even learn his name in the whole time. But we know he lives in the same area, Ephraim, at roughly the same time.

[22 : 18] And we learn one detail, that he has a concubine. We learn that up front. Now, just so you understand, a concubine is most commonly, it's a second wife or a wife who has no dowry.

So we can see through the story that the Levite refers to the father of his concubine as father-in-law. So there seems to be a formal relationship here.

It probably fits into one of those two, a second wife or a wife who has no dowry. And we learn something about her up front. In verse 2, his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months.

How was she unfaithful? We don't know. All we do know is that she left her husband's. There's no reason given as to why, but whatever the reason, it was big. It took four months for the Levite to go and try and win her back.

Any of you who are married will know this. You sit on a relational conflict for four months, and it's pretty big. It's pretty big. You feel it. Feel it long before four months.

[23 : 32] Seconds, I think you can measure it in, or fractions of seconds. Then you have the father-in-law of this concubine who appears to be really open-hearted. I mean, he takes his daughter back in for those four months, and he accepts his son-in-law joyfully, even after, you know, he's probably heard what's happened with his daughter.

And then he goes on to even practice excessive hospitality. Time after time, he talks him into staying for another night. Lodge here, and let your heart be merry, and tomorrow you should arise, and go early in the morning for your journey, and so on.

And in fact, he causes the Levite, his son-in-law, to set off on his journey way too late, we read. And because he's fed up of all the delays, his frustration gets the better of him, he thinks, forget this, I'm going.

I'm not going to get out of here unless I go now. And so he goes. He's not going to make it all the way home. He's not going to make it to where he wanted to get to by nightfall. So he has to stop somewhere. But where? Well, not Jerusalem, he says, because it's run by the Jebusites.

But Gibeah is run by Benjamites. That's actually the people of God. That's got to be a safe place. Surely the Benjamites can be relied on for hospitality, for safety. But no.

[24 : 45] The tribe that enters in, this Benjamite tribe that enters into the story, is not a safe place at all. In 1915 and 18, the fact is repeated.

No one from Gibeah would practice hospitality toward them. But it's worse than that. They're actually unsafe in Gibeah. The ominous words of the old man from Ephraim who sees them. He says this in verse 20, Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants, only do not spend the night in the square. He's horrified that they might actually be staying there. And the result? Even though they have the hospitality of this old man, a drunken mob comes to his house. They demand to have the man turned over to them. And it's very clear what their intentions are. They want to rape him. Depravity like this has not been seen in the Bible since Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. And God wiped those cities off the map.

[25 : 47] But now, now, it's surfaced within God's people. The Levite, well, under threat, his true colors come out.

He acts decisively. What does he do? He grabs his concubine and forcibly throws her out to the mob. And then in the morning, he sets off on his journey again. And there she is lying on the doorstep. As the Levite steps over her to continue his journey, to set out on his journey, he says to her this, Get up. Let's be going. But there was no answer. We read in 1928. She's dead. So he takes her body home.

This is a man who serves, we read in this story as well, he serves at the sanctuary before God. He takes her body home.

[26 : 47] He chops it into 12 pieces and he sends each piece to the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. They are horrified to a man.

The Benjamites aren't, though. So civil war breaks out, we read. The Benjamites fight to protect the rapists from justice. The other tribes fight for justice. The other tribes win and they get carried away and they actually kill everyone.

Everyone. Man, woman and child in Benjamin, except for the 600 Benjamites who actually escape into the wilderness. Pretty soon after that, they realize that this was overkill.

Literally. The tribe of Benjamin is nearly extinct. After only three generations in the Promised Land. So what's their solution? Get the survivors some wives so they can actually start to rebuild the tribe again.

How? Because they've all said that they, none of them are actually going to take an oath. None of them are going to give wives to these guys. Well, they kill the inhabitants of an entire town except for the virgins.

[27 : 51] Jabesh Gilead hadn't sent people to fight in what turned out to be the massacre, so they deserve to die. They just erased that town.

The second great idea they had was to let the Benjamites steal 200 girls from the festival at Shiloh. Again, Shiloh is where the tabernacle is. From before God, from in front of God, they're allowing these things.

Promoting these things even. Hospitality, morality, justice, restitution. Even when they try and fix their mistakes, they blow it. Again, it just goes to such an ugly, awful extreme.

It's so uncomfortable to read these stories. And it's meant to be. The whole account, the whole book of Judges finishes with the words, We're meant to read the ugliness of these stories and see that when we live life our own way, we have replaced God as God.

It's rebellion. The things we do are just an expression of this rebellion. Apart from God's intervention, we are like the Benjamites. We are like the Israelites.

[29 : 18] There was a song, I can remember from when I was younger, called Bad to the Bone. I don't know if you know this song. B-b-b-bad, yeah? I'm not going to sing it. But that's kind of how it goes. And it kind of makes it cool to be a rebellious kind of person.

To be, you know, to be bad in that kind of James Dean kind of way. That rebel type person. If you read the words on face value, they're actually quite accurate though.

See, we like to think, yeah, a bit of badness is cool because it actually makes it easier for us to cope with the fact that there is badness in us. We also like to think about badness in the sense that it's something that comes from outside into us.

It's something that, an influence in a sense. Because that then means that, you know, I'm okay really, but all this stuff around me is just, just having an effect on me.

It's, you know, it's making me look bad, it's making me feel bad, it's making me do bad things, but I'm not really bad myself. That is not what the book of Judges is showing us.

[30 : 25] The book of Judges is showing us that we are bad, bad to the bone. And given time, we'll express it in all kinds of ways. And Banksy shredded his painting to expose the skewed values of our culture.

These stories are meant to do the same. They're meant to expose our skewed values. They're meant to show us who we are and when and where we try and replace God.

They're meant to show us who we are apart from God's intervention. Friends, if the center of your moral framework is you, then you are already utterly lost and you won't even realize it.

But can you see? Or do you resent me for pointing it out? I can remember when our children were young, there are some newfangled potty training methods where you hold your babies over a potty when they're two weeks up.

Well, we didn't have that system. Our kids were toddlers when they were being toilet trains. And I can remember when our kids were toddlers, you get that whiff that lets you know that it was time to change their nappy.

[31 : 39] Some of you parents, you remember that? You're probably already in the middle of that. You get the whiff. You know. This is the toddler age, not where they're really, really young and it kind of escapes the nappy when they go sometimes. I'm talking about just that age when little toddlers, and you go to them, and they know too.

And so you say to them, do I need to change your nappy? And they'll look at you and they'll shake their head. And if you start to move toward them, they turn and they run. It's kind of comical.

They spread the smell around the house as they, you know, bounce around. This nappy full of poo. Is that what we're like?

There's a truth that we don't want to face. And so we run around with that truth, undealt with, like a toddler with a dirty nappy.

These stories, they're meant to expose our sin and to expose our need. To cause us to yearn for a king who will turn our hearts back to God. A king who will inspire us to love God with all of our hearts.

[32 : 51] A king who will awaken that same love for God in our own hearts. A king who will move our hearts to hang on God's every good word.

The next book after Judges is Samuel, which begins the process of finding kings.

God does go on and provide kings for his people. Kings who did inspire. But none of them could deal with the problem that already existed in their own hearts. Our hearts are hopelessly lost too.

There was only one king who could deal with that. The king who died that we could be forgiven, renewed and restored. The king who daily, lovingly exposes our own rebelliousness.

And even as he does, who lovingly speaks words of grace, words of life to us. The book of Judges is meant to show us the problem of our hearts.

[34 : 00] To point forward beyond Judges to a future solution that God would provide. Not just a king, but the king.

The king who could rescue us and restore us. The king. Jesus Christ. And friends, if you don't know who Jesus is today, if you're visiting and you have absolutely no idea, come and talk to me after the service.

I'd love to introduce you to him. I'd love to explain to you the truth of the song we sang just before I got up here and how you actually live that out. How you actually come to him and allow him to heal you, to rescue you, to restore you.

But friends, if you're already Christians, like me, what this book is trying to do is say, you're Christians. Are you judging yourself?

Are you allowing God's word to speak authoritatively into your lives? Are you accepting the solution that God provides and living for him, worshipping him his way?

[35 : 12] Judges. The book is done now. We've finished. All that's left for us now is to judge ourselves. Let me pray.

Father God, we thank you for the journey you've taken us on through Judges. We are not sure if we all expected it to take the route that it did, but it has been such a privilege to see the faithfulness that you've shown toward your people throughout history despite what we are like.

Thank you, Lord, for the privilege it is to know the king, the king that this judge, that this writer anticipated. We actually know him personally. And thank you, God, that through him we've become your precious children.

Lord, help us to see how precious you are. Help us to serve you your way. Help us to submit to you, Lord, according to your word.

With hearts filled with thankfulness. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.