

When God's Patience Wears Thin

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[0 : 00] Well, Israel's situation in these verses is certainly not unique, as we have spent the last several months studying through the book of Judges. This is not a surprising scenario at all.

This is actually part and parcel of everything that is true of the Israelites in this book. But their sin is much more pronounced here than in other texts.

Verse 6 gives us this long list of pagan deities to which they had offered their worship, which prepares us for the severity of God's response when they supposedly are becoming penitent.

This list, it reveals how deeply apostate the nation had become. Those God had taken as his very own turned to any and every other god except him.

Not only did they continue to serve the gods of the Canaanites, which is represented by Bel and Ashtaroath, but we're told that they began to worship and bring in the gods of the nations that were surrounding the Canaanites.

[1 : 06] We're told that they adopted the gods of Syria and Sidon to the north, then the gods of Moab and Ammon to the east, and then the gods of Philistia to the southwest.

And we read in Deuteronomy chapter 7 that God had actually instructed them to commit these nations and their gods to destruction. And if they didn't commit these nations and their gods to destruction, they would be corrupted by them, and then they would face God's wrath as God's enemy.

Now think about the irony here. God makes it abundantly clear. We just read it. It's abundantly clear to the nation. Do this to these people, my enemies in Canaan and the surrounding regions.

But if you don't obey me, you're going to be corrupted, you're going to worship their gods, and then you will then be my enemy. And face my wrath.

That's Deuteronomy 7. That's the warning of it. Now we get to Judges chapter 10, and we're reminded that they did not obey the Lord. This is near total spiritual corruption now.

[2 : 21] And it's time for them to face the threat of God's promised wrath. The instruments of God's wrath in this particular case includes two foreign enemies that are going to continue to tyrannize the nation through the final two judge cycles.

Now this is hard to believe, but as far as the judge cycles are concerned, there's only two major judges left in our study. There's Jephthah, which Lord willing we'll get to next week. And then there's Samson, that Lord willing we'll get to three weeks from today.

Well, the Ammonites, they came at Israel from the east. And they oppressed and were told in this text for 18 years. They progressively worked their way from the people east of the Jordan to where eventually they crossed the Jordan River.

And now they're even assaulting some of the bigger tribes like Judah and Ephraim and Benjamin, who typically falls under the protection of Judah because they're so close.

So this is a serious enemy. They're coming from the east side. And then we're going to see God deliver them, or at least hold back the misery of Israel to some extent, through what Jephthah does, through his use of Jephthah in the next chapter.

[3 : 37] But then there's the Philistines. The Philistines are coming from the west side. And while the Ammonites are coming on this side, the Philistines are coming on this side.

And though God uses Samson for a time to be something of an obstacle to them, the Philistines never are subdued until King David.

So God uses Jephthah, and he uses Samson to ease Israel's misery. But there will be no more rest for the land until God's king sits on the throne.

Israel's sins have come home to roost. And God is pleased at this point, as we read, for the consequences of their sin to run their course.

Well, just as Israel's idolatry is more pronounced in this text, so is their cry for help. The other narratives state simply that the people cried to the Lord for help, but only this passage in all of the book of Judges describes the nature and the content of their cry to the Lord.

[4 : 51] And on the surface, it's a welcome change, isn't it? We haven't seen this before with Israel. It's a welcome change to read that they are acknowledging their sins, that they're actually performing works of repentance by putting away the foreign gods.

We haven't seen them do that yet. But then God's response to that action is surprising, at least, and utterly offensive at most.

Israel seems to have done everything they were supposed to do. They confessed their sin. They put away their gods. They served the Lord. And yet God declares that He would not save them any longer. His patience had clearly worn thin.

But is His response to Israel just? Is it right? Is it fair? Didn't their prayers and their works of repentance merit the Lord's mercy?

[6 : 02] And if not, how can we trust that He'll be merciful to us when we put away our idols, when we cry out for His help?

These are questions that are born from this text, and they're questions that I want you to consider as we study it together this morning. There's two evident truths from this text about God's mercy that are helpfully clarified for us.

The first one is this. You cannot earn God's mercy. You cannot earn God's mercy. Look again at verse 10.

The people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, We have sinned against you because we have forsaken our God and have served the bells. And the Lord said to the people of Israel, Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and the Philistines, the Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites, which is probably a reference to Midian and the army and the coalition of the Midianites that Gideon fought against.

And you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods, and I won't save you anymore. Go, cry out to those gods, the ones that you have chosen.

[7 : 24] Let them save you in your time of distress. And the people of Israel said to the Lord, We have sinned. Do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day.

So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. Now the question regarding Israel's show of repentance is whether or not it was genuine.

Did they mean it? And unfortunately, we can't know that on our own. We can't know the truth of what's in someone's heart.

We only have the ability to discern what we can physically see and physically hear. And from what we can see in this text, the people did exactly what we would expect from someone who was seeking to receive salvation from God.

They confess their sins, and they put away their foreign gods, and they turn to proper worship. Isn't that what we say we're supposed to do? If there was a sinner and an idolater who comes into our church today, and they were asking questions about how to receive salvation from God, wouldn't we say, Confess your sin?

[8 : 37] Believe him? Turn to him? Worship him? The problem is the external displays of repentance do not always issue from a true heart of repentance.

This is why it's entirely possible, and even common, for those who at one point make a credible profession of faith to somewhere along the way abandon the gospel, and as Paul has said in 1 Timothy in your readings this week have made shipwreck of that faith.

Trusted church leaders, beloved companions in the church can reveal themselves over time to be counterfeit Christians and wolves who devour the flock.

And when those tragic moments inevitably come for all of us, it's easy to feel like you should have seen it sooner. Don't we usually give ourselves a hard time in those moments?

How could this happen? How could we be so deceived? How could we have trusted someone who surely was so wicked in their heart? But we can only see what we can see.

[9 : 51] We can only hear the profession the way that we hear it. We will never be able to peer inside the recesses of an individual's heart. which is also why God commands that we leave the judgment to Him.

He's given us parameters for discerning what may or may not be true of a person, but He has not authorized us to take His place as their judge.

For example, God has given the church the keys to the kingdom. That's Matthew 16 and Matthew 19, or excuse me, Matthew 18.

And He has authorized the church to baptize someone who has a credible profession of faith.

That's what it means to have the keys of the kingdom. We have the gospel message.

We preach the gospel message and then we discern people's profession of faith on the basis of that gospel message. and their willingness to turn and live a life that is in accord with that gospel message.

[10:57] And then the church says, by the authority of God and the authority of Christ, passed down from the apostles. The church looks at an individual and says, yes, your profession of faith is credible.

Your life seems to match it. We will baptize you because that's what we can see of your life. That's what we can hear of your life. But God has not authorized us to condemn someone on the basis of human standards like political affiliation, healthcare choices, whether or not they got the job or didn't get the job, disagreements on secondary and tertiary doctrines.

And yet we still feel the temptation so often, don't we, to depart from the gospel and start to look at things that are secondary to it and make our judgments on someone's validity of their salvation, not on the basis of their profession of faith, but on the basis of whether or not they match up with me in the most common denominator ways that are in addition to the gospel.

God has not authorized us to do that. In the final judgment, we need to acknowledge that there very well may be some people that we baptized who are condemned.

And there will also be some people that we vehemently judged who are welcomed by their Savior. Why? Because we can only see what we can see.

[12:33] And we can only hear what we can hear. And we cannot see an individual's heart. So, how can we discern the sincerity of Israel's displays of repentance here?

We can. But there is more to this text than what Israel did. We also have God's response who does know our hearts, who knows what's true of each and every one of us.

And he judged Israel's repentance as inauthentic. That's why we come to that conclusion. Look at verse 11 again.

Look at the words that the Lord says to them. The Lord said to the people of Israel, did I not save you from the Egyptians and Amorites and Ammonites and Philistines and Sidonians and Amalekites and Mayanites?

In other words, we've been through this before. Yet you have forsaken me and you've served their gods and I will not save you now.

[13:37] And you can hear the sarcasm in God's voice here. Go and cry out to the gods that you actually want to serve. Let them deliver you. God could see what was true of the Israelites' treacherous hearts.

But even we can see that the people had falsified repentance many times before. God's response, it shows that Israel was not a prodigal son who was coming to their senses and returning home.

That is not the picture here. They're more like the adulterous spouse seeking security and affection from her husband only until she finds someone else to take as her own.

They're like the addict who knows that one friend or family member who will always buy the lies and help them in a pinch until they get their next score.

They're like that professing Christian who Sunday after Sunday cries to God to withhold the consequences of the sin that they intend to continue in the very next week.

[14:47] That's the picture of Israel. Over and over Israel presumed upon the grace of God believing that following a formula of prayer and penitence would save them just long enough to make them feel comfortable to go back to what they truly wanted to do.

And God saw through the lies. And he in essence says you made your bed now you got to sleep in it. Julie's obviously great with child. Last week she said it's time that we actually start to prepare for this child.

And so we went into Charlie's room and we began to put the crib together and we got about halfway through the crib and I'm elbow deep in nuts and bolts and screwdrivers and there was something about the crib that she didn't like.

And I said Julie we've made our bed. Charlie's going to have to sleep in it. It's essentially what God's saying right?

You made your bed you got to sleep in it. Cry out to the gods that you actually love and serve. See if they'll save you.

[16:00] And then Israel's final cry in verse 15. It exposes their insincerity even further. Look at verse 15. And the people of Israel said to the Lord we have sinned due to us whatever seems good to you.

except for right now. Only save us right now. They didn't even see their own contradiction. Kill us later if you want but let us live now because of what we've just done.

Didn't we do what we were supposed to do God? Didn't we follow the formula? Didn't we say the prayers? Didn't we put the gods in the trash? Didn't we go back to the temple? We did the stuff God.

At least save us now and kill us later. Do you see the contradiction in what they're doing? They viewed repentance as a means of manipulating God to get them out of a jam.

They didn't trust God. They didn't love God. They just assumed that some moral adjustments would earn his mercy. That by following this formula they would handcuff God and force him to do what they needed him to do in the moment.

[17:12] Daniel Block says their repentance is external only. Theirs is a conversion of convenience. It's not real.

And we must beware lest we face the same disaster of presuming upon God's grace while persisting in sin.

sin. Let me give you another idiom. I don't know if Chris will know this one. We want to have our cake and eat it too. Do you know that one Chris?

Have our cake and eat it too? You know what I mean. We'll tell you later. Here's what it means. We want the life that's offered by sin.

Right? We want the pleasure. We want the satisfaction at least the temporary satisfaction that it brings. We want to live life our way. We want to do our thing.

[18:16] But at the same time we want to experience the security that only comes from God. And we try to have our cake and eat it too. We try to have both of those things. It doesn't work that way.

It's never worked that way. You can't just say a prayer and make a few moral adjustments and expect that God will suddenly be obligated to reward you.

That is not what the Bible teaches. And this is a repeated warning in the book of Hebrews for all who would use confession as a tool to manipulate God and simply escape consequences.

Hear this from Hebrews chapter 10. If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries of God.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much more punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the spirit of grace for we know him who said vengeance is mine I will repay and again the Lord will judge his people.

[19:52] It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God. Do you understand what the warning is there? It's a New Testament component of an Old Testament problem.

Those of us who would try to come up with some formulaic way some set of prayers or some form of action that we can handcuff God to doing what it is that we want while persisting in sin willfully deliberately he says it's like trampling underfoot Jesus Christ it is to profane the blood of the cross the blood of the covenant it is to outrage the spirit of grace and yet so many times we think we can have it both ways that we can go on sinning while also feeling secure under God and the reason is because we don't know God we don't know his holiness we don't stand and tremble before him we're like Israel who over and over and over and over come to the Lord do the formula and expect that

God will just acquiesce to whatever they want look I can't see your heart God can that is terrifying it's terrifying we cannot hide from him and some of you here today you feel pretty comfortable because you're hiding from mom and dad or because you're hiding from pastor Jared or you're hiding from the other people of the!

but here's the truth of it you can hide from us for the rest of your life but you cannot hide your heart from God he sees it all he knows it all and even when you look just like Israel and you cry out and you offer to throw your gods in the trash can God knows what's true in your heart you cannot handcuff him to do anything that you want it is a fearful thing to fall doesn't match what's true of your words you can't fool him or manipulate him and no amount of religious work will ever earn you his mercy because God's mercy can't be earned can't be earned that's the first thing second thing and it gets a little happier okay you can trust that he is merciful you can trust that he's merciful look at the last part of verse 16 and the

Lord became impatient over the misery of Israel he became impatient over the misery of Israel so after the dramatic exchange between the Lord and Israel the end of verse 16 is a bit of a surprise isn't it God is growing impatient with their insincerity which led to his judgment but then we also find that he's growing impatient with their condition which now leaves the door open for his saving grace isn't that wonderful and it's going to take some time in the text as we're working through judges to discover!

[23 : 33] how this grace will be shown in this particular situation but at this point in verse 16 there's at least a glimmer of hope that God will be merciful but the key to this text is understanding what actually moves God to that moment of mercy the potential of his compassion is not linked to anything that Israel did it is rooted in his divine love for his people it's not their repentance that motivates his mercy it is their misery that motivates his mercy do you see it in the text look how he responds or look how the author of judges tells us God became impatient over the misery of Israel why because he loves them consider

Deuteronomy chapter seven again I think I have this one on the screen if you want to follow along the second part of the passage we read notice what God says to them you are a people holy to the Lord your God set apart to God chosen by God the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his what treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth why there's a question assumed in this text now why does God hold Israel to be his treasured possession answer it was not because you were of more number than any of the peoples that the Lord set his love on you and chose you for you were the fewest!

people in other words there was nothing attractive about them so why did he love them it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your father you say why did God love Israel answer because he loved them there wasn't anything about them that's attractive there's not anything about them that motivates his love it's just the fact that he said his affection on them he says I love you because I love you Valentine's Day is coming up how many of you wives would be disappointed if you went to your husband and you said will you tell me why you love me and he just said I love you because I love you because I love you meaning that love can't be changed it's not attached to anything that they are or anything that they've done it is set on them in spite of who they are and what they've done the

Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand he's redeemed you from the house of slavery from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt know therefore that the Lord your God is God the faithful God this is who he is he is he's faithful he keeps covenant he keeps steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations you can trust that God is merciful because that's who he is he's merciful how can we trust that he will be merciful to us when we cry out to salvation not because we deserve his mercy but because he himself is merciful Dale Ralph Davis helps us in this and when he writes our hope does not rest in the sincerity of our repentance but in the intensity of the Lord's compassion repentance is a divine demand but it places its hope in divine grace rather than human sorrow and recognizes that any benefit received is not properly coerced but freely given the sinner's only hope is the astonishing grace of

God nothing more nothing less a proper understanding of repentance the thing that Israel seemed to miss is not that repentance itself causes God's mercy to activate but rather is itself the repentance motivated by a recognition of God's grace in other words we tend to get it backwards our moral adjustments do not produce God's mercy as something earned but when by faith we trust that he is merciful that faith will produce genuine repentance in us do you see the difference God isn't merciful because we repent we repent because God is merciful and ultimately it's the gospel of [29 : 00] Jesus that makes this so clear God did not send his son as a reward for those who do their best and try their hardest he sent his son to die in our place so that his true love and grace and mercy might be put on display for us to see and as we look on that grace and mercy then it would

lead us and motivate us to turn from sin and trust in Jesus Christ apart from our works apart from our religious formulas!

apart from our prayers it's the glory of the gospel that teaches us this and it's all over the Bible we love him because he first loved us Romans 5 while we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly and then Paul muses on that for just a moment and he says for scarcely will someone die for a righteous person though perhaps for a good person one would dare to die but God shows his love he commends his love he displays his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us he didn't wait for us to get our act together and say okay I'll send Jesus to get you out of the jam no he sends

Jesus so that we would get our act together through Christ since therefore we have now been justified by his blood much more shall we be saved by him from his wrath for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by your hope of salvation does not rest on religious commitments it rests on the boundless grace of God in Christ Jesus and we trust God's mercy because he's proven it through Jesus and he says that anyone who comes to Jesus in faith will receive that mercy leading to a heart of repentance this text is one of many throughout the scriptures that holds in tension God's severity and God's kindness and we have to be careful with that because imagine you've got a string that's what that analogy refers to right you've got a string and you've got two balls on that string and if you start to emphasize this one over here you lose this one or if you start to emphasize this one so imagine we've got God's severity and we've got God's kindness and they're held in tension with one another and we don't want to lose that tension because the Bible shows that tension right sometimes we tend to lean toward God's severity so much we might would say this is legalism or Phariseeism that we actually lose God's kindness sometimes we lean so far to the other side to God's kindness and his grace and his love let's say in an extreme version this would be antinomianism or this would be the free grace movement that just denies any form of repentance then we lose God's severity and his judgment and his justice and his holiness we have to hold the two intention that's what the Bible does his mercy on one side his justice on the other in this text it was just it was holy it was right for

God to respond to Israel's sin as he did it was right it was also right for him to be mercifully kind to deliver them anyways which is what he's ultimately going to do the tension courses through the Bible but it ultimately culminates at the cross doesn't it Jesus the sinless one took God's justice on himself so that through him we could rightfully receive God's mercy and we talk about this all the time when we come to Christ it's not as if God turns a blind eye to our sins that's not what happens he's holy justice must be served every single sin will be paid for it's not that he turns a blind eye to our sin it's that he punishes

[33 : 53] Christ instead of us for that sin the justice is poured out on Christ so that his mercy might rightfully be given to us that's not a mercy that can be earned that's a mercy that was purchased by blood and it isn't rewarded to those who get their lives together or at least pretend to it's received by those who recognize that they can't get their lives together that they can't atone for their sin apart from eternal hell and they trust wholly in the person and work of Jesus and the bottom line is when we come to this text and we see Israel's folly we must learn that we can't play games with God nor do we need to play games with

God we don't have to because he's merciful and we can trust his mercy and when you begin to understand that mercy it will make you want to live for him it will make you want to turn away from the gods in your life whatever they may be and be faithful