

Judges 2:6-3:6

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[0 : 00] Family food leaves 69 brothers dead. Powerful government leader caught in love nest.

! Gang rape leads to victims death and dismemberment.! Girls at party kidnapped and forced to marry strangers.! Woman judge says travel is no longer safe on the roads.

And they are the news headlines from the book of Judges. It's a book of trashy tales about dysfunctional families. Tim Keller says in his commentary, despicable people doing despicable things.

So why study the book of Judges? Why is the book of Judges in our Bibles? Well, it's the world we live in.

Are those headlines, they could have come couldn't they from the BBC website? How did this happen? How have things come to such a state as this? How did we get to become a society where these sorts of things happen?

[1 : 08] And you don't even turn a hair. How come our TV viewing is full of violence, sex and cruelty? And we are entertained by it.

How did it come to that? And what's worse is in the book of Judges, this is not society that's being described. This isn't the world, it's the church. This is Israel, the people of God.

What's gone wrong? Look with me at Judges chapter 2 and verse 10. And this verse explains really what is going on here.

It's our text as we begin this new series over this next kind of five or six weeks. Look at what it says there. It says, there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work he'd done for Israel.

They didn't know. They didn't remember. There's three phases to this kind of generation.

[2 : 15] First of all, they forgot what the Lord had done for them. And then they forsook. They walked away. They forsook what the Lord had said to them. And consequently, and as a result of that, they forfeited what the Lord had promised to them.

And they forgot what the Lord had done for them. They forsook what the Lord had said to them. And consequently, they forfeited the promise of the Lord.

There's a downward spiral. It's like spiritual amnesia. Moral amnesia. Spiritual amnesia that leads to apostasy and ends up in anarchy.

So first of all, this first phase in spiritual amnesia is that they forgot what the Lord had done for them. Look at verse 10 again. All the generation before were gathered to their fathers, that is they died.

And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work he'd done for them. In his famous book, 1984, George Orwell wrote, He who controls the past controls the future.

[3 : 24] He who controls the present controls the past. I'll think about that for a minute. He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.

So think about Hitler or Stalin or Mao Zedong. Once they seized power, once they had control of the present, what did they do? They rewrote the past. They rewrote the past.

Why did they rewrite the past in history? They rewrote it so that they could control the future. And it worked, at least for a while. History is always written, isn't it, by the winners.

And so, how important it is for us as Christians that we know our history. It's one of the tricks of the devil. To control the future by rewriting the past.

So think about the word missionary. Think of the history of missions. And of course, as we think of missionaries in the past, we're very aware, aren't we?

[4 : 29] They were children of their day. They were children of their time. And when we think of the word missionaries, we might not think, well, they were as culturally sensitive as they might have

been.

But to brand them all as a bunch of cultural imperialists is to rewrite history. Why does that happen? It's to put a stop to any missionary work in the future. Yeah. It's a ploy of the devil.

How did this happen? How did these people lose touch with the past? How did they lose touch and forget what the Lord had done for them in the Exodus and in the wilderness and the conquest of Canaan and the fall of Jericho?

How did they forget about all that the Lord had done for them? And I want to suggest some reasons that may very well apply to us. One reason was that they'd become satisfied with the status quo.

God had said to Joshua, hadn't he? Go in to the promised land and possess it. Go in and drive out all the enemies.

[5 : 35] Don't intermingle. Don't intermarry. Possess the entire land. And they did. The initial invasion of Canaan in Joshua is rapid and effective.

And yet as chapter 1 of Judges shows us, there's still a lot of work to be done. And at the end of a long, long life, Joshua recognized there was still land to be occupied.

There were still pockets of resistance to overcome. And that first generation, in obedience to God's command, they'd done a pretty good job. But no generation, however great, has seen all that God wants it to be.

There is always still more to be done. There is always still more territory to be possessed, more ground to be covered. And along comes the second generation, and their reaction is, well, why bother?

Near enough is good enough. We've got the land. We mustn't be greedy. These Canaanites, well, when you get to know them, they're not so bad, actually. We can coexist with them, can't we?

[6 : 47] Live and let live. That's what I say. And so the downward spiral begins. Someone has said this.

God doesn't intend for the experience of previous generations to be a diving board from which you can go down, but a foundation on which you can build up.

And so let me speak to you, if you come from a Christian home, a covenant home. Let me speak to our young people and to our children. Don't take it for granted.

Don't be complacent about it. What do I pray for our children in this church? What do I hope you pray for your children? I hope that you pray that our children will serve the Lord better in their generation than I have in mine.

The first sign of degeneration is complacency. It's satisfaction with the status quo. And I hope, as a church, we're not satisfied with the status quo. There's still a lot of ground to be covered, isn't there?

[7 : 53] There's a lot of work to be done if we're going to reach this city for Christ. The second symptom is ingratitude. That they took God's blessings for granted.

They didn't acknowledge him in all the things that he had bestowed upon them. They took the credit themselves. And God had warned them, hadn't he, about it in Deuteronomy chapter 6.

He said this, When the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob. These are hundreds of years before that God had promised them this land.

They had to wait for the iniquity of the Amorites to be completed. And God had served warning on those Canaanites. He says, if you don't repent, I will wipe you off the face of the earth.

They had hundreds of years to do that. God was patient with them. But he promised his people, you will enter the land. And God says, when you enter the land, that I will give you.

[8 : 54] And there will be great and good cities that you did not build. And houses full of good things that you did not fill. And cisterns that you did not dig. And vineyards and olive trees that you didn't fill.

And when you eat and you're full, then take care. Why take care? Lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Out of the house of slavery.

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord. And isn't that where we are today in today's church? We've become blessing-centered rather than God-centered.

More interested in the gifts than the giver. And if you're anything like me, so often you forget to give thanks. And we take credit, don't we, for what God has done amongst us.

And it's not as if the Lord needs our praise. To make him feel good about himself. He wouldn't be God if that were so. It's not that he needs us thanking him all the time. But we need, don't we, to

thank him.

[9 : 59] It's good for us. And the word of God commands us to give thanks in everything. That is God's expressed will for every Christian. 1 Thessalonians 5.18 And Hebrews 13 verse 5.

As believer priests, we are to continually offer a sacrifice of praise. The fruit of lips that confess his name. And so as the people of God, we are to be a thankful people.

And cultivate and nourish a spirit of praise and thanksgiving. In the place of a self-congratulatory spirit. Apathy dies where praise flourishes.

Apathy dies where praise flourishes. Apathy is the opposite of love. Hatred is not the opposite of love.

Think about it. It's not that they didn't know what the Lord had done for them, is it? It's not that the people in Judges 2 were uninformed.

[11 : 08] They were just unimpressed. It's as much as they could do to stifle a yawn. We talked about this in Sunday School Didn't We Children. Do you want to do what I asked you to do just for a moment?

What happens when you yawn? We'll see it in about a minute from the adults. Because a yawn is contagious, isn't it? Let me say this.

To yawn at God is far worse than waving your fist in his face. To yawn at God is far worse than giving him the fingers. It's a far greater insult to be bored and unimpressed with what God has done for us in Christ.

And it's one of the devil's great weapons, isn't it? What's the greatest blow to somebody who's a new Christian? It's not the opposition of the world. The opposition of the world actually fires up the new Christian.

The greatest blow to the new Christian in their newfound faith is the apathy of believers. It is the yawn of the church. Yawning in boredom when they ought to be yelling in excitement.

[12 : 16] And that is second generation religion and it's contagious. That's why sometimes I think that there is more hope for the kind of out and out rebels.

Than the church going cage who's just got bored. There's more hope for the person who's living a wasted life in the city than the person who knows it all but just cannot be bothered.

Think of the two sons in Luke 15. You've got the one son, the prodigal, who kicked over the traces, goes off into the far country and he is surprised by grace.

And then you've got the other son, haven't you? The stay at home, church going boy who never put a foot wrong. Which of the boys is lost at the end of the story? And so here is the first phase of amnesia.

They forgot what the Lord had done for them. They neither knew the Lord nor what he'd done. Peter talks in his second epistle terrifyingly about those who deny the Lord who bought them.

[13 : 28] And spiritual amnesia. They forgot that they'd been cleansed from their past sins. And in the end it leads to apostasy.

It's only a matter of time when you begin to forget what God has done for you. It's only a matter of time before you begin to forsake what he said. That's our second point.

That's what happened. Joshua and Judges, two books side by side but poles apart. Joshua is a book of conquest. Judges is a book of compromise. Joshua records victory after victory after victory.

Judges records defeat after defeat after defeat. And there's a reason for that. What's at the heart of Joshua? Because what is central to Joshua is peripheral to Judges.

God had said to Joshua in chapter 1 verse 8, Keep the book of the law always on your lips. Talk about it. Meditate upon it day and night. Do everything that's written on it.

[14 : 32] You do that, Joshua. You put it on your lips for the law of God and you will be prosperous and successful. Meditate on it day and night. But that's entirely missing from the book of Judges.

In the book of Judges, as far as I can tell, there is no reference to the study of Scripture. Because God's word in the book of Judges is no longer right at the heart of the nation. As it was under the leadership of Joshua.

So look at verses 12 and 13. They abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods from among the gods and the people who were around them.

And they bowed down to them and they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord. And they served the Baals and the Asherah.

They forgot what he'd done. They forgot what he said. We talked about it in our reading of the Lord, didn't we? The first commandment, you shall have no other gods before me. They had the Bible.

[15 : 39] They had the Ten Commandments. That was at the heart of the covenant that God had entered into them as a nation. They possessed the Bible, but they chose to ignore it. They rejected the word of God and they began to look at the life, look at life the way the Canaanites did.

And they did evil in the sight of the Lord. It says that in verse 11. And can you notice, they didn't just fall into it. How they threw themselves into it.

How they served the Baals and the Asherah. They are the male and the female god and goddesses. And they had sex. And that's how the land became fertile. And so if you wanted the land to become fertile, if you wanted good crops, you'd go to the temples, one of Baals' temples, and you'd sleep with the temple prostitute.

That's how they worshipped. They threw themselves into it. And they forsook Yahweh, the holy God of the Bible. And they threw themselves into Baal worship. They served the Baals.

That's what we're told. It's a supreme sin. It's a sin of all sins. It's the greatest sin a human being can commit. The greatest sin a human being can commit. It's not murder or rape or other atrocities.

[16 : 58] That are written about in this book. The greatest atrocity is to turn your back on the living God. And to serve many gods.

To serve man-made gods. They forsook the Lord. Listen to how Jeremiah puts it. He puts it so helpfully in Jeremiah 2.

He says, Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this.

Be shocked. Be utterly desolate, declares the Lord. For my people have committed two sins. Here are the two sins. Number one, they've forsaken me. The fountain of living waters. And they've hewed out cisterns for themselves.

Broken cisterns. That can hold no water. They've walked away from me. And they've walked away from the living water.

[17 : 54] And they've tried to create cisterns, bowls that will hold water. But they can't hold water. I heard recently about a young girl.

She had an outstanding academic career. That promised her a brilliant future. She met a young man who wanted to become a doctor. She fell head over heels in love with him.

They decided to marry. She gave up her studies. She gave up her personal hopes and her dreams. To put him through medical school. Year after year, she worked unselfishly at menial jobs.

She put up with all the inconvenience of his schedule and his studies. And finally, he finished his training. Only to tell her that he was leaving. And that he found someone else.

And we understand how shocking that is. We understand how devastating that is. But that is what Israel has done. And that is what you and I do when we substitute anyone or anything for God in our lives.

[19 : 03] And the results are devastating. They forget what the Lord has done. They forsook what the Lord has said. And because of that, they forfeit what the Lord has promised to them.

Look at verse 21. So God says, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died.

In order to test them. Whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did or not. And so God says to them, his people now, I will test you now.

I'm not going to do what I promised. I'm not going to drive out these nations before you. I'm going to leave these nations where they are. And you are going to have to work this out for yourselves. And it's going to be a test.

And we know, don't we, that they failed this test. We'll see that very clearly as we go through the book of Judges. They never learned this lesson. That the cycle keeps on repeating itself again and again and again.

[20 : 14] Over and over. And Israel is spiraling out of control. Amnesia leads to apostasy. Which ultimately, well do you know where the book of Judges finishes? Let's go to the very last phrase of the book of Judges.

Right at the end of the book. Chapter 21 and verse 25. Right at the end. Because in those days there was no king in Israel. And everyone did.

What was right in his own eyes. No king in Israel. God is not king. And the people did what was wrong.

No it doesn't say that does it? It's really interesting what it says. The people did what was right in their own eyes. We know our Bibles.

That should point us right back to Genesis 1, 2 and 3. Because God says. The devil says in it. If you eat of the fruit. You will become like God. Knowing good and evil.

[21 : 14] You will usurp the throne of God. You will take the place of God. You will be the one deciding what's right and what's wrong. And you've got no authority to do that.

You're just a little creature. And so can you see what's happening? Amnesia leads to apostasy. Which leads to moral anarchy. Where everyone decides the rules for themselves.

And whatever suits them and their lifestyle. It's up to you. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. It's anarchy. So much you could say on this.

But let me just make a couple of applications. As we close. Let me throw out a few suggestions.

We're going to see in this book. The astonishing grace of God. Look what it says in verse 16.

Verse 16. Then the Lord raised up judges. Who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

[22 : 14] It's astonishing. Twelve men and one woman. Don't get this wrong. Don't misunderstand this. These judges are not dignified officials.

Wearing stately clothes in a court of law. They are like wild west frontiersmen. The judges are rough around the edges to say the least.

And who God raises up to deliver the people again and again. They are wild men. They're like sheriffs. In those old western films. Rather than like a high court judge.

And God raised them up again and again and again. Verse 18. And whenever the Lord raised up the judges for them. The Lord was with the judge.

And he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of their judge. Don't fail to notice that. It's really, really important. Because instead of abandoning Israel to their sins.

[23 : 15] And leaving them. God kept on sending them saviors. To rescue them again and again.

And that's what the judges were. The people of Israel keep on sinning. Keep on rejecting his rule.

Keep on spurning his love. And he goes out and reaches to them. And he reaches out to them. And he reaches out to them. And Judges is full of the same love and grace of God.

That ultimately sent the Lord Jesus Christ into this world. And that's why you need to read this book. Because it is a dark book. And it is a confronting book. And it is a frightening book.

And yet it is full and dripping with grace. And it is full of the gospel. It is full of Jesus. And according to Hebrews 7 verse 25.

Jesus is the judge who never dies. Because he is alive forevermore. And Hebrews tells you.

[24 : 14] Because he is alive forevermore. He is able to save you forevermore. He is able to save you to the uttermost. Isn't it? So that preacher's line of from the gutter most.

Right at the bottom to the uttermost. That is where we are in Judges. That's where we live today in the UK. Right in the gutter. And we don't need role models.

You do not need role models. They are flawed big time in Judges. The book of Judges is not a book about trying to be like Gideon. Trying to be like Samson.

The book of Judges is not a book about trying your best. It is a book about Jesus. And it reminds you that you need a saviour. And that God has provided you a saviour who will never die. Who is able to rescue you this morning.

And so Judges points you to Jesus. And it whets your appetite. And Judges will explain that to us. And so there is a tension as you go through Judges.

[25 : 20] That we will see resolved at the cross. It is a tension between grace and law. Look at verse 14. So the anger of the Lord broke out against Israel.

That is what it means. Verse 16. And the Lord raises up Judges. Who saves them. How can verse 14 and verse 16 be true? How can God and evil coexist?

He cannot even look upon iniquity. He is a holy God. We are told that the anger of the Lord burns against Israel. And yet the Lord raises up Judges to save them.

And so God on the one hand he is holy. He cannot even tolerate evil. On the other hand God is loving and faithful. He doesn't want his people to perish.

How do you hold those two things together? And that tension keeps us in suspense all the way through the book of Judges. Will God finally give up on his people?

[26 : 24] Which is only what they deserve. They keep repeating the same things over and over and over again. And it just seems to go from bad to worse. But if he were to give up on his people.

Well what about those promises? What about that covenant? He has made a promise to them. That he will give them the land. Or will he finally give in to his people?

You know like exasperated parents. You know kids. Boys will be boys. You've just got to let them do what they do. Is that what God is like? Is God finally going to just give in to his people?

That's the way they are. But what of his holiness? And it's only at the cross isn't it? That this is resolved. Only through the cross. That God can as Paul says.

God can be just. And at the same time the justifier of the ungodly. It is only at the cross. That God can remain just. And at the same time the justifier of those who have faith in Christ.

[27 : 29] Augustine said. When God is angry. Where are you going to go? Where are you going to run to? Where will you go because of your sins?

The Bible tells us that God is angry every day. Because of our sins. It's not a hate that flies off the handle. It's not an irrational anger. It's not that God gets out of bed to the wrong side.

That he's irritable or grumpy like I am. But no. Anger is his settled disposition against our sin. And God is angry with our sin every day. Because of what we do and how we behave.

And so where are we going to run to? Oh sinner man. Where are you going to run to? How will you escape God's anger? And Augustine says. I've told you this before. And he says.

I'll tell you. If you want to run away from a God. He's angry with you because of your sin. The only place to run from him. Is to run to him. As he comes to you in Jesus Christ.

[28 : 32] And so realize this. That God was in Christ. Reconciling the world to himself at the cross. It's not that Jesus is some kind of innocent bystander.

Who just got unlucky. And God dumped all of it on him. No. God was in Christ. It is God himself who has gone to the cross. In the person of his son. Who absorbed in himself the punishment.

For our sin. He's a holy God. Who cannot pretend that sin doesn't matter. He's a loving God. That's who he is. Who does not desire the death of the wicked.

But wants to see his people saved. And the only way that that can happen. Is at the cross. And nowhere else in the Bible.

Do you see more clearly. What Ralph Davis calls. The boring bondage of sin. You see Israel didn't listen to a judge. Verse 19. Whenever the judge died.

[29 : 30] They turned back. Were more corrupt than their fathers. Going after other gods. Serving them above and down to them. They just can't help themselves. They're held in sin's grip. They've got bail in their blood.

And they just keep slipping back into idolatry. And they just can't break free. And it's a reminder to us. Isn't it? Judges. Teaches us. The tragic tyranny of sin.

Sin is not. Just failing to live up to the mark.

Sin is a power that holds you in its grip. Jesus doesn't just wipe the slate clean. Does he? He doesn't just forgive you our debts.

He does do all that. But he breaks the power of cancelled sin. And he sets the prisoner free. And he is the only one who can do that. And he is a real deliverer.

[30 : 31] Not just on paper. This is in real time and space. He breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free. And we'll see this in the book of Judges.

That if you want to know Jesus' power in your life. And you want to know him as a deliverer in the temptations that you face in a world like this.

If you want to have Jesus as your saviour. It means taking him as your Lord. Judges makes that really clear, doesn't it?

Actually, there can be no kind of halfway house. No half-hearted discipleship. God wanted Israel to take the entire land of Canaan.

But instead they compromised and lived with the idols in their midst. And God wants all of your life, not just part of it. Do you remember Abraham Kuyper's famous quote? He says this. There is not a square inch in the domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does

not cry, mine.

[31 : 38] There's not a square inch of your life or my life or this world over which Jesus does not cry, mine. Every square inch of your life belongs to him. And if Jesus is not Lord over all, he's not Lord at all.

And you cannot have him as your saviour unless you'll bow to him as your Lord. So 96 times in the book of Acts he's called Lord. Only twice he's called saviour. And so we need to look at our families and our careers and our ambitions and our use of time and our monies and ask ourselves two questions.

Number one, am I willing to do what God says about this area of my life? And secondly, am I willing to accept whatever God sends in this area?

And if the answer to either of those questions is no, you are living amongst idols. Just like these people. And you've allowed the culture of the Canaanites to infiltrate.

And so I believe that judges actually is the corrective we need as a church. I don't know where I read this. Critiquing kind of the modern day church in the UK. It says, we believe in a hell we don't deserve, but in a Jesus we do deserve.

[32 : 56] And I think that's a fair criticism, but it's the exact opposite of the truth. Judges is about grace abounding to the chief of sinners. It's about God reaching out in mercy to people like you and people like me.

Who do not deserve it and do not seek it. And do not appreciate it. Let's pray.