

JUDGES Half Heated Discipleship

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[0 : 00] Now I think certainly our society, but Christians generally have a problem with the book of Judges. It is so earthly, so puzzling, so primitive, so violent.

Judges could be described as despicable people doing deplorable things. That's a summary of the book of Judges, despicable people doing deplorable things.

It records a history of murder, assassination and massacres, of immorality, lawlessness and unfaithfulness. And one way to deal with embarrassing books of the Bible is simply to ignore it.

Just, you know, let's just preach on the Gospels or something like that. But it's difficult to do with Judges because it contains some of the Bible's most recognisable leaders and most flawed people.

Samson, Gideon, Deborah. I mean, these are the great Sunday school stories. They revolve around these characters.

[1 : 20] And so with characters who are so colorful and so flawed and so dramatic, it is easy, I think, to miss the actual intention of the book of Judges and just pluck the characters out and just do a character study instead.

And totally miss the point of Judges. Judges. This book is revelation from God about God.

That's what it is. And it is pure gospel. Pure gospel. Judges is about the God of mercy and long-suffering patience who continually works in and through and for his people.

And what's more, he does it despite the constant resistance of God's people against his purposes. God relentlessly offers his grace to people who neither deserve it nor seek it and don't even appreciate it when they're being saved by it.

List all the heroes you like in the book of Judges, but there is only one. And that's God himself. He is the only hero in this book.

[2 : 47] It is God who consistently rescues Israel from the stupidity of their decisions and the mess that they have created for themselves.

The 12 human judges who we'll start to look at next week, or the saviors in this book, point us to the great saviour.

Through all of their flaws and their strengths, we see our need for our saviour. And so we need to read this book with a great deal of humility.

So the first thing we need to do is fit judges in the Bible. Where does it fit?

Where does it fit in God's unfolding plan of salvation? God has rescued his people from Egypt. He's promised them that he's taking them to the promised land.

[3 : 50] And the very first verse of this book and the last verse puts it within its historical setting. It covers the period from the death of Joshua and the end of the exodus from Egypt period to, at the end of the book, the very last phrase says, very last sentence, is that in those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did as they saw fit in their own eyes.

And so it's the period between the leadership of Moses and Joshua to David and Solomon.

It's a period of something like 200 to 400 years. And the question at the very first verse of Judges really is asking the question, well, who's going to lead us now?

Who's our leader now? Joshua's dead. Anyone? Anyone? Anyone want to lead? Anyone? Anyone?

What we are introduced to in the verses of Judges section by section is 12 judges, 12 rulers.

[5 : 28] They are not leaders per se, but rescuers. They are redeemers and saviors. They're the people that God raises up to pull his people once again out of oppression and slavery because of their disobedience.

And as we look into the very first verses, there is one vital lesson that we learn. In all of those verses I just read, there is one vital lesson.

One main point. It's not so much a list of Palestinian places that aren't on the tourist route nowadays.

There's much more to it than that. And to understand this lesson that we've just read out, we need to effectively look over our shoulders to understand what Judges 1 is all about.

We're going to look back. Which is what, in fact, the very first verse of Judges does for us. It encourages us to look back.

[6 : 37] It says, after the death of Joshua. Joshua was one of only two men. One of only two men. Two men. In the whole generation that had been rescued from Egypt who had remained faithful in trusting God's promises to bring his people from Egypt into the promised land.

Two men. That's it. And the book of Joshua, one book before Judges, charts God's work in and through his people to keep his promises to them, to take them to the promised land.

To bring them into the land, to defeat their enemies and to begin to give them blessing and rest in their new home. It teaches us that because God always keeps his promises, God's people can bravely obey him and worship him.

And this is the book. Joshua is the book that provides the background for the book of Judges. In fact, it is the book that provides the yardstick, if you like.

[7 : 49] The measuring tool by which we measure the progress and the success of the taking of the promised land in the book of Judges.

So let's, you've got your Bibles in front of you, but let's turn back to the beginning of Joshua to see what God called his people to do.

What is his specific mission for his people having rescued them out of slavery in Egypt? So Joshua, this is God speaking to Joshua as he takes up the reins as the leader of God's people after the death of Moses.

So Joshua chapter 1, verse 5 to start with, As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous because you will lead these people to inherit the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.

[8 : 54] Be strong, very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.

Do not turn from it to the right or to the left that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this book of the law always on your lips.

Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

So in verses 7 and 8, God reminds Israel that their military advances into the promised land will be accompanied by a close and humble and obedient walk with God.

[10 : 02] Victory and rest in the promised land will come because they are dependent and obedient people of faith in the promises of God.

They will not achieve victory and rest for themselves. And so the book of Joshua records the beginning of the campaign to take the promised land.

And the purpose for driving out the Canaanites to conquer the promised land, it was not vengeance. It was not economic gain, but it was spiritual.

It wasn't vengeance. It wasn't for economic gain, which is why they were not to take any plunder. They weren't to have any slaves.

They weren't to enslave the people. They are to be removed so that Israel didn't fall under the influence of their gods.

[11 : 17] By the time we get to the end of Joshua's life, there is still so much more to be done. You can see that at the end of the book of Joshua. Much of the land still needs to be settled. And God's call on his people, both then and now, is to combine a trust in his promises with courage, with bravery, with risk.

True Christian discipleship is risk-taking and it is radical because true disciples rely on God to keep his promises to bless them and not on their own instincts, not on their own plans, not on their own insurance policies.

And so with the mission and the purpose of God clear for his people, we are now ready to launch into Judges chapter 1 and see how they go at trusting in the promises of God to be with them and to give them victory and rest.

And we arrive at verse 3 and Judah failed already. Who's to go up first? Judah. What did Judah do?

Turn to the Simeonites. Hey guys, you guys want to come with us? It would be a whole lot easier taking the land if we did it together. Now that makes sense from a military perspective.

[12 : 45] But they didn't trust God for the victory. And yet despite this, verse 4, God graciously grants them victory in spite of their disobedience.

Judah continues to take its inheritance in verses 8 to 11 and then again in verses 17 to 18. And in between those victories, there's this little story in verses 12 to 16, which we get a glimpse.

In amongst all of this, there is a glimpse of one faithful, obedient family. Caleb's family. Surprise, surprise.

And what they do here is they demonstrate the covenant faithfulness and courageous obedience to God that all Israel should have.

Caleb, Othniel, who will be introduced to soon, and in particular Aksar, reveal wholehearted discipleship.

[13 : 51] They believe in the promises of God and keep grasping for more. And they are a rebuke.

This woman here is a rebuke. Caleb's daughter is a rebuke to all of Israel. Now if the chapter ended in verse 18, you would kind of go, it's mostly encouraging, kind of.

You know, until you get to verse 19. The Lord was with the men of Judah, but they were unable to drive the people from the plains because they had chariots fitted with iron.

Now if you did not know what God had said to his people through Joshua, the book of Joshua, there would be plausible reasons why the Israelites didn't succeed in their military campaign.

We don't have chariots. They've got chariots. We've got guns. They've got tanks. There's a reason for this. So why not just be sensible about it?

[15 : 08] Why not just be sensible about this and compromise and negotiate a treaty? It was half-hearted obedience.

And unfortunately, it was contagious. When you read through the rest of chapter 1, it kind of reads like a collection of press releases from Israel with their advancement, each tribe's advancement into the land, and their own spin on how they're going with it.

Benjamin fails to dislodge the Jebusites in verse 21. The tribe of Judah makes a covenant with a Canaanite in verses 22 to 26.

Can you see the failures when you read Joshua and what they've done here? Manasseh fails to drive out various inhabitants, but they become strong enough eventually to exploit them as forced labor.

In verses 27 and 28, Ephraim allows Canaanites to live among them in verse 29. Zebulun opts for forced labor in verse 30. Asher doesn't simply allow the Canaanites to live amongst them.

[16 : 28] They choose to live amongst the Canaanites in verses 31 and 32, as does Naphtali in verse 33. Dan advances nowhere.

It says they become confined to the hill country in verse 34. And the slap in the face here, it says in verses 35 and 36, that the Amorites have got more tenacity, more bravery than God's own people.

Chapter 1 gives us the facts.

But at the beginning of chapter 2, what happens is we get heaven's explanation. It starts with, the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochum and said, that's a really significant point.

It's easy to miss. This is not just another destination issue. Not just another Palestinian village. Angel happened to be there and thought, oh, I better go over there. In Joshua chapter 5, it was at Gilgal that Israel made a covenant with God.

[17 : 54] We will remain obedient to you and we will exclude all others. This was the place where God had forgiven their sin. He had bound them to himself as his people and entered into relationship with them by grace.

He had motivated, sorry, that covenant was motivated only by his own loving kindness towards his people. And so God's assessment of his people's performance in verse 2 is in fact devastating.

You have disobeyed me. Now Israel disobeyed God through what they had done.

They in fact made a covenant with the people of Canaan despite being told not to. They enforced labor when they're told not to. They cohabited in Canaan when they were told not to.

But Israel also disobeyed God through what they had failed to do. They failed to break down the altars of their gods.

[19 : 11] The purpose of this campaign was to cleanse Canaan of its idols to get rid of every idol god.

Because there is only one god worthy of worship and total allegiance. And the fact that Israel didn't clear out the idols means that they hadn't rejected God as their god.

But they hadn't fully surrendered to him as their god. They hadn't rejected him yet. But they hadn't accepted him either.

They hadn't surrendered to him. One of the big points that we see right through the book of Judges is that this god wants lordship over every area of life.

Either all of life is given to God in grateful, loving, obedience, or none is.

[20 : 20] He doesn't pick and choose. We don't pick and choose. It's either everything or it's nothing. In verse 19 of chapter 1, we read that it says there, the Israelites were unable to drive out the people from the plains because of the iron chariots.

That's their take. That's their take on this issue. We couldn't do it. We just could not do it. God's assessment in chapter 2, verse 2, is not that you could not do it, but that you would not do it.

You chose disobedience. It's always really, really helpful for us to ask ourselves the question, where in my life am I saying, I can't do it, God?

But God is saying to us, actually, you won't do it. It's true to say you won't do it. It's not that you can't do it.

It's that you won't do it. Israel thought they had good reasons not to obey, but God called them flimsy excuses. And God's assessment of Israel is based on his promises.

[21 : 53] So here's one promise. Here's one promise from 1 Corinthians 10, verse 13. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

How about that promise? God will never put us into a position where we cannot obey him. He will never, ever, ever put us in a position where we cannot obey him.

There is never, ever an I can't moment in our lives. Ever. And this is a very searching and threatening passage to apply to our lives.

Because there may be all sorts of things in our lives that we think that we are unable to do, but which we actually are refusing to do.

We're refusing to do it. So here's just a couple. Ever said, I just cannot forgive this or that.

[23 : 10] I just cannot forgive him or her. But God commands forgiveness in Matthew 18, 35. Which means we, in fact, we can, in fact, determine to put aside anger, to soften our hearts with the knowledge of the gospel of grace and act as though the wrong had never happened.

When we don't forgive, we choose not to forgive. It's not that we can't. It's that we won't. When we say we can't, we mean we won't.

We want to hang on to our anger. We want to hang on to our bitterness and our desire to get even. All under the excuse of, oh, you just don't understand how bad I've been treated.

What about this one? Ever said, I can't tell them the truth. It would just destroy them. God tells us in Ephesians 4, 15 and Ephesians 4, 25 to speak the truth in love.

And more often than not, it is because of our cowardice or our pride that we say, I can't. It's our cowardice or our pride where we say, I can't.

[24 : 36] What we really mean is that if I were to tell them the truth, then they just might not like me anymore. What about this one?

Ever said, I just cannot give a minimum of a tenth of my income to Christian ministry. I just can't do that.

You don't understand my situation. I just can't do that. And yet God commands it. He says, in fact, that we rob him when we don't. God is the one who's made clear promises to give us everything we need.

He cares for us more than the sparrows. When we say we can't, we mean I won't because I don't trust that he will.

What about this one? I can't resist doing this thing even though I know it's wrong. I think we need to understand, we're going to see it very soon here in a moment in this text, that sin has addictive power over our lives.

[26 : 02] It is true that we may not be able to resist the temptation through our own sheer willpower, but then again, Israel was not meant to take the promised land under their own sheer willpower.

We can, however, get help. We can admit our problem. We can humble ourselves. We can cry out to God for mercy and we can seek transformation through him and become accountable to others.

1 Corinthians 10 tells me that God always provides a way out. No sin is inevitable.

No sin is irresistible. And if we don't resist, it's likely we would simply rather keep on sinning and excusing it with a, I can't.

When what God says here, it's actually, I won't. I refuse. Now, already in this book, we are introduced to one of the major tensions, one of the major tensions of the book of Judges, which goes right through.

[27 : 25] God is holy. God is just. He cannot tolerate or live with or bless evil sin in any way whatsoever. And God is also loving and he is faithful and he cannot tolerate the loss of people he has committed himself to.

So what does he do? What does he do with these sinful people that he cannot tolerate but he's committed to? And this is a tremendous and almost seemingly irresolvable tension in the book of Judges.

Will God finally give up? on his people. Right? I've had enough. Covenant reversal. Rip it up. Done with you. Or will he finally give in to his people? Oh, whatever.

You know, kid nags you. No, no, no, no, no. Oh, whatever. Yes. Is God just going to do that? And the tension here is only resolved outside of the book of Judges centuries later.

God takes decisive action to resolve it in himself. He takes the tension, resolves it in himself with the crucifixion of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 42] Our sin was credited to Jesus. Jesus takes our sin so that his righteous life might be credited to us. God's anger was poured out on Jesus.

Jesus satisfies both justice because sin was punished and loving faithfulness since God is now able to live and accept us on the merits of the Lord Jesus alone.

And so the cross of Christ is the only way the tension of Judges can possibly be resolved. Without the good news of Jesus Christ, we will always either be complacent with our sin and take his mercy for granted or we will live under the burden of guilt, shame and fear because we don't know that his mercy covers it.

We will go on one of those two directions. Either liberalism and license and go, well, God's in the business of forgiveness. That's his job so keep on sitting and give him a job to do.

Or burden of guilt that God could not possibly ever forgive a sinner like me. With the good news of the gospel, we are able to live forgiven, obedient lives despite also living sinful, disobedient lives.

[30 : 10] You see, the cross is where we find the freedom to accept ourselves without being proud and to challenge ourselves without being crushed. God resolves the tension in the death and resurrection of Jesus and it is the power and the motivation to fully commit ourselves to God.

God. You see, Israel's failure to obey, our failure to obey is a failure to remember. Our God is the God who rescues.

He's the one who brought them out of slavery, out of Egypt. He is the God who remains faithful to them right through the wilderness and he said, I will never break my covenant with you.

And so the core issue of our won't, of our disobedience is essentially a failure to remember who he is and who he has made us to be in him.

And the reverse is also true. As long as we remember who he is and what he's done for us in the Lord Jesus, as much as that becomes the defining vision of our lives, we will serve him wholeheartedly, radically and joyfully.

[31 : 47] And Israel failed to do this and the consequences were clear and they were catastrophic. The idols of Canaan would ensnare them.

Have a look in chapter 2, Judges 2 verse 3. This is God's pronouncement on his people. I will not drive them out before you.

They will become traps for you and their gods will become snares to you. Oh, what a tragedy.

I have rescued you from slavery and now you have chosen slavery. It's a great description here of what idolatry is and what idolatry does.

Idolatry, according to the Bible, is taking a good aspect of creation. It could be marriage, days on the beach, business, family, money, and turning it into the ultimate source of our security, our comfort, our identity, our power.

[32 : 56] And these idols are what are called thorns. When you make something good into the ultimate, it will make you miserable.

it will make you miserable. I've got a splinter at the moment in the bottom of my foot and I've been trying to get it out for some time, which is very difficult to do when it's at the bottom of your foot and you can't quite get there.

And I really don't want anyone else to play with it. That's what a thorn does and every moment I know it's there and it makes life miserable.

If our children are our idols, when their lives are troubled, we lose our joy. And even when their lives might become troubled, which in fact is all the time, we will worry and we will lose our joy.

Idols are snares, they trap us, they blind us, they enslave us, and it gets to the point where we just have to have it. We cannot say no to it, become addicted to it.

[34 : 12] And this is why so many people work so hard and they sacrifice their family, their friendships, their health at the altar of a career or give themselves to certain relationships that are so destructive.

Because a good thing has become the ultimate. The more we pursue half-hearted discipleship, the more ensnared we become, the more miserable we become, the more unstable we become.

That's what I think it means when James says a double-minded person is unstable in all that they do. They've got a foot in both camps. Verses 4 and 5 I think is helpful.

We see less of it as judges progress, but the people hear the word of God and they weep, they weep and they offer sacrifices. There's a picture here of genuine repentance.

Tragically, repentance decreases as the storyline progresses. Heed that as a warning, friends. As the storyline progresses, repentance decreases.

[35 : 26] Our response to God's accusing word here should be more than wet eyes. It is good to remove to tears, but it is much better to be moved to repentance.

Judges shows us that spiritual decline is inevitable for everyone and spiritual renewal then becomes the continual need for everyone.

Decline is inevitable, renewal is a continual need. God wants to produce in us good grief. Good grief. Joel 2 verses 12 to 13, return to me with all of your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning and tear open your heart, not your garments.

can I plead with you to tear open your heart in the coming weeks as we study judges, repent of half-hearted discipleship.

To be disciple of Jesus means we are under his discipline. Search your heart and ask whether he's committed to following God rather than the idols of our society and our neighbours. Are there any sins that you're particularly struggling with at the moment?

[36 : 46] How are you going at the moment, avoiding sexual immorality? What about gossip, slander, incessant criticism? Are your words building up? Are they tearing down?

Are you acknowledging error, seeking reconciliation? Are you confessing sin? Are you seeing sin in others more readily than you see it in yourself? Do you get angry or depressed when someone points out a flaw to you?

Has your commitment to church, to your church family wavered so now it's three out of four or two out of four or one out of four? Have you just decided for the first time in a while just not to join up to a community group this time?

What's your prayer life like right now? What have you been mostly praying for? God help me do this. God provide for that.

Do you have a global picture in God's glory, surrendering, confession? What has God been teaching you through his word lately? Have you felt your passion stirred in personal or corporate worship lately?

[38 : 02] Or is it just criticism? criticism? I don't give a rip whether you can sing the songs.

Are you trying? Have you been able to control spending and your saving habits?

Have you been able to control both your spending habits and your saving habits so that you become more generous? are there areas of your life where you have made big decisions but haven't consulted God or mature Christians for wisdom and God's will?

Are you making decisions for relationship with Jesus or making decisions against relationship with Jesus? Maybe you haven't rejected him but you haven't fully surrendered to him either.

Tear open your hearts to God with weeping and mourning and repentance. our sins. Thank you. Missing and glory and going to be to be ourselves unknown AH here.

[39 : 17] If you're figuring out everything