

Title: Desperate, yet proud
Text: Judges 10.1-11.11
Theme: Halfway repentance brings a halfway salvation
Series: Judges
Prop Stmtnt: Christ is our only hope

Read Text:

I stopped watching news programs many years ago because I dislike arguing and confrontation so much. If the Tigers start giving up runs, I turn off the game. I just want the problems to hurry up and get over. I don't like to talk about them as they happen and I don't like to talk about them after they happen. Now, obviously I have to talk about problems. I have to face problems. I have to tell people bad news at times. It is hard for me and I suspect many of you feel this with me. Therefore, preaching through the book of Judges has been hard, but good. It has been hard to witness and feel the problems compound, layer and therefore become more and more complex, controlling, debilitating and almost hopeless. What adds to the weight of all of this is seeing our own lives in this story and realizing things about ourselves that we need to see but find so hard to admit and really come to grips with. We are preprogrammed and hard wired to instinctively trust in ourselves and distrust God. We think that we know what is best for us. This is on full display by two years of age.

How many two-year olds have you ever known who demonstrate complete faith in and happy submission to parents? *"Oh, mommy, you want me to eat that and do it happily, contentedly, thankfully, and efficiently? Of course I will because you are wise and know what is good and right for me."* That two-year olds declaration of war at just about every meal and bedtime is our natural heart on full display. God, I know what is better for me, but in reality we don't.

So, let me admit this with you. I/we are not as good as we pretend to be. Can you at least acknowledge that? But, I need to push you a little further. I/we are not as good as we think we are. It's not just what we make ourselves to appear to be a little better in front of others, we give ourselves the benefit of the doubt and even when we admit our faults, we still find pride in the fact that we are not the hypocrites who don't even admit their faults, which, ironically is rather hypocritical. However, even that is not the entire story. The story is my heart and your heart, left unassaulted, unchallenged, and unchanged by God's direct intervention means that you and I would die without hope because in my natural condition I am spiritually unresponsive and am incapable of hearing and believing truth. In other words, I/we are completely dependent upon God to rescue us. Unless I realize how deep my need is, I am tempted to settle for a partial savior or a partial solution. That is one of the main messages of Judges. Over and over the people want God to rescue them from their enemies, but their real enemy is their unbelief. Who will rescue them from that or who will keep them rescued?

I. We never stop needing a savior. (1-5)

The story of Judges is the story of failure. There are a few good moments along the way, but for the most part, the story keeps going down. The nights are darker and the air is colder. Like the truck driver who crashed into a bridge support, collapsing the bridge, killing himself, destroying

his truck, the road, the bridge, etc. Abimelech left a mess. You can't do anything to the driver, because he's dead. All you can do is try to clean up the mess the best you can. I think that is what Tola had to do and given the brief description, it sounds like he did. The next guy, Jair was similar. His leadership and that of his boys seemed to have a restraining influence on the people. But, after he was gone, the grief returned and the problems seemed to only get worse.

Years ago, Bill Murray starred in a movie called, Groundhog Day in which he was trapped in living the same day over and over and over, until he learned a very important lesson. The book of Judges is like that movie except no one is learning the very important lesson and the same madness keeps repeating itself, except its getting worse. This much is clear. We never stop needing to be rescued. We seem to be completely incapable of learning a thing from history and it's not just the history of other people, we seem to be incapable of learning from our own history. Years ago I came up with the phrase, "sin causes brain damage" because over and over I looked in vain for some plausible and reasonable explanation for why otherwise sane looking and sounding people would do some radically sinful and therefore, stunningly stupid things. I knew a guy that I tried to help who would just randomly pick up strangers in his car, or hook up with people in public. I would see him and his face was busted up, he was hurting because a rib was cracked or something rather serious like that had happened. We joke that insanity is doing the exact same thing in the exact same condition and expecting different results. This is not just Judges, this is life and we are in the middle of it. We need someone to rescue us from this and this will always be the story of every single generation and every single person. There are no exceptions.

Remember this diagram? (chart) This shows the cycles of the Judges and how they repeat the same thing, except that it gets worse. This is evident here. And because of that, I think that we can and in fact we ought to question what kind of repentance the people had when they would face the consequences of their sin. Therefore, when 6a says that "*the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD...*" I'm led to conclude that...

II. Halfway repentance brings a halfway salvation. (6a)

Here is what I think the text is telling us. These people do not ever seem to learn. The only time when they appear to be doing better is when the teacher is in the room and is threatening them with detention. But, as soon as the teacher steps into the hall, monkey hour is on, right? Therefore, my conclusion is that these people do not really repent of their sin. They are sorry for the consequences of their sin, but not repentful for the sin itself. Let's unpack that for a second.

Let's say that your engine is a little low on oil. What is the solution? Get some oil and put it in, right? Well, there may be more to it. What if it is low on oil because your valve seals are leaking or your piston rings are worn out and oil is leaking into the gas chamber? (Hey, I watch NASCAR sometimes. I know how to put air in my tires.) Do you see my point? If you do not understand the scope and depth of the problem then you will not grasp the scope and depth of the solution. What we are witnessing in Israel and what we often see in our own lives is halfway repentance that is really not repentance. Halfway repentance or worldly sorrow is being sorry for the problem because it does not grasp how serious the real problem is, and therefore does not grasp the true nature of conversion. God is not an impersonal force like karma, that you invoke

to help you get through some tough patches in life. God is God and he plays for keeps. He does not ask for your surrender. He gloriously, lovingly and sovereignly demands it. But, if you attempt to use him in order to get what you want out of life, he will not play your game, which means, that will be a game that you will lose. Look at these verses.

III. Halfway salvation leads to deeper sin. (5b-9)

A halfway repentance leads to a halfway salvation. Halfway salvation leads to presuming that God will just keep forgiving. I can keep on sinning because God will keep on forgiving. That's his job. But the nature of sin is blinding even as it is corrupting. Sin takes us further and further away from God and further and further away from light, truth, and wholeness, to the point where one looks no different than the broken world. This description of Israel is devastating! They have become completely Canaanized. When you give yourself to sin like this, it profoundly affects you. This is not a switch that you can flip on or off. You lose perspective and you don't know that you have lost perspective.

I talked with a man one time who tried to share the gospel with a girl he hired for sex. Does that make any sense? No! What would you say to a man robbing a bank who tries to invite people to church? This is what sin does. It causes us to lose all perspective! Look at what has become of Israel. They are pursuing every god they can. It's like the addict who is smoking, snorting, inhaling, swallowing, ingesting, and shooting up everything and anything he or she can get ahold of. This complete recklessness. But again, note the religious tone to it. This is not a stumble and fall. This is giving myself to it hard and deliberate. And this is what we start seeing creeping into the story line more and more. The way people talk about and view Yahweh is not all that much different than how they talk about and view other gods. Yahweh is now one of the gods and serving him, is not all that much different than serving other gods. I really get the sense from the text that following God is more like a good luck charm.

This will not go on forever. Something has to give. We see it in how the language of the text becomes more intense. "They forsook the LORD and did not serve him." "The anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel." Think on that. Kindling wood is what gets the fire going and provokes the fire into intensity. Things were getting worse and worse. The LORD sold them (v.7) to the Philistines and the Ammonites. They were his. He owned them. He named them. He chose them. He delivered them. He fed them. He provided for them. Now, he sells them. He treats them similarly to how they were to treat the Canaanites who were in the land before them because the people are on the verge of being completely absorbed by the world around them. Look at verses 7 and 8. Do you see the connection? Be careful what you worship, because you will get and become what you worship. They worshiped the gods of the Philistines and the Ammonites and they got the Philistines and the Ammonites. In the next couple of chapters we will encounter Jephthah and his attempt at saving Israel from the Ammonites. After that we will meet Samson and see his attempt at saving Israel from the Philistines. These guys were probably contemporaries. And they had more in common than just living at the same time. These guys were a mess. And the author of Judges does not try to hide this from the reader. In fact, when you read these chapters, you are supposed to shake your head in frustration. This was the best they could come up with? The saviors we get do not really save.

IV. The saviors we get do not really save. (10.10-11.11)

The rest of our text gives us the backdrop to the sad story of Jephthah. What we see is that since the children of Israel didn't really grasp the depth of their need, they didn't really know what they needed to be saved from. They use some language that sounds good (v.10) but the story line makes it clear that they didn't even really understand what that meant. In fact when they cry out to God and tell him that they have sinned and they have forsaken him and they have served the Baals, God responds with a "too bad, I've heard it all before" attitude. Yep, you guys are in a mess, so go ask your gods to save you – and of course they cannot.

God is merciful, but do not presume upon it. Sinning, because you presume that God will be merciful means that you do not understand mercy. Mercy comes running when we repent. Repentance does not plan to sin. Repentance is seen when we remove the idols, and tear down the altars and remove the stumbling blocks from our life. It means taking a different way home so I do not go past the strip clubs, or the crack house. It means getting rid of my smart phone or credit card if that enables me to stumble. It means breaking off that relationship that I know is wrong, or getting rid of my Netflix account, or social media accounts if that is a source of stumbling. Repentance is taking radical steps because I hate the sin more than I hate the inconvenience.

A. If we don't understand our problem we won't understand the solution. (10.10-16)

God lets them try to solve this on their own. They are oppressed. They are beaten down. They try to change their ways and get rid of their idols and according to verse 16, it almost sounds like they are cleaning up their act. But look at the end of 16. "He became impatient over the misery of Israel." Does that mean that God finally felt sorry for them again and decided to relent and help them out? I don't think so. That phrase literally means that God's soul was short as a result of Israel's response. God was short. The word means frustrated, exasperated and even angry. I take it to mean, too little too late. And since they have made such an enormous mess, they are desperate. In fact they are so desperate, they will call on anyone to save them.

B. The saviors we come up with are a mess. (10.17-11.3)

The Ammonites are gathering together to destroy Israel. The men of Israel are running out of options. They need someone to save them, so they call for Jephthah. Now, I will get into this a bit more next week, but there is a lot of similarity between Jephthah and Gideon. But here we find out that Jephthah's mom was a prostitute. That may have meant that she was a shrine prostitute for one of the idols, or a prostitute as is more commonly understood. Either way, his brothers were not going to share their inheritance with him and they successfully ran him out of the home and the land. Well, apparently, he developed a bit of a reputation that got back to the family in Gilead. This guy ended up in the land of Tob (modern day Syria) and attracted a group of "worthless fellows" who went out with him (11.3). So, what do you suppose "who went out with him" means? It does not take a genius to imagine what a group of worthless fellows do when they go out. They are not going out and planting urban gardens, painting homes and

helping old ladies go to the grocery store to get food for their cats. These guys are thugs, or in the king's English – hooligans and Jephthah is their leader. He is the most worthless of the bunch. Later in the account we find out that he has a house, some property and a daughter. So, we have to assume that his terrorizing ways have not only gained him a reputation, but some success along the way.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch in Israel, the Ammonites gather for battle and Israel responds by gathering forces together, but now the problem becomes obvious and urgent. Who is going to lead? How do we organize this? What is the plan? If any military operation has any chance of success, there has to be a plan, there has to be coordination, there has to be someone in charge and there has to be communication. Behind the beginning of chapter 11 is complete panic. Israel is desperate. But the beginning of chapter 11 is only the result of chapter 10.

So, here is the irony. The brothers of Jephthah treat him, like the people of Israel treated God. Jephthah may have been an embarrassment to the family because he was the son of a different mom. Do not minimize this fact. I talked with a man recently who experienced incredible rejection and abuse as a child because his mom became pregnant with him by a man, who was not her husband and his very existence was a daily reminder to the dad in the home that his wife had been unfaithful to him. In Jephthah's case, his existence was a reminder to the family that dad had been unfaithful to their mom. Most of us are familiar with dynamics like this in our families. This is generational affecting stuff. So, that embarrassment became a good reason to reject Jephthah and get rid of him. He reminded them of something they didn't want to remember. Well, that was how Israel treated God, only in a different way. God reminded them of things they did not want to face, so they tried to get rid of him. Now, they need God, but God is not rushing to rescue them. So, they turn to Jephthah. This tells you how desperate they were.

We want mercy, but we don't want to be merciful. Do you see it? Sin wrecks us. It thoroughly wrecks us. The roots go deep and we need to know that we cannot rescue ourselves. We need to be rescued and the only One who can rescue us is the One who knows how serious sin is and who does not need to be rescued himself.

C. The saviors we come up are no substitute for God. (11.4-11)

So, the elders of Gilead have to take their hat in their hand and eating major helpings of humble pie go to Jephthah and beg him to come and rescue them. Of course, again that is what Israel did with God. Jephthah, predictably rubs it in their face. He could have only dreamed of this moment of vindication. And here it was! And he leverages it for all it is worth. They promise to make him their leader (think king) and he promises to hold them to it.

We'll pick it up from here next week. But, let me wrap it up with this analogy. Let's say that you develop a mass in your neck that is rapidly growing. You go to a doctor who suggests you take some Motrin and get a massage so that your neck is not quite so sore. Is that going to help? No. You go to another guy who takes out a Samurai sword because he is going to cut off your head. Sure, that will kill the tumor, but it will also kill you. You need someone who will rescue you, by taking your condition seriously but who won't kill you in the process. This account about Jephthah is another example of the fact that the saviors we come up with are no substitute for

God. Either they cannot rescue us (like the idols at the beginning of chapter 10) or destroy us, like Jephthah. This is the story of our world. Life as it is now, is unsatisfying. It will never give us everything that we want. We are halfway through the book of Judges. There is more grief to come. Why? We are thick-headed people, aren't we?

V. But God can use even saviors who cannot save to prepare us for the One who does.

Are you seeing the point of this book? God is waiting. He is waiting on you to admit to what he already knows. You cannot fix yourself. You cannot find a savior who will rescue you without destroying you. You can run all over the world, go to seminars in every country, try every philosophy, religion, lifestyle and belief. You can listen to guru's, lectures, and get degrees from the most respected universities in the land. You can be the ultimate minimalist or the ultimate materialist. It doesn't matter. At the end of your exhausted search, you will still have questions and no answers. Sin wrecks us. It thoroughly wrecks us. The roots go deep and we need to know that we cannot rescue ourselves. We need to be rescued and the only One who can rescue us is the One who knows how serious sin is and who does not need to be rescued himself. Come to Jesus. Turn from your sin and trust Jesus. He knows how serious your sin is. He knows more than you do. And only Christ can forgive you, because only Christ lived the life that you couldn't live and died the death you couldn't die. Only Christ can pay it all and only Christ has paid it all. Trust in Him. Come to life. Come to forgiveness. Come to freedom.

Part of me would like to hurry up and get done with Judges. Whoever heard of preaching a series on Judges that people were sitting spellbound to and were inviting friends and family to listen to? But, it is here for our good. Let's allow the weight and the grief of this text to help us see and run to the Savior who really saves and who saves forever.