

un·compromising faith

IN THE DAYS OF THE JUDGES

SERMON TITLE: Divine Ophthalmology

DATE: April 10, 2022

SCRIPTURE: Judges 17-21

PASTOR: Jim Thompson

The days of the judges were not happy and hopeful. They were dark and despairing. Israel was called to be a holy people – faithful to their God and showing the nations his power and love. Sadly, rather than bless the nations, Israel became like the nations. They bowed to idols and embraced pagan lifestyles. In short, they compromised. As the last line in Judges puts it: “Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” Thus, these stories serve as both a warning and an invitation to us. They warn us against conforming to cultural narratives and they invite us to hope in the face of despair. They ask us, “What does it mean to have an uncompromising faith in a faithful God?”

SERMON SUMMARY

God did not create us to be or do whatever we want. To believe this is to swim upstream and against culture’s current. Sadly, this is basically the epitaph written over the entire book of Judges, specifically over the last five chapters: “Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” The two episodes of chapters 17-18 and chapters 19-21 prove the tragic and destructive nature of thinking that we can run our own lives and from our own perspective. And when we step back from the two episodes of Judges 17-21, we have to ask: What is the remedy for only living from our perspective?

SERMON SCREENSHOTS & KEY POINTS

Judges 17-21 begins and ends with the diagnosis: “In those days there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” And in between these bookends, we have two sad tales of what happens when people try to do meaning and purpose and life and fulfillment on their own. And this approach is doubly problematic because what often feels like freedom is actually a prison.

In chapters 17-18, we meet a man named Micah who in a few short verses breaks six of the ten commandments. He steals millions of dollars from his mom. He and his mom make some idols together. He ordains his own sons as priests. And then, people come and steal from him. This leads to idolatry, violence, and eventually a nearby peaceful city is completely burned the ground (18:27).

In chapters 19-21, we meet a man who has no name. His decisions to do whatever he pleases (with total disregard for God’s purposes) snowball into God’s people fighting against and killing themselves. These chapters also recount one of the more violent scenes in the entire Bible that includes gruesome sexual abuse. And to surpass the first episode, these events lead to multiple cities being burned to the ground (20:48). In both episodes, the authors of Judges want us to see that these things are the result of everyone doing whatever they want. Judges wants us to know and feel:

Any sustained attempt to be or do whatever we want will result in us hurting ourselves and hurting others.

If sin goes unchecked, if idolatry is not met with accountability, if sin grows in secret, if we try to do God’s promises our own way, if we convince ourselves that it’s no big deal, if there’s no hint of repentance, and if these things are given time and space, they become a self-justifying avalanche that will not only take you out, but also those around you. When the dam breaks, it’s not just you who gets hurt. And at the root of it is us trying to do meaning and purpose out of thin air and on our own. We were not made to each be commanders of our own destinies. We are not supposed **to do or figure out** life on our own. And any extended effort in that direction will backfire. So, the first part of the remedy is to own the fact that we need one.

But there’s more. When Judges mentions people doing what’s “right in their own eyes,” the implication is that they aren’t doing what’s right in God’s eyes. And the Hebrew Bible has a lot to say about God’s eyes. His eyes are about his perspective and his standard. On the first page of the Bible, seven times it says that “God saw.” And he saw all that he

made and it was good and right and beautiful. The Psalmist prays, "He who *watches over* Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." 1 Samuel 16 says, "The Lord does not see like man sees. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." And these thoughts on God's eyes helps us wiggle free from the slavery of our own perspective. Thinking about God's eyes teaches us that,

Viewing life from God's perspective and living life by God's standards guards us from unnecessary hurt and roots us in unshakeable hope.

If the diagnosis is problematic because of our eyes, then the remedy is right and true because of God's eyes. And the reason the hope is unshakeable is because God is not a seasonal, tribal judge who falls back into sin. That's what we've been dealing with for 21 chapters. But God isn't like that. He's the eternal, unimpeachable King who knows what's best. Thus, the hope we have in him is immovable. And we can live in this hope and view life from his perspective by leaning into what he says is true:

We are his image-bearers. We are meant to reflect him, enjoy him, and rely on him. The two greatest commands in Scripture are to love God and love others. Towards God, that's a posture of obedience and humility. Towards others, that's a posture of care and service. We are meant to be conversationally prayerful. We are meant to be in vulnerable community together as God's family. We are meant to be people of the Book, knowing God's Word and God's Story. We are meant to be missionally-minded people, inviting people into life with God. These are the kinds of things that give us God's perspective. They remind us that we were made to be a part of something bigger than what we can dream up ourselves.

And Hebrews 12 gives us the supreme remedy for living only from our perspective. It tells us to "fix our eyes on Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith." Why? Because Jesus is God's perspective and God's standard in a Person. Attempting to conjure up hope and happiness on our own by doing whatever we want will undo us. But the gospel of Jesus tells a different story. It tells us that meaning and purpose and truth and life and fulfillment doesn't rest on us, but it rests on him. At the cross, he took all of our pride and turned-inwardness. He took all of our sin and shame and guilt. And now if we trust him, he offers us life beyond us. The equality and justice and peace that our world is aching for cannot be found in "you do you" or "live your dreams." The wholeness and justice and peace that we yearn for can only be found in Jesus healing our idolatrous hearts and freely taking the violence of the world into himself, and then turning around and offering us forgiveness. And because of Jesus' death and resurrection, "In these days we do have a king over God's people, who can show us what's right in God's eyes." Trusting Jesus over trusting self frees us from the pressure of having to make our dreams come true. Now we can live with a divine perspective.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

1. When is a season in life where you tried to do it all on your own?
2. When is it hardest to trust God's perspective and obey God's standards?
3. Who is someone you know who doesn't impulsively do whatever they feel or think, but rather patiently learns what God wants and then follows him?
4. What part of the passage or message stood out the most to you?
5. What can we learn from the language about "the eyes" in these final chapters of Judges?
6. Name a time when you truly understood God's perspective on something you were facing.
7. How do these final chapters of Jesus point to Jesus?

Guided Prayer

Fill in this blank out loud with yourself, your family, or your community group:

"Lord, how do I _____ from your perspective and not mine?"