

Judges 1

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Date: 17 October 2021

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[0 : 00] It's really great to be with you this evening.

Thank you so much, Paul.! May our hearts be humble and gracious.

May we glorify you. May your name be glorified through all of this. May you be exalted. And may we turn to you as king. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So, Paul very helpfully read for us from Deuteronomy 7 and Judges 1. And this opening chapter of the book of Judges sets a little bit of an ominous tone for the rest of the book.

One commentator describes the overarching theme of Judges as the Canaanization of Israel. We heard from Deuteronomy 7 the charge that God gave to Israel regarding the inhabitants of the land that God had given them.

[1 : 35] Do not show mercy. Destroy them. Devote them to destruction. And yet, we jump to Judges chapter 1.

And this is not happening. The previous book, Joshua, recounts the general invasion and conquest. And what's happening now is what one describes as an extended mopping up operation to clear the land completely of the Canaanites.

And now there's initial faithfulness and obedience in verses 3 to 17. We didn't hear those. We heard verse 17.

Judah went with Simeon, his brother, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and devoted it to destruction. So the name of the city was Horma, which means utter destruction.

But this soon changes. So three things that I want us to consider this evening is we must drive out sin.

[2 : 41] We must not tolerate sin. Secondly, sin will grow if we don't.

And the way we do this is through Christ. There's a common refrain in this first chapter of Judges. I'm not sure if you heard it.

It emphasizes the disobedience and faithlessness of Israel. God commanded them to destroy the Canaanites. But what do we see? They did not drive them out.

This refrain is repeated eight times in the passage. Seven times in verses 27 to 33 alone.

They did not drive them out. They did not drive them out. They showed mercy. In verse 28, we read, So we might think that forced labor is hardly showing mercy.

[3 : 58] It's hardly endorsing the Canaanites. No, it was disobedience. God had said destroy them, and they did not.

God had said, and we heard this in Deuteronomy, Do not make a covenant with them and show no mercy to them. And what Israel's doing there, subjecting them to forced labor, slavery, is entering into a covenant with the Canaanites.

You will be our slaves, and we will not drive you out completely. It's an act of mercy on the part of Israel to the Canaanites.

This is disobedience. And the angel of the Lord in Judges 2 explicitly says so. You have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? They did not drive them out.

Now, I guess there's various reasons why they might have done this, and why we sometimes do this in our lives. Why do we tolerate sin? There's three reasons, I think, or there's many reasons we could say.

[5 : 14] We love sin. We love doing, and we enjoy doing, that which is wrong. I know I should not do this, but I'm going to do it anyway.

I'll let this sinful thought, whatever it is, linger in my mind just for a few moments longer than I should.

I'll indulge myself today. Or unlike the psalmist in Psalm 37, I will envy those who do wrong. Maybe it's a fear of man.

We tolerate sin because we don't want to be legalists. We don't want to be judgmental. We, you know, taking the Lord's name in vain, you know, it's not that big a problem, is it?

In churches, in society. But I think the main reason here, with Israel, is they underestimate sin. They did not drive out the Canaanites completely, and they were okay with that.

[6 : 30] Presumably, if you can subject the Canaanites to forced labor, they could have driven them out completely. But they did not know the gravity of what they were doing.

By tolerating the Canaanites. And maybe that's, they forgot what God thinks about sin. We know the cross was necessary because of our sin.

God's pouring out of his wrath on the cross shows us what God thinks of sin. And Israel should have known. And Israel should have known what God thinks of sin.

So when we ponder those glorious truths of God's grace and mercy and forgiveness of our sins, it's because of the cross, our sins, nailing Jesus to the cross.

And I know you know this. You know, you've been going through Romans in the morning. You know, those early chapters. It's on and on about our sin because we should not forget it.

[7 : 36] There is none who does good. No, not one. We are sinners. But God does not condone sin.

But we do, don't we? We find acceptable what God finds unacceptable. We find pleasing what displeases God.

Evil that we call good. Good that we call evil. And yet, we're to drive it up completely. Psalm 97:10, let those who love the Lord hate evil.

We're to put to death the deeds of the body. Put them to death. But we underestimate this.

We underestimate sin in our lives. We let it linger and fester and grow because they're not major. But they do grow and destroy and lead to destruction.

[8 : 39] White lie here and there is not too big a problem. I don't need to disclose all my income. I'll, you know, flattery. A bit of gossip doesn't hurt anyone.

It's okay to be rude and mock someone if it's behind their back. I have every right to be bitter. They wronged me. Thank you, Lord.

I'm not like those other sinners. We all have this tendency, don't we, to overlook. But this also applies to the church.

It's great and wonderful that there are many wings of the church. I know the IPC have been very firm on this, defending marriage when it's been coming under attack in our culture.

But sometimes, it can feel like we haven't really valued marriage. maybe in the way we've tolerated cohabitation or fornication or the marrying of unbelievers.

[9 : 48] We've seen this in many different churches. And so that's why we're given instructions in the New Testament about the requirements for leadership, about church discipline.

They're there for a reason. when we tolerate members openly and willfully in sin serving in churches, the next thing we see is they are leading churches.

Church discipline is a godly tool to drive people to repentance and restoration. So that kind of signals, doesn't it, what are the consequences of what happens when we tolerate sin.

Well, God tells Israel in chapter 2, Judges 2, verses 2 and 3, I will not drive them out.

Verse 3, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides and their gods shall be a snare for you, to you.

[10 : 50] And this is what Israel saw in the rest of Judges and really the Old Testament, this cycle of faithfulness, compromise, idolatry, judgment, restoration.

But ultimately spiraling downwards. We see these cycles of the Judges. So there is repentance here as soon as the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel.

The people lifted up their voices and wept. But the apostasy comes soon after. And by the end, Israel's wickedness is deep and endemic.

By the end of Judges, we've seen apostasy, adultery, rape, murder, intermarrying, a descent into depravity. The book literally ends with the tribe of the Benjaminites nearly being wiped out for their wickedness.

And in a sense, we see this in chapter one, in Judges already, this signal that things are going to get worse.

[12:04] Notice the change. Verse 29, Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gaza, so the Canaanites lived in Gaza among them. Verse 29, but then in verse 33, Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath, so they lived among the Canaanites.

You see that change there. The land that God had given them, they tolerated the Canaanites living amongst them. And next thing you know, you're living amongst the Canaanites.

is there the striking parallels to the apostasy we're seeing in our culture where sin is paraded and celebrated by our institutions which once openly proclaimed Christ.

The queen at her coronation, 1953, was given a Bible saying, these are the lively oracle gods. Here is wisdom. She vowed to uphold the Protestant religion.

And so what was the taboo then is celebrated, taught in our schools. What was unthinkable then now being celebrated.

[13:24] But what else does God warn Israel about? Well, we see this in the earlier passage, Deuteronomy 7, verses 3 and 4, The world has a close to a 100% success rate at passing on their faith.

They estimate in the church it's about 50%. Some put it even lower. And this warning that God gives them comes true. Judges 2, 10.

And all that generation were gathered to their fathers. They died and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel.

So God rescues Israel, enters them into the promised land. and a generation raises up who does not know the Lord and does not know what he's done.

So I do want to encourage you here. Generally, it's such a joy for me to be here and to be worshipping with the full church, young and old.

[14:49] It's a real blessing for me to be here and to be with them. So I do want to encourage you in that. And so we see this exchange happening.

Not just in society, we've seen it in our churches as well. We saw the Methodist church earlier this year embracing gay marriage, cohabitation, denying the uniqueness of Christ.

Evangelicals are aliens in their own church. but the roots of that probably go back a few generations. It doesn't happen overnight.

It starts with tolerating sin. I'm sure Paul maybe knows much more about this. The United Reformed Church are the roots of why they are the way they are probably goes back generations.

It's a former Presbyterian Church of England. But it probably goes back to lots of long, a long way back to lots of subtle yet significant tolerances and decisions.

[16:09] So we see this in society, we see this in churches and we see it in our own lives. Deep, grievous sin almost always starts far earlier. Tolerating sin in our lives, it will grow and fester and destroy.

That's why Christ says those words, if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. Throw it away.

Adultery, deception, abuse, abusive behaviors almost always, whatever it is, starts far earlier with something small being tolerated.

The consequences of tolerating sin in society, the church and in our lives are serious. So how, what do we do?

How do we do this? So we have this call to drive out sin without mercy, to not tolerate it. but what's that in the positive?

Well, Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 that we are the salt of the earth and that we are the light of the blood. Driving out sin is being salt and light. We cannot lose our saltiness.

[17:25] Salt preserves taste and prevents decay and we as Christians should impact the world around us. Wherever it is that God has placed us and the world will see our light through our good works and obedience to Christ.

So in fact, Paul writes in Ephesians 5, walk as children of light, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness but instead expose them for it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

But when anything is exposed by the light and we're children of light, when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible.

For anything that becomes visible is light. So we let our light shine and it makes the darkness visible. It makes the darkness light.

So that looks very different in different contexts. We've been looking in our own lives, we're looking in our churches, we're looking in society. That would look different wherever we are.

[18 : 41] It's what we're trying to do at Christian Concern is trying to expose darkness through exposing bad legislation on LGBT or abortion by contending and speaking with trying to shine that light.

it would look different in our own contexts for us as individuals in our workplaces wherever it is. But it can come at a cost.

So a close pastor, it was a church that I used to be in, a close pastor friend of mine, I think this is an example of tolerating sin and it having consequences.

A close friend of mine, one of his small group leaders came out as a lesbian, one who wasn't going to abstain.

And he said, he agreed to allow her to remain to be a small group leader. So I know alarm bells, I know.

[19 : 57] He agreed to let her remain as a small group leader but asked, can we meet for coffee and I'll share with you from the scriptures why I believe marriage is one man, one woman. And she refused because that would have been an abusive situation.

And months go by, she becomes a bit of an activist in church. Anyway, the vicar's associate takes on the responsibilities of leading the small groups and they're a bit more hardline.

and removes the small group leader. A small group leader goes to the press about the trauma and the abuse that she's experienced in the church for asking her not to lead a small group.

And she was refusing to meet with the pastor to hear the orthodox real marriage. Goes to the local press, goes to the denomination, investigation, all these kinds of things.

No support from the denomination, from the diocese, I guess. Tolerating sin and seeing what happens.

[21 : 24] So the cost is great in our culture today. In our lives, in our workplaces, you know, Christian concern, we defend a lot of people who articulate Christian positions on things and lose their jobs.

Whatever it is, complaining about sex education in schools, being insulted by teachers and headmasters. Whatever it is, it'll be a cost.

But in one sense, yeah, the cost is great, but the other sense, the cost is small. Light momentary affliction compared to the eternal weight of glory that God is preparing.

But where does this come from? Where do we have this strength? Where does this light shine? How do we remain salty? How do we remain light? How do I keep snuffing out that sin in my life? It keeps coming, keeps popping up. Some commentators have interpreted judges as an apologetic for Israel's need for a king.

[22 : 39] The last verse of the book, it says, in those days there was no king. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. But I'm not convinced by that.

Later in 1 Samuel 8, the elders of Israel gather and they say to the prophet Samuel, appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations. And Samuel seeks the Lord and God says to him, obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you.

For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Judges is about rejecting God as king.

Their descent into depravity is because they reject God as Lord. That's what we're seeing now. As a nation that has rejected God.

In Romans 1, we've exchanged the truth about God for a lie. We're worshipping and serving the creation, not the creator. We're doing what is right in our own eyes.

[23 : 46] Claiming to be wise, we've become fools. In fact, what's happening now is God answering the prayer of the nation that we want to be without God.

He's handing over. We see that repeatedly in Romans 1, don't we? God hands them over. But Christ is king and lord.

God of us here individually as a church, in our families and in society.

Society is not a neutral space with no king. Christ is king. So we have to submit to him as king.

And so it's easy to become depressed and discouraged. But that's the reality of sin. Well, the reality of the bad news that we are fallen, that we do sin, that we do rebel.

[24 : 51] But we do not stand in our own strength. We stand in Christ's strength. It's his power, his strength, his righteousness.

And so our engagement with the world our being salt and light, our driving out sin in our lives, our church discipline in our churches, it's all an overflow of following Christ, of being his disciple.

So yes, the Christian life is a life of repentance, but it's one of joy as we delight in God's goodness and mercy and grace. So when I'm saying we should not tolerate sin, it's so that we can actually experience God's grace evermore in that repentance, in that turning to him.

Amen. In Judges 1, in verse 19, it says about they could not drive out the inhabitants because they had chariots of iron.

You know, the world's so powerful, the chariots of iron, surely that's not disobedience. But God said to them, Joshua 17, 18, you shall drive out the Canaanites though they have chariots of iron and though they are strong.

[26 : 25] And so we know God was with them in their battles. But they chose, anyway, they chose disobedience, they didn't. Submit to him as king.

We trust God in all that we do. However difficult it looks, and so that's not me saying that, oh, okay, so all we need to do now is trust God and every battle in life is won.

Not at all. But it's saying that we submit to God, trusting him, knowing that he is in control. we know and hold fast to the fact that he does work all things together for good for those who love him, according to his purpose, that he does.

His promises are true, his covenant is true for our children and our children's children. will will will will have will will!

nation on our backs as though it's our responsibility to fix everything. It's our responsibility to drive out sin where we are. In fact, as Matthew Roberts writes, we are salt and light by faithfully serving God in the callings he has given us, not in trying to be more than God has called us to be. If we imagine that unless we're making massive changes to society, we're not doing what we should, we have forgotten that God is God and Christ is Christ and we are neither.

[28 : 04] Faithful, humble godliness in ordinary things is how God uses us. So at Christian Concern, I can often fall into despair. People ask me, how's work going? I'm like, well, the nation seems to be getting worse, so I don't think it's going well.

You know, but you can't fall into despair. God's in control.

It was, you know, all the issues that we're seeing in society, if I keep my eyes fixed on them, then I'll fall into despair. It's the 54th anniversary of the Passing of the Abortion Act, a week and a half ago. 9.7 million abortions since then.

So how can I, how are we going to possibly fix that? How can I possibly end that? That's just the wrong question to ask. It's about God ruling and reigning.

In fact, he's making a footstool out of his enemies as we speak. He's sitting. And so it's not talking about making lots of progress and seeing huge changes in society, necessarily seeing huge changes in society, it's about being faithful.

[29 : 34] As an overflow of God's love for us. Patient, faithful gospel ministry and the power and strength of Christ through the Holy Spirit. So we don't need to lose hope.

Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, knowing that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. We take heart. Christ has overcome the world.

He's in control. He's sovereign. God's plans will not fail. The government, the lobbyists, the Marie Stopes, they can't thwart God's plans.

You know, and even through the midst of judges and the Old Testament, through all the depravity, God was working to make sure everything was working out for his son to come.

His plans never fail. We read the call in Deuteronomy 7. It's important that we just read those verses afterwards.

[30 : 52] What God says in verses 6 to 11. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession.

Out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth, it was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you.

But it is because the Lord loves you. Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is God. The faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.

God chose us because he loved us. He set his love on us. So much so that he sent his son to die to pay the penalty that was due us.

Everything in Judges in the Old Testament is cyclical. Never true restoration because it needed the perfect Savior. The perfect sacrifice who came in the person of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 10] Who bore the penalty that was due us. He took our place. Saved by grace. Through faith. Not by our own works.

So that none may boast. We're utterly dependent on Christ. So please don't confuse anything I've said about a kind of legalistic, rules-based salvation.

Not at all. Note the way, you know, God talks to David as a man after God's own heart. And he sinned, he majorly sinned. About faithfulness.

In response to Christ's love for us. A people that he chose to set his love on. A call to holiness and obedience in light of Christ's work.

He is faithful. And whoever comes to him, he will never cast out. So he has to be holy for God is holy. But no, we're made holy by God's love and grace and mercy.

[33 : 16] We do not need to despair. For if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just. To forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That is glorious good news. That we all once were lost but now found. Blind but now see. To keep our eyes fixed on the King.

Jesus. To carry out the tasks that he set before us faithfully. Wherever we are. To be salt and light. To drive out sin.

But in response to his love for us. Amen.