

August 7/8, 2021

**Deliver Us This Day**  
*Messes. Choices. Faithful God Series*  
**Judges 10:1-18**  
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When we started our study of the book of Judges, I said that there are some people that seem to struggle to connect the dots between the choices they make and the misery they experience in life. They often portray themselves as victims, as if this stuff just happens, and they can't seem to connect the dots between bad choices and the misery they're experiencing. Perhaps it's because we have a tendency to just kind of diminish the significance of our sin before a holy God.

Several years ago, I was having a conversation with someone, and I was concerned about some lifestyle choices and just wanted to talk to him about it. And he said to me, "Bryan, it's no big deal. I can go out and sin on Friday, ask forgiveness on Saturday, and everything's okay." Now, most Christians would probably not be so bold as to say that, especially to their pastor. *(laughter)* But I wonder, "Are we guilty of thinking that way? That the grace and mercy and compassion of God means He really just kind of shrugs His shoulders and says, "Nah, sin? Whatever. It's not that big a deal." Imagine making bad choices, ending up miserable, and coming crawling back to God and expecting Him to do His thing and make everything okay. Instead, God says, "Nope. Don't want to hear it...not interested." You say, "He would never do that." Well, He did in our story in Judges, Chapter 10. So, if you have a Bible, turn with us to Judges chapter 10. This is our last time in Judges for the summer. We're about halfway through the book. We'll wrap things up this weekend and then we'll pick it up again next summer, and actually finish Judges then.

In order to really understand the book of Judges, you have to remember that before Joshua died, he gathered the people together, and he challenged them that if we're willing to trust God, if we're willing to walk in His ways, to enter into the land, to drive out the enemy, to possess it, and dedicate this land to God, that God longs to bless us and create a place where we can flourish. One can only imagine what could have been. But the book of Judges is all about a people who were unwilling to trust God, and continually chased after foreign gods, and made their lives miserable cycle after cycle after cycle.

Gideon is a great story, but Gideon's story does not end well. Gideon's son, Abimelech, was a disaster and dramatically affected the lives of thousands of people. So now we pick up the story in chapter 10, verse 1:

**Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir. After him, Jair, the Gileadite arose and judged Israel for twenty-two years. He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.**

(\*NASB, Judges 10: Vs. 1-5)

So these are what are referred to as minor judges, minor from the standpoint we know really next to nothing about their story. The first one is Tola, and we learn the names of his father and his grandfather, but those names really are meaningless to us. When it says, **He arose to save**, it's the exact same language used of the other judges. So, although we don't know what happened, it must have been significant. God used him, and there was peace in the land for twenty-three years.

The next is Jair, a Gileadite. The land of Gilead was on the east side of the Jordan, so this is the first we really have activity east of the Jordan. And all we really know is that he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they oversaw thirty, essentially, tent cities. Now there's lots of discussion about the significance of that. Here's what we would know: **Thirty sons** means he has a *harem*, so he was living somewhat like a king. **Donkeys** represented *royalty* and would have been expensive, so they'd represent prosperity, but it also would be prosperity, then, in a time of peace. And then this whole idea of **thirty tent cities**. You couldn't maintain tent cities unless there was peace in the land. So I think the meaning of these two minor judges is, after the mess with Gideon, after the mess with Abimelech, once again God showed himself faithful, raised up judges, and there was peace and prosperity in the land. But we know what's coming next. Verse 6:

**Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroath, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. The anger of the LORD burned against Israel... (Vs. 6-7a)**

So notice verse six uses the word **again**. We've been through this cycle now multiple times, where the nation does what's evil in the sight of God. They're conquered by some other nation. They're miserable; they cry out to God; God raises up a judge, and the judge delivers them. So once again they **did evil in the sight of the Lord**. Now, I've mentioned this before, but again, it's worth underscoring. The problem is they're doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord. This has to be understood against a backdrop where the description of the times is that, "*Everyone did that which was right in his own eyes,*" which connects us back to Genesis, chapter three.

One of the symptoms of people who believe that they can be God is that, "I want to decide for myself what is right and wrong." This is a very good description of our culture today, where everybody wants to decide for themselves what's right and wrong, what's good and evil. But what the text says is that misery flows from doing that which is evil in the sight of God. What affects the misery index is not the culture's definition of right and wrong. It is not *your* opinion of right or wrong or *my* opinion of right or wrong. But if we're going to be serious about what creates misery in life, it's about doing evil as defined by God. So, they did evil in the sight of God.

One of the distinctives of this passage is that it is the most extensive passage in the book of Judges, listing all the gods that people chased after. Now, if you remember, when we took our visit to the visitor center in chapter two, God Himself described this as Israel "*playing the harlot*". It's common in the Old Testament that God is portrayed as the husband and Israel is portrayed as the wife, and as she goes out and commits spiritual adultery by pursuing the pagan gods of these other nations, God calls it, "playing the harlot". So, essentially, what's being said is, "You played the harlot with this group of men, and then you played the harlot with this group of men, and then you played the harlot with this group of men seven different times." Again, if you can imagine this in

a twenty-first century culture, it's not hard to imagine these people posting pictures on Facebook and Instagram celebrating their worship of pagan gods, celebrating they're playing the harlot and committing spiritual adultery. And it's not hard to imagine the people around them agreeing and celebrating and liking these pictures. But God is saying, "What are you doing? This is my wife, and she's playing the harlot with one group of men after another, and you think that's a good thing? You think that's something to celebrate?" So it says, verse 7: **The anger of the LORD burned against Israel.**

Now, I've mentioned this before, but it's worth saying again. I can imagine people reading a sentence like that and saying, "Oh, here we go. Here's the God of the Old Testament, that God of anger, that God of judgment, that God of wrath." So, we remind ourselves that the God of the New Testament—the God of grace, and mercy, and compassion, and kindness, that sent His Son to be the Savior of the world—is the same God of the Old Testament. If His wife is out playing the harlot with groups of men again, and again, and again, why would you not think that's going to make Him angry? As a husband, what kind of a bozo would I have to be if I knew my wife was doing that and it doesn't bother me? Would I shrug my shoulders, "Eh, whatever. I don't care." Of course it's going to make God angry!

**. . .and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years, they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites. The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed. (Vs.7b-9)**

So He turns them over, sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites. Essentially God says, "You know, I'm locking the doors. You can't come home. You've decided to play the harlot. You've decided to chase all these other lovers, so you're going to have to live with them. You're going to have to figure this out with them. I don't want you to come home." It says they were **crushed** and **afflicted**, two words we've not seen before in the book of Judges, other than the word *crushed* is the same word used in chapter nine to describe what happened to Abimelech's head when the woman dropped the stone from the tower onto his head.

For eighteen years, they were absolutely miserable! Most of this is happening on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, so this is the first time in Judges where most of the activity is there. But it bleeds over. The Ammonites cross the Jordan, come into the area of Judah and the area of Benjamin, areas we would think of like Jerusalem or Bethlehem, those kinds of areas. So now we know what's happening. We know what's coming next. We've seen it over and over again, in the book of Judges. Verse 10:

**Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals."**

So, we've seen this. They're miserable and they're ready to come crawling back and expect God to do something to deliver them from their misery. Verse 11:

**The LORD said to the sons of Israel, “*Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands.*” (Vs 11-12)**

So this is God, as the husband, saying, “You know, you went off and played the harlot with the Philistines, and I took you back. You went off and played the harlot with the Amalekites, and I took you back. You went off and played the harlot with the Egyptians, and I took you back. Seven times we've been through this, and I keep taking you back.” Verse 13:

**“Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.” (Vs. 13-14)**

So God says, “No! No, I'm not going to listen. I don't hear you. We're not going to do this again. You've done this to Me seven times and I'm not going to do it with you again. Why don't you cry out to your foreign gods? Why don't you cry out to the pagan gods? Why don't you cry out to all these different lovers you were determined to pursue? Let them rescue you. Let them set you free. Let them help you. You thought they were so great. Let's see what they can do for you now in your time of need.”

**The sons of Israel said to the LORD, “We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day.” So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer. Then the sons of Ammon were summoned, and they camped in Gilead. And the sons of Israel gathered together and camped in Mizpah. The people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, “Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.” (Vs. 15-18)**

So the nation of Israel knows there's nowhere else to turn. They can't turn to the gods of the Philistines and the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Amalekites. They're not real. They have no power. They can't deliver us. There's no hope there. The only chance they have is to say, “God, we have sinned. You're the only hope we have. So, do to us whatever you need to do to us.” The **You** in that is emphatic, meaning they're saying, “You and You alone are the only one that can rescue us. So even if You must punish us, Your punishment is still going to be better than what any of these other gods can offer. So do it. Do whatever you have to do.” In good faith they put away their idols and their foreign gods, and they turn their hearts back to God. In verses 17 and 18, it describes the people east of the Jordan **gathered together** in order to try to figure out who is the hero that God is going to raise up in order to set us free. And once again, God will raise up a most unimaginable hero. But we won't talk about that until...next summer. (*laughter*)

I want to wrap this up by going back to the tail end of verse 16: **So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.**

So the traditional interpretation of that, which is in most of our English texts, is that because God is so compassionate and merciful, He sees the misery of Israel and even though this is that consistent pattern, His heart breaks for the people that He loves. And once again, He will show Himself faithful. But the actual Hebrew of the text reads like this: “His soul was short with the misery,” which adds a little bit more description to it. What that essentially means is God was so tired of the disobedience of His people, His soul was tired of the pattern, of the misery, of the cries for help. God loves these people. This is His bride. He wants to see this beautiful love story lived out. But they're just so determined to chase after false gods and make themselves miserable, and in His heart, He's just so weary of the pattern and the misery that they have experienced again and again.

So imagine I'm the husband, and this is a long established pattern with my wife. For decades she goes and plays the harlot with this group of men, and then she comes crawling back. And then she goes and plays the harlot with this group of men, and then she comes crawling back. And then she goes and plays the harlot with this group of men, and then she comes crawling back. And every time I take her back and forgive her. And now she's crawling back again. What should I do? How you answer that question depends on what seat you're sitting in.

For example, if you're my friend, and you see all the heartache and disaster that this has caused me, you'd say, “Don't do it. How many times are you going to enable this behavior? How many times are you going to forgive her before you finally make her live with the consequences? Don't do it.” But what I should do looks really different if you're my wife, and you're terrified, and you're broken, and you're afflicted, and you're crushed, and you're in despair, and without hope, and you have nowhere else to turn. And in that moment, you hope beyond hope that once again I can find the compassion and the grace and the forgiveness to take you back one more time again.

Once again, God will show Himself faithful. Once again, God will forgive them. Once again, God will raise up a hero to deliver them because that's who God is. I know people talk about the God of the Old Testament being this angry, wrathful, judgmental God. But when people say that, I have to ask them, “What Old Testament are you reading?” Because all I see is a God of unimaginable grace, and forgiveness, and compassion, and kindness, and patience. There isn't a person in this room that would be as gracious and forgiving and compassionate as God is with His people over and over and over again.

Early in our study of Judges, I talked about one group of people who are doing things in their life that are offensive to God. They're engaged in sin, and they have no interest in changing. It doesn't matter what I say, doesn't matter what anybody else says, they're not going to change. “I just don't want to hear it.” And that just makes my heart sad because your story is not going to end well. But that's a very small percentage of people in the room. The overwhelming percentage of people in the room want to walk in a way that's pleasing to God, want to be used by God to make a difference in this world, want to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised. The problem is, over time something happens to us, and we start to diminish the significance of our sin. We rationalize it. We excuse it. We minimize it. We dismiss it. Rather than possessing the land and flourishing in this love relationship with God, we've allowed things to stay in our life that we know shouldn't be there. It creates a roadblock to the freedom that Jesus wants us to experience.

When you came in this morning, you received a card that looks like this. If you didn't get one, raise your hand and an usher will quickly get you one. Also, if you don't have a pen or pencil to write with, they can help you with that. So, on one side of the card is the challenge from Joshua, that if we go into the land, if we trust God, if we possess the land, God longs to bless us and make it so we can flourish in this love relationship with Him. The other side of the card is a place for you to identify what is it that is in your life this morning that, if you were to be honest, you would say, "I know it shouldn't be there. I've excused it; I've rationalized it; I've diminished it, but I know it's not pleasing to God. I know it shouldn't be there and it's created a roadblock to really experiencing this freedom that God wants me to experience in Jesus." What you put there is between you and God. We're not asking for any personal information. If you're concerned that the person next to you will see it, just put it in code language. It doesn't matter. It's between you and God, but just so you know. But there's value in coming to a point in our life where we say, "I need to be done with this. This shouldn't be in my life, and I want to have the faith and the courage to face it, to be done with it, to leave it here, and to experience the freedom that Jesus offers."

So here's how we're going to do this. In just a moment I'm going to invite us to stand. We'll sing the last song which is really a song of victory. I really encourage you to pay attention to the lyrics of the song. We're declaring that Jesus gives us the victory. There's no reason to live with these things in our lives. At the end of that song, Rich will invite you to be seated. We're going to run the Judges video one more time. It's just a reminder of what we've studied this summer. And at that point, I would encourage you to write whatever you feel like you want to write on the small tab on the card. As soon as you've done that, I invite you to bring the card up and drop it right here on the steps. It's your way of saying, "I want to be done with this. This shouldn't be in my life. I want to experience the freedom that Jesus offers. I want to have the faith and courage to deal with this. I want to leave it here. I'm not taking it home with me. I want to be done with this. And I'm going to trust God to set me free." At that point, when you've dropped off your card, you're free to go and we'll see you next week. If you're uncomfortable coming all the way to the front, in the back of the sections, there are baskets. You can also just drop them in the basket, and that's your way of saying, "I'm done with this. I'm leaving it here. I'm not taking it home. I want to be set free."

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