

“Generation Degeneration”

Judges 2:6 -23

May 15, 2016

Scripture Reading: **Judges 2:6-23**

Prayer

AS we come to Judges 2:6 and following this morning, we come upon the second introduction to the book of Judges. A couple weeks ago we got a sneak preview through chapter one as a historical introduction to the book. Today we venture into chapter two which lays out the general pattern we see repeated throughout Judges. Chapter 2 functions as an interpretive framework/lens, to give us God’s perspective on how we should understand Judges.

What is laid out for us in chapter 2 is the general storyline or survey of what takes place in 7 repeated cycles throughout the book of Judges. You’ll remember from a couple weeks ago that the cycle goes something like this:

1. **Rebellion:** God’s people rebel against him by breaking the covenant to serve idols, and provoking God to anger.
2. **Judgment:** God disciplines His people by subjecting them to their enemies.
3. **“Repentance:”** The people cry out to the Lord in their distress.
4. **Deliverance:** God, in His mercy, raises up a deliverer (Judge) to rescue His people.

Prelude to Apostasy

Before we unpack this cycle in chapter 2, let me remind you of where this whole landslide toward apostasy began in vs. 10. (Apostasy – to reject or abandon one’s relationship with God). Vs 10: “...there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, not yet the work which He had done for Israel.” As Pastor Nick showed us last week, its not that they didn’t know about God and what He had done, but they failed to understand the significance of what He had done and they failed to walk by

faith—failed to *love* the truth. This grave danger is very possible today as well. One generation may sincerely follow the Lord only to be followed by a generation that cares little for the things of God. “Not that they formally repudiate everything. It’s just that they will know about the Lord rather than know the Lord.” They may even go to church, but “there is not fire in their ‘faith,’ no warmth in love [for the things of God], no joy [that rises] from enduring hope.”¹ The surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord doesn’t resonate with them.² Its not enough for our children to mimic our faith—they need to be born again by the Spirit of God that produces true, genuine conversion and results in them not only knowing the truth, but loving and living the truth.

The most urgent need in any parent’s life is to pray for spiritual rebirth as they shepherd their kids toward the gospel.

Now notice what happens in vs. 11 in the absence of knowing the Lord: “Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.” Its not a coincidence that this vacuum of true godliness becomes a breeding ground for idolatry. People are worshippers by their very nature. God created with a necessary capacity to worship. The question is not, “will we worship?” The question is, “who or what will we worship?” Apart from knowing the Lord and walking in His truth, we are left to our sin-corrupted culture as the only means of interpreting life. Either we will worship the true God of heaven, or we will worship the false gods of this world.

This brings us to the first phase of the cycle in Judges...

1. **God’s people rebel against him by breaking the covenant to serve idols, and provoking God to anger.** [vs. 11-13]

Vs. 11 contains key a phrase for the historical books of Judges, Kings, and Chronicles: “Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.” When we read through the accounts of the kings, every king is assessed in one of two ways. Either he did right in the sight of the Lord or he did evil in the sight of the Lord. In

¹ Dale Ralph Davis. *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. P. 36.

² Phil 3:8

the end, the only factor that really matters in a person's life is God's assessment of him which is based on God's perspective, not man's. In the book of Judges 7 times we'll see this phrase as a signal of Israel's apostasy. What is the evil in this context? In vs. 12, Israel's evil is that she rejected and abandoned the Lord God of heaven to bow down to the false god of Baal.

Vs. 12 reminds us that they forsook the very God who brought them out of Egypt. Don't forget that Israel's deliverance out of Egypt was an immense act of God's grace. Israel was helpless and undeserving of God's rescue, but God out of His rich mercy and faithfulness brought them out of slavery. There is an interesting correlation here between verses 10 and 12. When we lose sight of God's grace, we lose sight of God and any sense of obligation we have toward Him.³ You don't have to bow down to the idol of Baal for this to be the case. In any troubling circumstance, when we lose sight of God's grace as sufficient for us and we begin to see our circumstances as bigger than God, we have already lost sight of God's character as the Almighty, all-wise, gracious Creator and Redeemer. And suddenly we are miles away from grasping our responsibility to walk by faith, to trust God, to honor Him with our obedience regardless of our circumstances.

2. God disciplines His people by subjecting them to their enemies.

[14-15]

Life principle: Idolatry always leads to bondage. Whatever you serve as your god will ultimately control you.

Notice the strong language in vs. 14 & 15:

- The anger of the Lord burned against Israel (fury)
- He gave them into the hands of plunderers (not allowed)
- He sold them into the hands of enemies (like slaves) so that they could no longer stand
- Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil

³ Daniel Block. The New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth. P. 123.

The NAS has the strongest translation here. The hand of the Lord was against them, not just for defeat or calamity or harm, but for evil. Why this translation? There seems to be a play on words here in the original text. The word for evil in vs. 11 is the word *ra*. The Word in vs. 15 is the word *raah* (same root), which can mean evil, misery, distress, or injury. In other words, Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord will give them the consequences of their evil. He will feed them what they have sown. God is not just allowing them to suffer oppression by evil men, He is causing it.

What's going on here? Has God backed out on His promise to be with His people and drive out their enemies? Remember there were two sides to his promise. On the one hand, if they obey the Lord He will fight for them, but He also promised that if they forsake the Lord for other gods, He would stand against them and not drive their enemies out (Deut 7; Josh 23)

Life Principle: *God will fiercely oppose any idolatry in our lives.* Idolatry rouses God's righteous anger. Idolatry sets God against us.

We take this far too lightly. We think, I'm in Christ so God would never be against me, and that's true in the sense that God is for us in Christ. But sometimes being for us means disciplining us for our waywardness. If God is secondary or marginal in your life, you cannot expect the favor of God to rest on you. You cannot expect God's blessing to be generous in your life if He is not supreme.

Deut 6 is essential for us to keep in mind: *"Hear, O Israel! The LORD [Yahweh] is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart..."* In other words, because He is the only One, love Him fully, love Him singularly, love Him as though there is no other.

Because God is a God of covenant faithfulness, His love will not tolerate false gods in our lives. He must oppose them. And He disciplines us out of faithfulness to His covenant of love toward us.

Davis: "Now [this] is the problem with having the God of the bible as our God. To have a God who loves His people is to have a jealous God, and to have a jealous God is to have an intolerant God. 'Love divine' is not soft laxity but blazing intolerance, an absolute claim (cf. Matt 10:37-38). Such is

the God of Israel whose jealous love makes Him faithful in His anger toward you.⁴

Life Principle: God will be faithful to His promise to discipline His wayward children.

If God was faithful to discipline His people under the Old Covenant, how much more might we expect His faithful chastisement under the New eternal Covenant in Christ. This is why Hebrews 12 says, “Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord or faint when you are reprovved by Him. For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines.”

The third phase that we see repeatedly throughout the book of Judges is that ...

3. The people cry out to the Lord in their distress.

For example, we see this in chapter 3.

- Vs. 7: “Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals...”
- Vs. 8: “Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, so He sold them into the hands [of their enemies].”
- **Vs. 9: “When the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer...”**

That’s how the pattern works through Judges, except in chapter 2. Here in this general survey in chapter 2 we run into a problem. This 3rd phase is left out. Look what happens. We go right from vs. 15 where God is against them to cause them severe distress, to vs. 16 which says, “then the Lord raised up Judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.”

So God oppresses them with their enemies, and God raises up Judges to deliver them from their enemies. We would never leave the story like that. We would call for the editor to fix it. So what’s going on here? Some say, well we should just assume that Israel’s cry of repentance is implied here since we see it repeatedly in the following chapters. But I think Israel’s cry of repentance is missing in chapter 2 for two reasons: 1) to emphasize that the primary cause for Israel’s deliverance was not so much her repentance as it was God’s mercy and faithfulness to His promise. 2) We will discover

⁴ Davis, p. 38.

throughout the book of Judges that Israel’s repentance was never really very good. It was shallow and short-lived. And so the text jumps right from God’s discipline in phase 2 to phase 4...

4. God, in His mercy, raises up deliverers (Judges) to rescue His people. [16-19]

There are a couple of life principles here that we would do well to take note of. The most obvious is that...

Life principle: *God, in His mercy, provides opportunities for us to be delivered from the bondage of our sin.* But how we respond to His mercy will determine the ultimate trajectory of our lives.

1 Cor 10:13 – “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”

Notice here, that God will provide the way of escape, but we just take it. Yet the real test is not just in the heat of the moment, but when the crisis passes, will we remain genuine in our repentance? The sad reality is that Israel not only turned back to their idolatrous ways quickly (vs. 17), but they also became progressively corrupt each time they fell back into their stubborn sinful ways (vs. 19).

Life principle: A lack of lasting, genuine repentance will result in a further hardening of heart that regresses further from the Lord and His grace.

What we will see throughout the book of Judges is that with every cycle of sin, the rebellion gets worse, the oppression gets heavier, the repentance is less heartfelt, the Judges themselves more flawed, and the “revivals” grow increasingly weaker.⁵

If there’s one thing we should learn from Judges, it’s that sin is a power. Sin is not merely a synonym for bad choices (though we always make bad choices when we sin). It is a power at work within in us—a power that holds us in its grip—a power that must be contented with. This is what Paul meant in Romans 3:9 when he said that all are “under sin.” In Romans 6, Paul goes

⁵ Tim Keller, *Judges for You*. p. 34.

on to explain that the good news of the gospel is that in Christ we are set free from the slavery of sin (6:6-7).

The only way for us to be set free from sin's progressive enslavement in our lives is to turn to Christ who has the power to break sin's dominion and give us a new heart that is inclined toward God.

Do you feel the pull of idolatry in your life? Are you struggling against the power of sin? It's important to understand that our hearts are by nature worship centers. If we don't worship God with our whole heart, we will worship something else in His place. Keep in mind, that when the Israelites forsook the Lord for other gods, it's not that they put a ban on worshipping Yahweh. They just started worshipping other gods alongside Him, denying His singular supremacy in their lives. In other words, it's possible for us to come to church every week to worship the Lord and yet be worshipping other gods that truly have ultimate dominion over our lives.

An idol is anything we give supreme attention to in a way that competes with or overrides God's proper place of supremacy in our lives. Ask yourself the question, what rules you? What masters you? What matters most to you when it comes to relationships, resources, and decisions?

Let me give you some examples of common idols we might struggle with today:

- Materialism
- Any possession (house, car, boat, piano, chocolate chip cookie, etc.)
- Hobby
- A relationship
- Children (are our lives centered around our children or is our parenting centered around the Lord)
- Career
- Fear or praise of man (driven by self-esteem or peer pressure)
- Personal control over your life or others
- Something you don't have but deeply want (desire to have it controlling you)
- Comfort, ease
- Status, position, power
- Ministry
- Entertainment
- Gadgets
- Addictions are idols by nature

- The need to be right
- Schedule
- Self (wanting all of life to revolve around me)
- Etc.

Idols are not always bad things like addictions. Sometimes they are good things that have taken too high of a priority in our lives and have become the ruling factor rather than being subject to God and His purposes.

So how do you recognize if something has become an idol in your life?

- Begin by recognizing that fallen nature in everyone, including you, is prone to serious idolatry.
- Do you get angry when it gets messed with in your life? Do others pay when they violate it because you go to war over it?
- Does it cause sacrifices in the wrong areas of your life?
- Does it preoccupy you in a way that draws you away from God and His priorities for your life?
- What would other people (especially your spouse and kids) say your life is centered around?
- What does your checkbook reveal about your priorities?
- What most powerfully influences your decisions and relationships?
- Is this thing/relationship a means to pleasing and honoring God or is it competing with God? Does it result in gratitude to God or self-gratification? In other words, is the ultimate purpose of this thing to please and satisfy yourself or is it a means for you to be satisfied in God?

The ultimate test of whether something has become an idol in your life comes down to two questions:

- 1) Am I willing to do whatever God says about this area?
- 2) Am I willing to accept whatever God sends in this area?

We know from the last few verses of Judges 2, that it was because of Israel's idolatry that God allowed some of the Canaanite nations to remain in the land as a test for Israel. Let me conclude with this caution: *All of us have a tendency to minimize idolatry in our lives—especially when we are not feeling its full consequences yet.*

Apparently this was already beginning to happen during Joshua's day, because Joshua's farewell speech in Josh 24 addresses this very matter:

[Josh 24:14-19] Why does Joshua insist that the people will not be able to serve the Lord? Because they have idols in their possession. They are vowing to serve the Lord while clinging to idols in their hands and hearts. We are tempted to do the very same thing today.

In the book of Judges, God's people are a living demonstration of what life is like under sin's dominion. The power of sin enslaves our idol-craving hearts. But praise God, we don't live in the book of Judges. The only one who could possibly break sin's clutches has come. In Christ we have the power to live with single-hearted love and loyalty to God. And He is the only God that can give you grace—the only God that can give you the hope of eternal life.