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Winners and Weepers
Messes. Choices. Faithful God Series
Judges 1:1-2:5
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Over the years, I've had many conversations with people that seem unable or unwilling to connect the dots between the mess they're experiencing in life and the choices they have made. Often they portray themselves as victims, as if this “just happened”. And it's not unusual that these people blame God, “Why would You do this to me?” unable to see the connection. Yes, victims! Victims of very bad choices! And choices have consequences. At the end of the story, based on the choices we make, there will be winners, and there will be weepers. That’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Old Testament book of Judges, I'm sure you were just reading Judges this week! (*laughter*) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges. The Book of Judges covers the time period from the death of Joshua, really to the anointing of King Saul. Judges 1:1 opens with the word: **Now**, or a Hebrew word that could be translated: *And*. How many books do you know that start with the word “and”? It presupposes something has come before it. So, we go back to Joshua, and Joshua 1:1 opens with the word, “*and*”. So we go back to the book of Deuteronomy, and that's actually where our story begins.

So the nation of Israel has been led by God out of Egypt, to the land of promise, but the people were not willing to trust God by faith to take the land. So that generation who is unwilling to trust God, wanders in the wilderness for 40 years because of their unwillingness to trust God. Deuteronomy means *Second Law*, probably more accurately it is the re-giving of the *First Law*. But it is giving the next generation their marching orders for going in and taking the land. God is very clear, “If you trust Me, I'll give you the land.” He calls on them to go in, to drive the inhabitants out of the land, and to dedicate this land to Him. It would be a holy land, a land set apart to God, in order that God might pour out His blessing on the people, and that the nations around would see there's a better way to live, that they too might know the God of the Hebrews.

So one question that would arise would be “Well, why would God ask them to drive these people out of the land? That seems so unfair!” So, first of all, it's really important we don't try to impose 21st century sensibilities on an ancient world. It just didn't work that way. This was a piece of ground where there was no dominant nation. This wasn't like Egypt, with the pharaoh that ruled the territory. Rather, this was a ground that was covered by small, what you might call city states. They were kind of a nation unto themselves. We might use the word almost like *gangs*, and they were dotted all throughout the landscape. It was an exceedingly violent place. It was the law of the jungle. Judges said, “*Every man did that which is right in his own eyes*,” and so there was no possibility for peace. So what God wanted was: Think about an area dominated by gangs and going in there and moving them out, in order to create this land dedicated to God and God's ways, in order to create flourishing. So then God could bless the land, and the other nations would see there's a better way to live. That was God's vision. So to do that, God had to move these idol-worshipping, very violent people out.

So Joshua is the story of crossing the Jordan River, the walls of Jericho, into the land of promise, and taking the land. So Joshua is filled with battles and victories and sword slashing, and all kinds of good stuff. And they do a tremendous job because they trust God. But before Joshua dies, he takes each of the 12 tribes of Israel, and he assigns them a particular area of the land. So, think of the land as being divided up into counties, and each tribe got a particular county. Your job is to finish the job, to clean up that area of land, and we'll dedicate this land to God.

So that's, then, where we pick up the story in the book of Judges. Now, some people would say the book of Judges has two introductions—the passage this week, and the passage next week. I think more accurately stated, the passage this week is the background to the story. The passage next week is the introduction to the book of Judges, and then we start these amazing stories of these heroes referred to as Judges. So, Judges 1:1:

Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?” The LORD said, “Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand.” Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, “Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you.” So Simeon went with him. Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. They found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. Adoni-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.” So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there. (*NASB, Judges 1:1-7)

So it had been very clear that Joshua was the leader. But when Joshua died, the people came to God and said, “Who now takes the lead?” God answered them, “The tribe of Judah.” Now, each of these 12 tribes is named after one of the sons of Jacob. But understand, those sons died many years before. So we're not talking about individuals here; we're talking about tribes. So the tribe of Judah, which is the tribe through whom the Messiah would come, takes the lead. They invite Simeon. If you remember the story of Jacob, he had 4 wives and 12 sons. It was a bit of a mess. But Judah and Simeon were full brothers, both children of Leah. If you look on a map, the territory given to Simeon was actually within the boundaries of the territory given to Judah. So it makes sense that they would combine forces and work together. So they trust God. They go into battle, and they take Bezek. Bezek is ruled by Adoni-bezek. Adoni is a Hebrew word, typically ascribed to God. It means *Master* or *Lord*. So he has named himself Master Bezek, or Master, Lord of Bezek. Each of these city states has their own king, typically has their own city and fortress, and it's just the law of the jungle. So he flees and they catch him. They cut off his thumbs and his big toes. So what's up with that?

In the ancient world, when one group conquered another group, you had two options: Either you slaughter everyone, which was most common, or you take them as slaves. But it actually took a lot of resources to maintain people as slaves, so typically they just wipe them out. As I said, exceedingly violent! In those days, the king was not an administrator, not like King Herod in the

New Testament. They were primarily warriors, and he was king because he was the best warrior of all. So what do they do with Lord Bezek? It was common. You cut off their thumbs and their big toes to disable them, so they cannot ever fight again. They deliver him to Jerusalem, and there in Jerusalem, he will live out his days. Now it's interesting that Lord Bezek tells us that he had actually done this to seventy other kings himself. He found great delight that they lived by picking up scraps under his table, because he had defeated them. Now, what's helpful about that is, again, it gives us insight as to how exceedingly violent this place was. Most historians think **seventy** is a bit of an exaggeration, but whatever the number is, you just get a sense of the law of the jungle, and how many people he slaughtered to have that many people under his table. He sees it as justice. He's done this to others; now God has done it to him. Verse 8:

Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. Afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country and in the Negev and in the lowland. So Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron formerly *was* Kiriath-arba); and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmi. (Vs. 8-10)

So they keep going south. About twenty miles south of Jerusalem is Hebron. Hebron was the highest point in that area. We would recognize it as the home of Abraham. We would also recognize it as the place where the twelve spies stood and looked into the land and saw the giants, and determined the giants are too big; we can't trust God with this. So there's a lot of history here with Hebron. So they go in, they take Hebron, and they take down these three sons at the end of verse 10. Now, it's important to understand that Jerusalem, at this point, was not Jerusalem, as we think of it. Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, as we think of it, doesn't happen until under King David in 2 Samuel. It's just another fortified city state, occupied by the Jebusites. So the significance of naming these three sons is they are sons of Anak, and that Hebrew word means *giant*. So these are likely descendants; they're giants. But God easily gives Judah and the army victory. There was no reason for the previous generation to wander for 40 years. God was fully capable of giving them the victory, just as He had promised. Verse 11:

Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly *was* Kiriath-sepher). And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife." Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife. Then it came about when she came *to him*, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. (Vs. 11-15)

So just a little bit south of Hebron is this place called Debir. So at this point, Caleb is 85 years old. Caleb was one of the two spies of the twelve that said, "Let's go! We can take these guys." The other one was Joshua. So Joshua is dead; Caleb is 85, so he invites anyone to step forward who has the courage to trust God, and "Let's win a victory here!" So his nephew, Othniel steps up, trusts God, wins a great victory and gets the girl. Achsah was Caleb's daughter. So then Achsah

says to her husband, Othniel, “Ask dad for this piece of ground.” But then she herself asked her father for these springs that go with the land. What she was asking for was very valuable. Now there's a hidden message in here, as there is throughout this text. This is the idea: God calls someone to trust Him and win a great victory. Othniel does that. He gets the girl; he gets married; it's this love story. They get the land, and she asks for the water rights. So, they get all this, which is a picture of Israel, *who is the bride of God*. And God invites them, “Trust Me, and have the courage to take the land. Enter into this beautiful love story, into this marriage, and then ask for whatever you want, and I'll be more than delighted to bless you and give it to you.” Caleb wasn't offended by this; he was delighted to give his daughter what she asked for. It's a picture of God in this love story, delighted to give His people what they want, to create an amazing place of flourishing, *if they'll just have the courage to trust Him*. Verse 16:

The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people. Then Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. And Judah took Gaza with its territory and Ashkelon with its territory and Ekron with its territory. Now the Lord was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country... (Vs. 16-19a)

So Moses' father-in-law was Jethro. Jethro was a Kenite; the Kenites joined the people of Judah, all together getting this victory for God. So they're continuing to move forward, and they take essentially the Philistine cities. Now we always look at what we refer to as the *law of the first reader*. And what that means is: how would the first readers have understood the story? In this case, the first readers would have been the nation of Israel under King Saul. So the nation of Israel under King Saul would have had a question, because the Philistines were their primary enemy, that were a thorn in their side constantly. So, “If the nation of Israel conquered all these Philistine cities, why is it the Philistines still occupy those cities and are making our life miserable?” The second half of verse 19—and you've got to hate this word in this text—**but**. Up until this point, it's been victory after victory after victory; it's pretty exciting stuff. **But**...Oh boy!

...but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots. (Vs. 19b)

The Philistines were known for their iron chariots that were worthless in the hill country, but very difficult to do battle with on the flat, coastal plain. So they didn't fight them there. This takes us back to Deuteronomy. “*And God warned the nation of Israel, when you go into the land of Israel, be very careful if the victories come too easy, because you will forget the Lord your God.*” So they've been taking one place after another, one victory after another, even the giants. But now they hit the chariots. And for some reason, they aren't convinced God can give them the victory, and they leave them there. If this was an athletic contest, our team is ahead. But all of a sudden, it's starting to feel like the momentum is shifting, and we're getting this uneasy feeling in our gut. It feels like the victory is slipping away. That's where we're at in the text, Verse 20:

Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak. (Again, Anak means giant. So now we feel better, back

on track. **But...oh, boy!**) (*laughter*) **But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.** (Vs. 20-21)

So again, the first readers would have understood that they did not have possession of Jerusalem. It belonged to the Jebusites.

Likewise the house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them. The house of Joseph spied out Bethel (now the name of the city was formerly Luz). The spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city and we will treat you kindly." So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go free. The man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and named it Luz which is its name to this day. (Vs. 22-26)

So now the tribe of Joseph is taking Bethel. They see someone coming out from the city; they capture this person. They make a deal, "You tell us where the secret entrance into the city is; we'll let you live." Most of these city states were fortified. They had a main entrance, but almost all of them had some sort of a secret entrance. Typically it was some sort of a waterway. So the army is not going to go marching through the front entrance; they want to know the secret entrance. So this person tells them, and they win a great victory. He and his family go free. They go down the road a little ways, and they start a *new* city of Luz. So this one is a wash. They go in and wipe out one city, but the man released establishes a new city. By the time of the first readers, Luz was a full city within the territory. Verse 27:

But Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land. It came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely.

Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them.

Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor.

Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob. So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; and the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced labor for them.

Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley; yet the Amorites persisted in living in Mount

Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalvim; but when the power of the house of Joseph grew strong, they became forced labor. The border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward. (Vs. 27-36)

One after another, after another ...**did not drive them out!** We start with such great victory—a little glimpse of what could be if they just trust God—and then it turns into this very sad story. We would say *of mixing in with the culture*...again, and again, and again, and again.

Now before we take the last five verses, I want to throw a map up on the screen and give you a little bit of a sense of the book of Judges. So, this is the land of Israel. Here's the Mediterranean Sea, Sea of Galilee, Jordan River, the Dead Sea. Like pretty much every place in the world, the divisions have to do with geography. There is a mountain range that comes right down the spine. So this is the mountainous area. To the west of that is the hill country that it talks about, and clear over west of that is what's called the coastal plain. So this is Judah, and within that is Simeon. So as I mentioned before, Simeon is actually within the boundaries of Judah. So here is Jerusalem, and then here's Hebron and here's Debir where Othniel gets the girl. So this is where the story is taking place. If you look at all the different colors on the map, those are the different regions that were assigned to the different tribes of Israel. So think of those as counties, and each tribe was in charge of a particular county. Then you see all these little white boxes. Every one of those represents a Judge. So throughout the book of Judges, there are Judges that arise in different geographical regions, different counties, whose assignment is to deal with the enemy in that particular location. So that's how the book of Judges works: there are all these small geographical areas where these battles will take place. All right, last five verses:

Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you, and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they will become *as thorns* in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.’” When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD. (Judges 2:1-5)

The Hebrew word **Bochim** actually means *weepers*. So the angel of the LORD comes to pay them a visit. Often in the Old Testament, when you see *angel of the LORD*, it's what we call the pre-incarnate Christ. In other words: *it's Jesus in the Old Testament, before he took on man*. That's likely the case here. So this is the second person of the Trinity—God Himself—who shows up. He comes **from Gilgal**. That's significant, because that's the place where Joshua led the nation through the Jordan River when the Jordan River parted, and they established a stone monument to remind them of God's faithfulness. So God had shown Himself to be faithful, so the angel of the LORD comes and reminds them: God kept His promise. He brought you out of the land of Egypt. He brought you into the land of promise. He gave you these victories, just like He promised. He told you to drive out the inhabitants—to not establish covenants with these violent idol-worshipping people—but you didn't listen. You did not obey. Choices have consequences. And the consequence is God has said, “Okay, then I will not drive them out, and you will live with your choices, and these people—these violent, idol-worshipping people—**will be a constant thorn in your side**. Your

life will be miserable, **and their god's will be a snare to you.**" When the people heard this, they wept—not a weeping of repentance, but a weeping of sorrow—that their lives are going to be miserable.

When we go through the Old Testament, Egypt is a picture of the world that holds us in slavery. God delivers us from the slavery of the world, by leading us to the land of promise, which represents our salvation. He calls us then, to clean up the land, to drive out that which is offensive to God, to obey Him, to live life His way, on His terms, so that He might bless us. As a result of that, others might see the blessing of God and choose Christ as salvation themselves.

It's very common that when people experience new life in Christ, they're excited; they're courageous; they trust God, and they begin to do battle to clean up the land. And we deal with this, and we deal with that, and it's all so exciting, just like in this story. But at some point, we start to get tired; we start to get weary. We get tired of doing battle and cleaning up the land. And we start to think that maybe we can just enter into a covenant with these areas of our lives, and somehow we excuse them, we rationalize, we justify, and we settle in allowing things in our lives that make our lives miserable. But so often, we fail to connect the dots. Why is it we're not really experiencing the abundant life, the joyous life that Jesus promised? Maybe the answer is because, rather than driving out the things in our lives that are offensive to God, we've allowed them to remain.

Some of you this morning, as soon as I say that, you know exactly what I'm talking about. There are things in your life you know shouldn't be there, things in your life you know are offensive to God, things in your life that you should deal with, but somehow, over time, you've allowed them to remain, and you've been unwilling to possess the land. My prayer is through our study in the book of Judges, that you would have the faith and the courage to face your stuff. Get back to work; clean up the land, and experience God's blessing. Part of the story of Judges is God will again and again and again show Himself compassionate and faithful, ready to forgive when the people are ready to repent. God wants to bless your life, but He cannot do that as long as you've made a covenant to allow that which is offensive to dwell in your life. So hear me on this. At the end of the story, there are going to be winners and there are going to be weepers. So, which is it going to be for you?

Our Father, our prayer is that we would trust You, that we would have the faith and courage to face that which in our lives is offensive to You, to take possession of the land, to experience your blessing. God, may that be our story as a result of our time in the book of Judges. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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