

Title: What is in your wallet?
Text: Judges 7.1-4a
Theme: Repenting of idolatry
Series: Judges
Prop Stmtnt: When God gives us what we want, so that we don't have to trust him, we stop trusting him.

Read Text: Judges 7.1-4a

We talk of being hungry or starving, but most of us have never experienced what that really means. When a person is starving, his/her body begins to consume all of the glucose that has been stored. When the glucose has been used up the person now starts to feel extreme hunger and can only think of food. During this time the body begins to consume any fat it may have while drastically becoming weaker. After consuming glucose, then fat, the body starts to draw down its proteins and starts destroying its own tissue and muscles. This is when the skin becomes thin, almost translucent. The eyes become distended and ones legs or belly will swell as the body tries to hold onto whatever fluids it may yet have. Any amount of exertion can lead to exhaustion. In many cases, the sheer effort to eat causes death.

Holodomor is the name given to the forced starvation of 4-5 million Ukrainians in 1932 and 1933. Stalin's War on Ukraine through forced starvation is graphically documented in Anne Applebaum's new book, Red Famine. When I was in Kiev, Ukraine, Jerry and Kellie Benge took me to the Holodomor museum, where this nation, living in the shadow of Russia and for years under its tyrannical thumb is fighting to remain free and fighting to be heard by trying to let the world know about a genocide almost as great as the Holocaust which happened a few years later. It is customary for dignitaries to visit this museum and place gifts of grain on the base of the statue of the frail little girl who is clutching a few stalks of grain. Her face speaks for millions who were never heard.

After hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt, Israel has come into her own land. It is a land that is flowing with milk and honey. Like Ukraine, like our own Midwest, it is bountiful. Harvests are abundant. Crops are plentiful and when the produce is ripe, the times are good, provided, the people trusted God. But, the prosperity became the occasion for them to love the prosperity instead of God and the idol Baal promised them even more prosperity, so the nation turned from God and followed Baal. What's in your wallet – for Israel, it was Baal. But following Baal didn't work and now, the people who followed this god because he would give them their best life now, were starving and were too afraid to stand up to the Midianites.

Like the millions of Ukrainians who walked near the thin line of life and death every grain of wheat was fought over. When we first meet Gideon in chapter 6, he is beating out wheat in a winepress. The picture is clear, he doesn't have much and what he has he has to hide out of fear that it will be taken from him. What is going to happen to Israel? They cannot defend themselves and now they cannot even feed themselves. Like the Ukrainians at the mercy of Stalin and his henchmen, the Israelites are at the mercy of the Midianites who steal everything. These are desperate days. Stalin orchestrated this starvation for 2 years, Israel was devastated by Midian for seven. But the story of forced starvation and deprivation by the Midianites is the surface story. The story under the story is the story of idolatry and trusting in what you think will give you what you want. So, in order to make sure that you don't miss the point I want to pull off to the side of the road of this text this morning. These accounts in Judges are factual, historical, yes, but they are purposeful and personal. In order to benefit from this book as we need to, I want to challenge you to do four things this morning: 1) Unmask your idols 2) Expose the lies 3) Repent of your misplaced trust 4) Believe the gospel.

1. Unmask your idols.

Martyn Lloyd Jones was a doctor in England who became a pastor and was an outstanding one. He was a great physician for the body, but became an even better one for the soul. In his study on 1 John he described an idol as *“anything in our lives that occupies the place that should be occupied by God alone. Anything that ... is central in my life, anything that seems to me ... essential.... An idol is anything by which I live and on which I depend, anything that ... holds such a controlling position in my life that...it moves and rouses and attracts so much of my time and attention, my energy and money.”*

In the words of the famous advertising slogan of Capital One, “what’s in your wallet?” What are you trusting in? So, let me ask you some questions.

- When you first get to know someone, what is it that you want them to know about you?
- i.e. What is it that makes you feel good about yourself, successful, competent, maybe proud?
- What image do you attempt to portray in person or in social media?

Let me give you some examples. Do you feel a sense of righteousness because of your personal discipline (you work hard, you manage your life, your time)? Do you feel a sense of righteousness because of your family? (my kids are successful, my kids are athletic, smart, talented, mannerly and respectful, my family has a great reputation). Do you feel a sense of righteousness because of your theological convictions? (I am well-studied, consistent, and feel sorry for those who don’t believe as I do. I can back most people into a corner and point out their inconsistencies and the holes in their beliefs) Do you feel a sense of righteousness because of your intellect? (I read more than others, I know more than others, I’ve had a successful academic career) Do you feel a sense of righteousness because of your fitness or even health? (I am in better shape than most people my age. I’ve never been on meds or have had major surgery. I don’t color my hair. I have hair.) Do you feel a sense of righteousness because you are more merciful than others, or more financially disciplined than others? Do you feel a sense of righteousness because you believe you are more righteous than others? What are the things that you feel most qualified to speak to? Those tend to be the things that we are tempted to trust in. Here is another angle to pursue this goal of unmasking idols.

- What are the things that tend to “set you off” or irritate you when they just aren’t right?
- What do you tend to think about when you have time to daydream?
- Who are the people in your life whose opinion or approval you desire the most?

Now, all of these questions are designed to help you identify our idols, but for most of us, this will expose what I call surface idols. Underneath those surface idols are our core idols. Darrin Patrick calls these “source idols. I recently came across this chart that Darrin Patrick put together. I think it is really helpful in unmasking our idols.

(This chart was taken from Robert Thune's work on *Gospel Eldership* (Greensboro, NC:New Growth Press, 2016). Robert states that he adapted it from Darrin Patrick's *Church Planter* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010) who acknowledged that he was building on the work of Dick Kaufman from a lecture series as well as the work of Dick Keyes in book from Moody Press, 1992, *No God, But God*.)

What I Seek	The Price I'm Willing to Pay	My Greatest Nightmare	Others Often Feel...	I Often Feel...
Comfort (privacy, lack of stress, freedom)	Reduced Productivity	Stress, Demands	Hurt	Boredom
Approval (affirmation, love, relationship)	Less Independence	Rejection	Smothered	Cowardice
Control (self-discipline, certainty, standards)	Loneliness, Spontaneity	Uncertainty	Condemned	Worry
Power (success, winning, influence)	Burdened, Responsibility	Humiliation	Used	Anger

Look at the column that is titled: My Greatest Nightmare. What do you fear the most? For me, my greatest fear is humiliation. I do not mind stress, demands, have experienced plenty of rejection, and uncertainty, but I am tempted to work really hard at being prepared so that I appear to you as if I am competent. Now, this is helpful for me. Because I see that yes, I am willing to pay the price of being burdened and taking on responsibility to getting a job done. And yes, others around me can certainly feel used because I need them to help me accomplish a goal. But, here is the real benefit of this chart. Look at the first column; what I seek. What I seek is the idol of our hearts. For me, "power" is my Baal. What's in my wallet? What am I tempted to trust in? What am I tempted to believe that if I have it, then my life will be perfect? Power. All of the things that I am tempted

to trust in, like discipline righteousness, family righteousness, etc. are attempts at avoiding humiliation, because in my heart of hearts I am tempted to believe that I need to have power in order to be have my life the way it ought to be.

What's in your wallet? What is your greatest fear? Do you have one in mind? Now, the degree to which that idol has power in your life is based on how much you believe its message. The problem is, your idol is lying to you. It will not tell you the truth about you nor about it. You need to expose the lies.

2. **Expose the lies.**

What is the promise that your idol is making to you? "if you have me then _____" Here is an example of a surface idol and a core idol. If you look young for your age, people will admire you and envy you. And if people admire you and envy you, then (watch out – here's the lie) you will be happy because you will have their approval. We are prone to believe that. We are prone to believe that if we have the approval of others, then we will be satisfied. Here is what we have to come to grips with. The idols of our hearts cannot bear the weight of the promises they make, nor can they safeguard our happiness. Have you ever met a person who is controlled by the approval of others, who is genuinely happy?

The people who give themselves to the god of comfort end up bored and restless because comfort cannot give happiness to the soul. The people who sell their souls for the approval of others are insecure because even if you ever got someone's approval, you are always in danger of losing it. People who do everything they can to control their world through relentless planning, time management and organization can never rest because no one can actually control the world besides God. People who think that success will bring them happiness are never happy because no one ever stays successful. These gods cannot give you what they promised. They are powerless. Expose those lies for what they are.

Baal promised food and prosperity and yet, the people are starving. Israel, you believed his lies. God is saying that you have to reject the idols and trust me. But, unmasking the lies and exposing the error means that you have to be willing to admit that you were wrong and foolish to believe them. So, when God tells Gideon to lead Israel against the Midianites, he is forcing Gideon to face the question of "what's in your wallet?" He's also forcing Israel to do the same. After all the Midianites look like the armies of Mordor. They are nasty, stinky and overwhelming. Gideon, are you willing to believe me? Are you willing to put your trust in me? Look at what trusting in Baal has done for you and for the nation. What have your gods promised you? Do you have it? Do you realize that they have lied to you? Are you willing to believe me now? If so, then you need to repent.

3. **Repent of your misplaced trust.**

Like most of the world around them Israel was an agricultural nation. Everything depended upon the weather. If you had good weather, you had a good crop and if you had a good crop, you could eat (which is good) and you could sell what you have left over and make money. If you had a lot of land, you could make a lot of money especially if others did not have a good crop. Having a good crop felt like it was everything. So, who are you going to trust? Baal was supposed to be the god who specialized in weather and there were plenty of people who followed Baal and appeared at the time to be successful. So, Israel was tempted to follow Baal, and initially it seemed a lot easier and certainly more pleasurable than following Yahweh. But, the truth is, Baal was not the god of the weather. Baal was no god at all and therefore, he could not bear up under the weight of making the weather good because he couldn't control it. But, for many people, it felt like he could. And they were afraid of not trusting in Baal because of what he might do.

When you really unpack this, you realize that Baal is just a made up name and story for the human heart. We want to control the weather. We want to control the world. We want to have prosperity, so that we can have comfort, approval, control or power. It all started in the garden in Genesis 3. We want to be like God so that we

do not have to trust in God. But, we are not God. And when we try to assume control of the world, or even control of our own world, we are taking on a weight that we cannot bear up under.

This is where Gideon was. God revealed himself to Gideon and called him to obey him. The only way Gideon was going to obey God was if Gideon first trusted in him. In this text, God is not only asking Gideon, what's in your wallet, he is forcing Gideon to only rely on God. What is the message of this text? The message of this text is one of the chief messages of the Bible and that is this: When all you have is God, then you will find that all you need is God. The very thing we fear is the very thing we need. God is enough. But, what we tend to do, is ask God to give us things and arrange circumstances in such a way that we no longer have to depend on God. Do you honestly think that God is going to go along with that?

It is infinitely better for us to be in a place of complete dependence upon God than for us to have everything that we think we want. Gideon, you need to trust me – take on the Midianites! Now, stop the story for a second. Did God need Gideon to pound the Midianites? No. God could have done it without Gideon. But, God called Gideon so Gideon would learn and so that we would learn that God is worth leaning on. So, back to the story. Gideon is called to take on the Midianites. Are you crazy? Are you sure? So, Gideon (we assume) sends out couriers who call for the men to take up arms and they come. 32,000 of them. It could have been bigger. Not too long after this, when Saul is made king, he calls for an army to take on the Ammonites and 300,000 Israelites show up. So, it could have been bigger. It's about a tenth of what it could have been but an army of 32,000 is something and yet God says, "too big." If you go to battle with 32,000 soldiers and win, you will be tempted to think that it was the size of your army that did it. God demands to be the only One in your wallet. He demands to be the only One for you to trust in. So, Gideon announces that all those who were afraid can go home and 22,000 of them did. Do you know what that means? That means that the 10,000 left were now, really afraid!

Then God does it again – "too big." Your army is too big. You don't need a big army when you have God. We will return to this text in the Sunday after Resurrection Day, but God reduces Gideon's army down to 300, not because God needed 300 guys in the army, but because he wanted to have 300 witnesses to God bench-pressing the entire Midianite military complex and face-planting Baal.

When you realize that God is enough, then you need to repent. God, I confess that I have believed that having comfort, approval, control or power will give me the life that I want. I confess that I have pursued this (Baal) instead of pursuing you. I have believed this lie instead of believing your promises. I have allowed this god to rule over me. I confess this to you as sin and I ask that you will forgive me.

This idol cannot give me what it promises. It cannot give me what you give me because it has no power, or resources or authority. In fact, this idol has made me a slave. It has robbed me of my joy, of my time, of my affections, of my thoughts, and has been growing in power and mastery over me. This god, that I once loved, I hate. I loathe its mastery over me. The more I serve this idol, the more power it seems to have over my life. How I have grieved you! How I have offended you by giving to this idol what only belongs to you. How blind I have been to act as if this idol is more beautiful than you! I have been a fool.

I want you to see the irony. Baal promised food and wealth and the people are starving and totally impoverished. All gods promise you things you want and even things you need, but cannot make good on their promises. But, while God makes good on his promises, he doesn't do so, so that you won't need him, but so you will.

4. **Believe the gospel.**

Look at what we want: comfort, approval, control and power. When we pursue those, we will never get them in an ultimate sense. But, ironically, when we pursue God by trusting Christ, we receive ultimate comfort, the

approval of God, the knowledge that our good Father and our Savior are in control of all things and God's omnipotence is leveraged for his glory and our ultimate good. Remember the gospel and believe it afresh. Christ lived a life so perfectly and so righteous that he was approved by God. His God-approved life was offered as the infinitely perfect sacrifice for sin. When you repent of your sin and trust in Christ, you are credited with his death that paid your debt and you are credited with his perfectly righteous life. Everything that Christ did pleased the Father and that is what you get credit for. There is no greater approval than having the approval of God and you have that in Christ. Believe that! Rest in that. Enjoy that. No one else can give you that, and no one else can take it away.

“Jesus, you alone can rescue me. You alone can give me comfort that never ends, approval that is real and eternal. You are the King. You are in control and my life is safe within your hands. You have all power and you use that power for my good. I delight in you. You made a promise to come to this earth and to die for your people, and you kept that promise. You made a promise that you would rise again from the dead, and you kept that promise. You made a promise that all those who trust in you will be forgiven of their sin, credited with your righteousness, placed into your family, given a home forever in heaven and you keep your promises. You have promised that even though I may die, even though I may get sick, even though I go through sorrow that you will never leave me, for you cannot turn your back on your own, but you will keep me, you will satisfy me, you will be for me, all that I need.”