

Title: Wrong side
Text: Judges 2.11-23
Theme: The quick apostasy of Israel
Series: Judges #3
Prop Stmtnt: The gods of this world will promise you everything you want, and will take from you everything you need. But everything that they take will be what you have given them permission to have.

3 Things to note:

1. Israel's relationship to idols
2. Israel's response to God
3. God's response to Israel

Read Text:

Tonight there is this little scrimmage between a football team from the Boston area and a football team from Philadelphia. Since Johnny is from Philadelphia, he, perhaps more than about anyone else here is interested in this game. Johnny and I were talking earlier in the week about how much we loved football and followed the game when we were kids. The game was bigger than life to me. In those days I lived and died on how the Cleveland Browns played, which of course meant that I died a lot. So, imagine that your team is in the Super Bowl. Imagine that the Lions actually make it. Seriously, if Jesus could rise from the dead, then the Lions being in the Super Bowl is theoretically possible. But, let's say that your team makes it and is playing in the big game and you are all in. You can hardly sleep these past two weeks. Every day you want to wear your jersey to school. You watch ESPN for any and every bit of information you can get. Tonight cannot come soon enough, but then, they lose. And I mean they really lose. There is no explanation. Dropped passes, interceptions, blown coverages, missed blocks, and penalties and penalties. It was humiliating and you have to go to school the next day and face all of the kids that you have been trash-talking to. Monday and Tuesday are like the worst days of your life. You cannot figure out what happened to your team?

What would you think, if several years later an investigation revealed that several key players on your team had accepted bribes for the Super Bowl and threw the game for the other team and some of those players were some of the guys that you believed in so much? Well, that is what Israel is doing. She is wearing God's jersey. She says she is on God's team, but she's playing for the enemy and in fact, ends up out-sinning the enemy at their game. Don't you know who you are? You're on the wrong side!

I. A sad story of life in a fallen world (the story of Judges) 2.11 -23

Judges is not just the story of Israel; it is the story of our world. It is the story of our country. It is the story of churches because it is the story of many of our lives. Judges 2.11 is a preview of the book and the rest of chapter 2 tells us a story that is repeated six different times.

Compromise (internal and personal rebellion), Rebellion (personal and national), Bondage (Death and Disaster), Remorse (sorrow without repentance), Deliverance and Peace (prosperity), repeat over and over.

Without a gospel-driven humility, peace and prosperity have been the occasion for worshipping the gods of pleasure. The result is that there is a lot of sin and a lot of carnage in this book. There is very little repentance, if any. We see remorse, but we don't see repentance and as a result this pattern is not only repeated but it gets worse. It is said that, *"those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."* That is true. What is also sadly true is that most people do not learn from history. This happened time and time again over a period of 350 years. 350 years is a lot of stupid.

II. What has happened to us?

What happened to us is another way of asking, what happened to Israel. I say, what happened to us, because every one of us is in this story. The text is very clear. V. 11 is a summary statement and pulls no punches. The rest of the chapter has a lot of language about the anger and wrath of God as well as his pity and compassion. This text gives us specific categories that we need to understand so that we can mentally put things in them.

For example, serving other gods is evil. This is in direct contrast to the idea that you can find your own religion and do whatever feels right to you. There is such a thing as evil. There is a category of evil. God judges evil and God judges people who give themselves to do evil things even if they think they are nice and caring. Serving other gods means that you've abandoned the LORD. Serving other gods is evil. But claiming to serve God, while living in disobedience to his Word, is rebellion. You cannot use the promises of God's presence and care while you ignore God's commands for holiness and purity. People like to borrow the promises of God's care, while ignoring God's commands for pure worship.

Serving other gods is a deliberate decision to give yourself to them. *"They went after other gods. "* (v.2)*"They ... served the Baals and the Ashtaroth" (v.13) "...they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked.... "* (v. 17) To whore after something is to sell yourself for it. Following idols is a deliberate decision made to follow something or someone other than God. It is not an accident. It is a choice and it provokes God.

Serving other gods provokes the LORD to anger. The language in verses 12, 13 15 and 20 speaks of God being provoked over time. God is not angry by nature. God's anger is his response to his righteousness, justice and patient love being rejected and scorned. God is not looking for an excuse to erupt. God does not have a violent and unpredictable temper. It takes years for God's anger to be kindled and he gives ample warning and opportunities to repent. But, God's anger is real. That is a category you need to have. God's anger is kindled (trying to get the fire started), generated, provoked, stirred up by unrelenting rebellion, but it is not a fundamental attribute of God. God was not angry in eternity past and will not be angry in glory. His anger will be felt and expressed in hell, but not on his children.

But, because God's anger against sin and rebellion is real, serving other gods results in destruction. And the pattern is clear. The consequences are grievous and God while faithful to his justice is grieved that his response to sin is so necessary. This is what happens when you give yourself to something or someone other than God. You will be sold to your enemies (who hate you vs. God who loves you). If you will not listen to God who loves you, you will be forced to listen to those who hate you.

Israel was unable to stand on their own. Israel had known a lot of success. Her victories over Amalek, Og and Sihon, over Jericho, and Ai, in the northern and southern campaign meant that apart from the hiccup in Ai, she was on a string of being undefeated. No one it seems could stand before her. Success is usually more difficult to handle with grace and humility than failure. But her victories weren't because of her, it was because of God. Now, she couldn't stand in front of anyone. Instead of being a recipient of God's grace she became a recipient of God's wrath and in many cases she eventually was unable to repent because she was completely owned by the gods that she gave herself to. We can all see WHAT happened. We can graph it, but why?

III. Why does this keep on happening?

Why do the children of alcoholics have such a propensity toward alcoholism? Why are the children of angry parents so likely to be angry themselves? Why is it that we seem to be incapable of learning lessons from those around us? In spite of the fact that idolatry is disastrous and makes no sense, why is idolatry so powerful? Sin is not logical, which is why we say that sin causes brain damage. But, while it is illogical, there are aspects about it that are good for us to recognize. There are reasons why idolatry is attractive. I've made a list of why this is so. Some of the reasons overlap, but you will get the point.

But first, let me give you a little background on Baal and Ashtaroah worship. V. 11 says that they served the Baals (plural). There wasn't just one Baal. Different regions had their own version of Baal and their own stories of where he came from and his relationship with Ashtaroah (v. 13) or other female gods. But, primarily the local Baal was considered to be the god who controlled the weather. In those days, the weather was not only something that people did not quite understand in terms of science, but because the society depended so heavily upon agriculture, the people were totally at the mercy of the weather. According to the Canaanites, if Baal was happy, then you got good weather and if you got good weather, then you had good crops and of course, food and income. Pleasing Baal through worship was the means of getting a good life. Related to the worship of Baal was the worship of Asherah who was the goddess of love and war. Again if Asherah was happy, then your family would be fertile, and your army would be successful. Large families meant more workers for the farm and more soldiers for the army and more protection from the enemies. So, making Baal and Asherah happy was very important. But, the way you made them happy was through bowing down, giving gifts, public displays of devotion such as carrying the gods through the streets and having all of the people from the village follow in procession (hence the literal term of "walking after other gods") as well as what is called empathetic worship. Since Asherah was the goddess of love (sex) she was to be worshiped by engaging in and with temple prostitutes. Baal and Asherah worship overran Israel in a short amount of time. One

almost wonders if Israel waited breathlessly to get into the land so they could act like the Canaanites. Like a kid who can't wait to leave home and do everything that he has been not allowed to do at home. The result was a people who became so highly sexualized (and violent) entire towns would look for gratification in gang raping unsuspecting travelers. The book of Judges ends with two stories that were typical of the time and those stories deal with rape, dismemberment, violence and mind-numbing abuse of women. Again, this is our culture. We simultaneously celebrate 50 shades of grey and violence against a woman and condemn Larry Nassar and violence against women. The sexualization of a culture destroys minds, destroys souls, destroys the capacity to relate, to love, to sacrifice, to be faithful, to esteem life, and to truly be honorable. Baal was so attractive because he offered your best life now. And that promise is attractive because we want to believe it. Our Baals are alcohol because it promises to ease your pain and help you forget your hard life. Our Baals are Facebook likes because they tell me that I am important. Our Baals are the approval of others, being seen in the right places with the right people, wearing the right clothes, having the appearance of being the envy of the world. Our Baals are having the right look, the right stuff, the right life that makes others want to be around. Our Baals promise us that if you have those, you will finally be happy. This week Yale University announced that the largest sign-up ever for a psychology class took place this semester. The name of the class? Happiness. Yale? These are the kids who have made it, right? Aren't these the insiders, the over-achievers, the up and coming stars? Yea, these are those who have been going from Baal to Baal and in some cases are treated by their parents as if they are Baal and they still want to know how to just be happy.

A. Idols offer you what you think you want.

Idols offer you what you think you want because an idol is a mirror of your heart. Idols are not made by God. Rather they are made by, created by, imagined by people who create gods that look like them. They are an attempt to explain life without God in a way that empowers me to get the life that I want. What do I want? I want pleasure. I want respect. I want to be in control. I want power and prosperity. I want health. I want comfort. I want my best life and I want it now.

B. Idolatry appears to be easy.

Trusting God, denying yourself, living for his glory means that I set my self against the wind of my world. Living for God means to live in conflict with the world system and my own self-centered heart. Living for idols (myself) appears to be easy and that is attractive. With idol worship I get to find the idol that I like and want. I get to pick which god I will follow based on which one I best identify with and which one will make much of me.

C. Idolatry gives you the illusion that you are in charge.

Let's say that you worship the idol of self-righteousness, hard-work and self-made success or the idol of heroin or prescription drugs. In all of those cases, you believe that you are calling the shots. You believe that if you obey the laws of hard work then you

will be rewarded with the comfortable life that you deserve. If you, however bow down to the idol of heroin or prescription drugs, you also believe that you will be rewarded with the pleasure that you think you deserve. But, the sad fact is, the god of hard work is a hard master and does not guarantee comfort nor pleasure. In fact, people can become so owned by their work that they do not know how to live or love because there is a huge difference between loving work and loving people.

Idolatry makes you think that you can stop anytime. You can quit this habit if you really want to - right? Then why are you so unsuccessful at doing so? You only think you are in charge. What you give yourself to owns you. But we have a hard time seeing that.

D. Idols like but you want to believe the lies.

You want to believe that you are in charge. You want to believe that you will get the life you think you deserve. You want to believe that you can control the forces around you.

E. Idolatry appears to be true.

In spite of 100 examples of this not working, your heart is drawn to the one example of where it appears to be working. If your idol is money, then the one story of someone winning the lottery will trump the thousands of stories of those who do not. The one story of a person worshiping Baal, following the formula, who appears to be successful, covers all other examples of destruction. Idolatry has a powerfully effective media department that knows how to Photoshop and airbrush the truth in a way that entices you.

F. It often appears as if you have no other choice.

Frederick Douglas, the famous abolitionist from the civil war era said, "*7 have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and as far as possible to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery. He must be made to feel that his slavery is right!*" The idols of this world want you to be contented with slavery to them. That is the power of idolatry. It enslaves the follower with the thinking that everyone else is doing it. I am destined to this. But, since worshiping idols is part of the punishment of God for worshiping idols then your will, your resolve, your resistance to the idol is almost destroyed. Over time, there is a giving into and giving over of life to the idols.

I've traveled to countries where shrines sit in the driveways of the homes, where villages celebrate the local deities with elaborate ceremonies and bizarre rituals. And in those places I look into the eyes of the people, especially the children. There is no spark. There is no fire, no flash. Looking into their eyes is like looking into the eyes of a cow. It looks hollow. Life is taken away. The gods control it all, all we can do is get in line.

G. Idolatry is so powerful because behind every idol are demons.

Idolatry is not a matter of information, it is a matter of war; spiritual warfare. Who is going to rule my heart? Who am I going to believe? Who will I trust?

IV. How can I change?

You can. If you are listening to me and hearing me and you want to change; you can.

A. Understand that worshipping and following God is completely different than following an idol.

Worshipping an idol is a veiled attempt at worshipping yourself. Worshipping God is not like that. Worshipping God does not mean that we give him some attention so that he will give us what we want. Worshipping God means that we surrender to him. Genuine conversion to Christ means unconditional surrender. We give him the keys. We get off the throne. We do not use God to get what we want. We write him a blank check with our lives. And if you did that with anyone else or anything else it would be terrifying. But, not so with God because....

B. Remember that God is SO glorious and SO satisfying that he is worth worshipping and savoring no matter what.

The fatal and fundamental flaw of following God so that God will make much of you is that God is the One worth making much of, not us. Are we to worship God so we will get nice clothes? Is that what God's glory is about? Are we to worship God so we get nice weather on our vacation? If that's it, then God's glory is pathetically small. No, God is so glorious and so satisfying that he is worth worshipping and savoring no matter what my circumstances may be. We do not worship God so that he will make our lives better. We worship Him because he is worth it. Many times the difficulties in life are simply a means to display the fact that we live for the glory of another, who is glorious! But, those who truly worship him are satisfied with him and being satisfied with him, the stuff of this world, even things like health and pleasure, while in and of themselves are not bad, are not the things that we have to have. When we have Christ, we have all that we have to have. But, we are prone to forget that. Therefore...

C. Immerse yourself in the gospel!

You know the old rule, do not go grocery shopping when you are hungry, right? You will tend to buy way too much because everything looks good (except broccoli, spinach, brussel sprouts and cabbage) . Part of my mission is not only to point you to Christ, but to teach you to treasure Christ. I want you to remember what you have been saved from. I want to remember that apart from Christ, I would be a slave to sin. I would be in bondage. I would be living a meaningless life. If I had kids, they would hate me because I would be so selfish. If I was married, my wife would probably resent me because I was so selfish. If I had a job I would probably irritate others around me because I would only think of myself. Apart from Christ, I would be a mess. But Christ has not only forgiven me, Christ has given me life. Christ has given me eternal life. Christ has given me eternally full life. I do not need the approval and respect of others when I have the love and approval of God. I do not need for life to go my way, when I am in Christ and He is the King and the world is his. I do not have to stuff that is going to fade away, because I will inherit a kingdom that cannot be taken away from me. And taking this bread and this

cup is a reminder that I am full. So, while this is just a little bit of bread and little cup, it points to the bread of life and the price of our redemption and that fact that we are loved not only personally and deeply, but that we are loved eternally. Take this bread and this cup and be reminded that you are full, so that when the idols of this world try to offer you something that they think you would want, you can say, "I'm not buying what you are selling because I already have all that I need. I have the water of life, the bread of life and a joy that cannot be taken.