

**Judges: The Curse of God's Blessing**  
**Sermon 7-15-18**  
**Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**Judges 2:10-19; 3:7-31**

<sup>10</sup>Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. <sup>11</sup>Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshipped the Baals; <sup>12</sup>and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup>They abandoned the LORD, and worshipped Baal and the Astartes. <sup>14</sup>So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and he sold them into the power of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. <sup>15</sup>Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them to bring misfortune, as the LORD had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress. <sup>16</sup>Then the LORD raised up judges, who delivered them out of the power of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup>Yet they did not listen even to their judges; for they lusted after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their ancestors had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD; they did not follow their example. <sup>18</sup>Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them. <sup>19</sup>But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshiping them and bowing down to them. They would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.

<sup>3:7</sup>The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs.

<sup>8</sup>Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. <sup>9</sup>But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. <sup>10</sup>The spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the LORD gave King

Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. <sup>11</sup>So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

<sup>12</sup>The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. <sup>13</sup>In alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, he went and defeated Israel; and they took possession of the city of palms. <sup>14</sup>So the Israelites served King Eglon of Moab eighteen years. <sup>15</sup>But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent tribute by him to King Eglon of Moab. <sup>16</sup>Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length; and he fastened it on his right thigh under his clothes. <sup>17</sup>Then he presented the tribute to King Eglon of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. <sup>18</sup>When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent the people who carried the tribute on their way. <sup>19</sup>But he himself turned back at the sculptured stones near Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." So the king said, "Silence!" and all his attendants went out from his presence. <sup>20</sup>Ehud came to him, while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber, and said, "I have a message from God for you." So he rose from his seat. <sup>21</sup>Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into Eglon's belly; <sup>22</sup>the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out. <sup>23</sup>Then Ehud went out into the vestibule, and closed the doors of the roof chamber on him, and locked them. <sup>24</sup>After he had gone, the servants came. When they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, "He must be relieving himself in the cool chamber." <sup>25</sup>So they waited until they were embarrassed. When he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them. There was their lord lying dead on the floor. <sup>26</sup>Ehud escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the sculptured stones, and escaped to Seirah. <sup>27</sup>When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites went down with him from the hill country, having him at their head. <sup>28</sup>He said to them, "Follow after me; for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites, and allowed no one to cross over. <sup>29</sup>At that time they killed about ten thousand of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; no one escaped. <sup>30</sup>So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest eighty years.

<sup>31</sup>After him came Shamgar son of Anath, who killed six hundred of the Philistines with an oxgoad. He too delivered Israel.

## Message:

(Play video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOYy8iCfIJ4>) As our video illustrates the book of Judges is a very graphic book of the Bible and not for the faint of heart. So if it's that bad, why are we studying it? Because it's going to push us. I don't mean to make any of you feel uncomfortable with it's graphic nature, but this is part of the Biblical narrative. Over the next number of weeks we're going to study this book because I believe it will stretch us. In the Church of the Brethren this is probably one of the books that we avoid because of our peace position. But to know Christ's call for peace, we also have to know how bad things can become. As our video shared with us, Judges is a book of tragedy. It's a cautionary book and story. It's warning us of what not to do as followers of God. As our video also told us, don't think of the book of Judges or the term "judges" as our modern-day court system. In this book, "judges" functions more like tribal-warrior chieftains. They are not necessarily arbiters of disputes even though we see one judge, Deborah, function in this way. It also shows us our human limitations. And that's partially what today's message is about.

In Chapters 1 and 2 of the book of judges, the narrator sets the stage for the stories of tragedy and sin. There's some triumph, but it is often short-lived. Starting in our first passage in chapter 2, "<sup>10</sup>Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel." So after Joshua conquered most of the land of Israel, a whole generation is raised that did not know the Lord. What leads to the worship of other gods is that the previous generation did not teach their children and grandchildren about the Lord. And when the text uses the word to "know", it's not just referring to head knowledge. It's referring to intimate relationship with our God. So a whole generation didn't know how to have an intimate relationship with God. They may know OF Him, but they don't know Him. This new generation does not know about the Exodus or the wilderness or the way the Lord lead them to conquer the land of Israel. This generation doesn't know of any hardship of the previous generation or how God got them there. All they knew is the blessing in which they currently experience. And who's fault is that? The previous generation. So where did that lead this new generation? "<sup>11</sup>Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshipped the Baals; <sup>12</sup>and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup>They abandoned the LORD, and worshipped Baal and the Astartes." This new generation started to worship other gods because they didn't know the God of Israel. They didn't know the God that

we know. And because of the failure of these people and the previous generation from not passing the faith on, being lead to worship other gods, God withdraws His protection and favor on the people. “<sup>14</sup>So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and he sold them into the power of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. <sup>15</sup>Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them to bring misfortune, as the LORD had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress.” And so then this inspired God to raise up judges who were faithful to Him, who know Him and could deliver His people.

Now, pay attention. As we go through this series, you’ll notice that it’s not the Israelites repentance that moves God to save them. It’s not Him forgiving them of confessed sins most of the time. It’s God having mercy on His people as they complain about being in slavery. He has incredible compassion upon them as they suffer and cannot see them suffer anymore. “<sup>18</sup>Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD would be moved to *pity* by their *groaning* because of those who persecuted and oppressed them.” There is no confession, it’s just complaining and God reacts in mercy and compassion.

As our video illustrated, you will witness this downward and cyclical spiral of the people sinning, slavery, then complaining, God delivers with a judge and then they move back into worshipping other gods and sinning. And the cycle starts all over again. As each story progresses though, they move further and further away from God. Each story starts out very similarly as it does in Chapter 3, verse 7, “The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs.” And as I said before we see this complaint by the people, “...when the Israelites *cried out* to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother. <sup>10</sup>The spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel...” Again, the people cry out and God raises up Othniel to be a judge, a tribal-warrior chieftain, and put’s His Spirit upon Othniel. So he went out to war, defeated the King of Aram and he reigned for forty years until His death.

Can you guess what happens next? You guessed it. The people fall away. They sin. They become enslaved. “<sup>12</sup>The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” This is where you start to see this downward spiral. Othniel appears fairly righteous as the previous judge. But in this story, the Israelites are delivered by deception and a graphic death. “<sup>14</sup>So the Israelites served King Eglon of Moab eighteen years. <sup>15</sup>But when

the Israelites *cried out* to the LORD, the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man.” Now, the detail of Ehud being left-handed is a significant detail to this story because it was assumed that most men were right handed. So when the guards of the king checked Ehud for weapons, before giving tribute, they would have checked his left hip because that’s where a right-handed man would pull his sword. They didn’t check his right hip and they paid the price. That’s why he was able to sneak in with this weapon and eventually kill the king of the Moabites. It’s actually quite clever. But again this path to freedom for the Israelites is less noble and righteous. They got their freedom, but only through deception. And Ehud reigned for 80 years. And after Ehud comes a minor judge in Shamgar who defeats the Philistines and delivers Israel again.

So what’s the Lord trying to say to us today through these passages? As you can see the Israelites experienced incredible blessing through the work of Moses and Joshua and during seasons of the judges ruling over Israel. What I find interesting is how, if we’re not careful, blessing can eventually turn into a curse. And here’s what I mean, when we experience the blessing of God, we’re on Cloud 9. We are so grateful. We may even be in disbelief that God has answered our prayers so faithfully. We’re astonished and live with this sense of joy. We’ve come from hardship and suffering and now God is delivering us. That can be from financial hardship. That could be from bad health. That could be from a bad work environment. It could be from difficulties in your marriage. God delivers you from your suffering. You thank God immensely and worship Him faithfully...for a while. But after a while, your spirit very gradually shifts. It’s not always noticeable that you’re making this shift. This is how evil corrupts the blessing. We start to believe that it wasn’t God who delivered us, but it is we who delivered us. It shifts from “Look at what HE did...” to “Look at what I did...” Let me give you an example. For whatever reason, some of you commented that my preaching went to a whole new level this past winter. It may just be gaining more experience in preaching. But I think more truly it has to do with God’s anointing. When you and I are in-step with the Spirit of God, God moves. Just like when the judges had God’s Spirit upon them. I think God moved many of you in my sermons not just because of my preaching techniques or preaching experience, but because the Spirit was moving among us and through the sermons. Many of you complimented me and I’m grateful for those compliments. I’m not trying to imply to withdraw the compliments. Nor am I pleading for more compliments. I appreciate a genuine compliment. But my responsibility in my relationship with the Lord is to make sure that those compliments don’t go to my head. And I confess, at times I have let those compliments go to my head. I start to focus more on my preaching techniques and how I can replicate them to keep receiving those



compliments. Instead of the sermons being about the Holy Spirit moving and letting God do the work, it becomes about me and what I have to say. The temptation in being blessed by the compliments is to move from “Look at what HE did...” to “Look at what I did...” The blessing can easily be turned into a curse. I think this is what precisely happens to the Israelites. They are blessed by God’s favor and the conquest of the land, but the blessing turns into a curse because a whole generation failed to help a new generation know God.

Experiencing the blessing of God has the potential to make us unfaithful and complacent. As stated at the beginning of our passage in chapter 2, “<sup>10</sup>Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.” It sounds to me like that previous generation who conquered much of the land of Israel got complacent. They experienced God’s incredible favor and blessing as they conquered the land, but they failed to teach a new generation about God. Now, my intention is not to be heavy-handed here, but the hard question begs to be asked to us: “Have we failed in teaching the next generation about the Lord?” “Have we failed in teaching the next generation about the Lord?” And will that cause generation after generation to gradually turn away from the Lord?

One of the tensions of the book of Judges is, how much of what happens on earth is human responsibility? And how much of what happens on earth is God’s responsibility? There is this tension between human agency and the sovereignty of God. I believe the decline of the church is, in part, our fault. We have failed the next generation. We may have done what we could, but we ultimately failed. And I believe it’s actually intertwined with trying to do too much ourselves. It seems to me that there has been an imbalance between relenting to God’s action and doing-it-ourselves. Instead of listening for what God wants to do, we rely on our willpower. Or maybe God calls us to action, but because we’re content living in the blessings of God, we fail to act. God wants to work through each and everyone us. He doesn’t have to. He can certainly take care of things on His own. But because he loves His creation, He wants to work through humanity to accomplish His work. But ultimately, if we’re not listening to His voice, there is very little God can do through us.

So how do we break this cycle that we see in Judges? In our lives today? To not be tempted by complacency in the blessing? To stay true to God and not be tempted by the idols around us? First of all, WE can’t break the cycle. Only Jesus can. At the end of Judges, they claim that all this happened because they didn’t have a King. And in a way, they’re right. They didn’t have the true King, Jesus. So if we’re not only going to experience God’s blessing, but continue to acknowledge Him for His blessings, we have to recognize the one who is the greatest blessing of all, Jesus Christ. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 says, “Here is a

trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” It is imperative that we do not deny our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether that is through attrition, forgetting our Lord, or through blatantly turning away. When we turn away from the Lord, He will chase after us, but we will not have His favor. Two, we have to engage regularly in confession. The Israelites didn’t confess, but merely complained. We need to be better. We need to break the cycle by confessing our sins. How many of us need to confess today that we have failed the next generation of sharing the love of Christ? Teaching them about the Lord? Leading them to Christ? If you’re saying, “not me”, check your pride. Because your pride is what will lead to falling away from faithfulness to the Lord. Confession inherently keeps us humble. It reminds us that we are not the ones in charge. We are God’s servants. And we are only blessed because of the grace of God. It’s not because we earned it or deserved it, but because Jesus gave us salvation from our sin through His sacrifice on the cross. None of us deserve that grace. It’s only through Jesus that we can experience forgiveness and freedom from our sin. Confession is incredibly important. And you will have such an opportunity to confess your sins today through our communion time. Lastly, we break the cycle by remaining reliant upon the Spirit of God. The only reason these Judges are able to triumph is because the Spirit of the Lord is upon them. So the more we seek the Lord’s will and Spirit, the more His favor will be upon us. This intimacy with Jesus is how we understand God more and act in His ways.

As we continue to journey through Judges, I implore you to read and understand these stories as a word of caution. If nothing else, these stories tell us that we are in deep and desperate need of Jesus. Surely, God can save us through His son Jesus Christ. But we can just as easily forget if we get too comfortable in the blessing. God’s blessing can easily turn into a curse if we stop being a confessing people. If we turn away from Jesus and we fail to pass-on the might of our Lord and Savior, then humanity will continue to go down a dark path. If Providence fails to continue to confess that Jesus is our Lord and savior, we will lose God’s favor. If we continue to confess our failures and our sins and follow Jesus, God’s favor and blessing will follow. God wants a people that are fully reliant upon Him. Please turn away from believing “Look at what I did...” and continually remind yourself of what He did for us on the cross. Because it is only by the saving grace of Jesus that this downward spiral exemplified in Judges can be changed. It’s only by the true king of the Kingdom of God that we can know salvation from our sin. It’s only through our faithfulness to Jesus that generation after generation after generation will know our savior, Jesus Christ. Providence, I implore you to not rest and rot in the blessings of God, but continue to be a

confessing people that is wholly reliant upon His presence and upon His leading. Because again, this has generational consequences if we fail to remain faithful. Let us be a people that continually seeks the Lord through confession and a humble spirit. God's Spirit will then abound. And that next generation will know the salvation of Jesus. Amen.