

Series: God is the Hero of this Story: A study through Judges
Judges 2:11-3:30 – “They forgot the Lord their God” / Ryan Patty / 4.30.23

How forgiving of a person are you? How long do you tend to hold that grudge when slighted? Or even better, how do you demonstrate forgiveness? Are you a hard line, one time and they are done? (they broke your trust and therefore its over). Maybe two times you can put up with, But three strikes and they are out! I think the thing about forgiveness is that we love to see it in others, demonstrated by others, but rarely want to have to do it ourselves. It's hard. Who wants to be hurt in some way and then have to forgive the person? Can't we just go our separate ways?

We have started a new series just a few weeks ago through the book of Judges as we see Israel's repeated covenant breaking and God's repeated covenant faithfulness.

This week we have a large section as we seek to finish out chapter two and cover all of chapter 3. If you have a Bible you can even look at some of the headings it provides (not inspired) that will give you an idea of what takes place. So, in this large section Chapter 2 is really serving as a second introduction to the book and setting the scene of what the coming chapters will look like. Then in Chapter 3 we are introduced to our first few judges, Othniel and Ehud, and we get a foretaste of what is to come with the rest of the book.

Our main point for this morning is that God is Glorified in Salvation through Judgment (x2). He is glorified in salvation, he is glorified in judgment, and he is glorified in bringing salvation through judgment.

Our title this morning is “They forgot the Lord their God...” All of what comes stems for those words. All of sin, and idolatry, and wickedness and evil stems from those words. They forgot him. May it never be so for us.

So with that said, let me **pray** for us.

I want us to see 4 themes this morning from the text.

Our 4 themes are:

1. Relentless Apostasy
2. Deserved Judgment
3. Amazing Grace
4. Divine Deliverance

1. Relentless Apostasy

2:11-13 The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They worshiped the Baals and abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They angered the Lord, for they abandoned him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths.

2:17b Instead, they prostituted themselves with other gods, bowing down to them.

2:19 Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more corruptly than their ancestors, following other gods to serve them and bow in worship to them. They did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.

3:6 The Israelites took their daughters as wives for themselves, gave their own daughters to their sons, and worshiped their gods.

3:7 The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight; they forgot the Lord their God and worshiped the Baals and the Asherahs.

3:12a The Israelites again did what was evil in the Lord's sight.

Again and again we hear that type of language. Throughout our section and the entire book of judges, Israel repeatedly gives themselves over to the worship of other gods. They commit spiritual adultery, forsaking Yahweh for another. Notice the language here: they abandon God, they prostitute themselves out for other gods, they worshipped them, they did evil...

They are marked by their relentless apostasy. Think of what God had done for them. From the Exodus to the victories in battle to bringing them into the promised land. God was working time and time again to save his people.

And when the going gets tough, they look elsewhere. **They play the role of the harlot and seek out another to give their devotion to.**

The beginning books of the OT and the prophets are clear that God is the spiritual husband of his people, he saves them, redeems them, leads them, and ultimately they are ungrateful and unfaithful.

Since the promise given to Abraham, God's people were looking forward to the promised land, looking for a rest that was to signify something greater (that you and I now know and experience in Christ). And God leads them to the promised land. They must drive out the inhabitants though. As Jeff said last week, the focus isn't on the ethnicity itself but the worship of another god that is tied to that ethnicity. Israel cannot be syncretistic, they cannot allow other religions to mix into their faith as well. Our God is a jealous God, an all consuming fire, the one true God: the worship of another "god," a created "god," an idol, is an affront to his holiness, majesty, His sovereignty.

Like the spouse that gets bored being married to their current spouse and looks for a cheap and quick thrill elsewhere, so God's people here do the same. They forget their first love, and go after something else. Rather than Israel being a light to the nations the darkness of the nations has infiltrated Israel: Israel has become canaanized.

There is a darkness to what is happening here that we cannot simply overlook. Repeated forsaking of God, repeated breaking of the covenant, repeated and relentless apostasy as they abandon Yahweh.

But the truth that we know and see in Scripture God will not abide the worship of another. If you are an unbeliever here this morning we welcome you. We are a people who have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been saved from our sin and the consequences of it, separation from God and eternity in Hell. This apostasy I'm talking about implies a turning away from someone you have in some way expressed allegiance to. But maybe you have never truly known this God I am talking about.

You see you were created to be in fellowship with him, you were created to know and love God. You were created in His image therefore your life has worth and value and meaning. But sin warps all of that. Apart from the grace of God we are blinded to the things of God.

Through our first parents Adam and Eve we both inherit a sinful nature and willingly disobey God ourselves. In our sinful hearts, God's Word tells us, we suppress the truth of God and do not like that he is in authority over us. Friend, if you don't know Christ that is true of you right now. You are in rebellion to God. Your biggest problem in life is not the lack of money in your bank account, the frustration you have with work, the difficulties even in your marriage (all problems to be sure), your biggest problem is that you have a God problem.

You can only blind yourself for so long to it. You can medicate with drugs or alcohol, you can work that much harder to climb the ladder of success, you can resolve to date your spouse twice a week for the next year, you can do good works until you exhaust yourself, but in the end you still have a God problem. My friend be patient with me, but there is good news coming.. But before you hear that good news you must first wrestle with the reality of your greatest problem in life... And that is your sin before a holy God.

To my fellow saints at CCC, let us learn from this relentless apostasy. We praise God that he saves us and keeps us in the faith. But do not be blind to the effects of the flesh and the world in your own lives. Do not be blind to where you are tempted to turn to another... (whether it be money, comfort, that promotion, getting married, or something else... when things are hard do you run to God or to something or someone else). Let us not kid ourselves that we can have one foot following Christ and the other foot in this world; flirting with sin and temptation. That only leads with both feet turning away from Christ. May God through His Holy Spirit show us all where we are prone to wandering, may the Holy Spirit convict us where we need it...

In light of this relentless apostasy, Yahweh is fed up. Which brings us to our second point:

2. Deserved Judgment

A God that is perfectly holy and righteous cannot let sin go unpunished, for he would not be perfectly just. A people that have repeatedly broken the covenant deserved to be judged.

2:14-15 The Lord's anger burned against Israel, and he handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies. Whenever the Israelites went out, the Lord was against them and brought disaster on them, just as he had promised and sworn to them. So they suffered greatly.

2:20-23 20 The Lord's anger burned against Israel, and he declared, "Because this nation has violated my covenant that I made with their ancestors and disobeyed me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I did this to test Israel and to see whether or not they would keep the Lord's way by walking in it, as their ancestors had." The Lord left these nations and did not drive them out immediately. He did not hand them over to Joshua.

3:8 The Lord's anger burned against Israel, and he sold them to King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim, and the Israelites served him eight years.

3:12b He [the Lord] gave King Eglon of Moab power over Israel, because they had done what was evil in the Lord's sight.

I said before, Yahweh is a jealous God who will not abide the worship of another. Our main point is that God is glorified in salvation through judgment and here we will see God's judgment. The God who judges the living and the dead has judged Israel for their repeated apostasy. It is not a pretty thing. Notice once more the language.

God's **anger** burns against them in verses 2:14 and 20, again in 3:8. We do not serve a God who is so transcendent as to not be imminent. He is both. He is the God who simultaneously rules over all things and also cares for his people like no other. Yahweh's anger here shows his jealousy of his people, it shows his faithfulness to his Word and the covenant. Our God cares; he cares so much as to not let sin go unpunished. Friends the lie that love allows all things is truly that, a lie. Jealousy is a vital part of love.

Imagine a husband has the sad but true evidence that his wife has had an affair with another man. This isn't just a rumor, it has been validated. The husband had been faithful to his wife, loved her dearly, sought to lead her well, and had been tender and devoted to his wife. And then he learns of this affair and simply says, "well ya win some and lose some... such is life..."

What would you think? You would think he really doesn't love or care for his wife. I would think he is a weak and passive man and a passive leader. If he really loved his wife he would be stirred by a vast array of emotions, anger definitely included. If there was true love there, he should be aghast, upset, jealous and livid.

Such is the case with God and His people. He shows us in his judgment his love for his people. We know that God is infinite and perfect, and that informs us about both his love and his wrath. He demonstrates them perfectly. And here in this judgment, we see his wrath, as he delivers Israel over to foreign nations that conquer and subject them. King Cushan-rishathaim in v. 8 – his name means doubly wicked. Israel wants to serve false gods, they will be put under sinful and wicked leadership. Same thing as we will see with Moab in a bit from v. 12 on.

God is the one making history here. He is orchestrating the events. He is the rightful judge and the one giving them over. These foreign nations might think they are conquering Israel by their own might, but here in Scripture it is clear that it is Yahweh giving them over. As the writer of Hebrews tells his readers and us, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God - Hebrews 10:31. The Psalmist can say Who understands the power of your anger? Your wrath matches the fear that is due you. - Psalm 90:11. We see this as well in the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah as foreign nations are used by God to accomplish his bidding. He raises them up for his purposes, and then judges them all the same. It is as Psalm 2 says, The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord ridicules them. - Psalm 2:4.

God raises up nations for his purposes. As a brief aside, let me say something about our nation. I do not personally understand America to be in covenant relation with God like Israel was. I understand the new covenant to be what the covenant with Israel was pointing forward to and foreshadowing (pointing forward to something greater that we now experience). But in light of me talking about the judgment of God and God using nations how he sees fit, let me say this:

- **God’s judgment is a real thing.** Nations come and go, (we see this in history and our nation is still relatively young) but his church will last forever. A nation that has wicked rulers that celebrate wicked things will be judged. A nation that *sacrifices* children on the altar of comfort or convenience and calls it healthcare will be judged. A nation that seeks to up-end the created order and call it “finding your true self” will be judged. A nation where pornography is rampant and everything must be sexualized will be judged. The list goes on.
- So in light of us being here, in this nation, in 2023, sovereignly appointed to live here right now as Acts 17 tells us, We as God’s ambassadors have work to do. We have a lot of work to do. And I don’t want you to discount your part in it. Seeing all the things happening and feeling hopeless. We tend to label certain things in life as “small things,” but they are actually vitally important things; they are in many respects what God commands us to do: like having a marriage that honors the Lord and is a witness to the world, like raising and discipling the children in your home to know the truth of God and His Word, like evangelizing coworkers and neighbors, like fulfilling the great commission by teaching people all that Christ commanded, like working towards biblical justice taking place, and so on and so forth. God calls us all in different ways to see his kingdom advance. Don’t discount what he has called you to do and think it small in light of the problems in our nation, that’s not true in the Kingdom of God. God uses what the world thinks is weak and foolish to accomplish amazing things for Him, so that his wisdom and glory might be put on display.
- Our hope for this nation is ultimately (hear me say ultimately) not found in the halls of Washington, although there are serious things to be mindful of that are happening there and your allegiance to Christ informs all the decisions you make, including how you vote. Politics is always informed by your faith in Christ, divorcing the two is impossible. So no, our hope is not ultimately in Washington, it is solidly found in Jesus Christ.
- And so friends, in a time and in a nation that is in many ways resembling the book of Judges when “everyone does what is right in their own eyes,” recognize that day by day faithfulness (where God has you) **is** advancing the kingdom of God, and take seriously that we are to be a part of seeing that Kingdom advance through His Church.
- And pray. Do we ever need to pray. In our homes and in our church. In light of 1 Timothy 2 pray that our leaders and those in authority would repent of their wickedness and come to faith. Don’t simply look to those in authority for your hope though, be about God’s Kingdom work now.

Friends, back to point number 2 and deserved judgment, God is perfectly just in his wrath. Unlike the husband not caring about the affair, his jealousy burns because of his love for his people. God is perfectly just in his wrath.

And make no mistake, sin is judged. If you are not found to be “in Christ” on that day, if you are relying on something other than Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross, you will feel the full weight of God’s wrath in eternity. **God’s Word tells us that sin is a tyrant.** Sin is not simply something you do or do not do, something you say or do not say, it’s not less than that but it’s presented in Scripture as more than that. It is a power that apart from God’s saving grace holds you in its grip. Romans 3:9 tells us that all are under sin, under the power of it, apart from the grace of God.

Until we come to see the power of sin, we will not appreciate the glorious grace of God shown to us through Christ. We will keep thinking that salvation or being a Christian just means going to church, playing dress up, being a nice person, or worse performing a religious charade. None of that is Christianity. *Instead it means that we have been delivered from the power of sin and death because our sin was so bad the Son of God had to die.* Think back to the announcement of the messiah in the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. The angel said, “you shall call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” That is a profound statement, a statement that has the full wrath of God towards sin and the full love of God towards his people behind it. He will save them from their sins, and He did!

So Israel had to learn a lesson. In plain terms, they will be married to Yahweh or married to the “gods” of the nations. And the same is true for us today. The church is purposefully called the Bride of Christ. The New Covenant spells this out for us. Therefore we will be married to Christ or married to the “gods” of this world. There is no neutral ground.

This brings us to our third point, a shocking truth in the text:

3. Amazing Grace

I have just extrapolated out a small bit on the judgment and wrath of God. There is much more to say. But I do not want us to gloss over what is to come, the amazing statements we are about to see. You saw the texts about Israel's apostasy, they turn away from God. We saw God's rightful judgment. But notice now his amazing grace that God shows.

Look at the sequence comparison, v. 14a The Lord's anger burned against Israel... now here we would expect it to say Israel repented and turned away from Baal and cried out to Yahweh... But v. 16 The Lord raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders...

What an amazing statement that is! V. 16 introduces God's grace like a punch. This is the miracle of Scripture: That the God who rightly punishes us stoops to save us. He owes us nothing, yet gives us everything. He has pity on the sinner, compassion on them. Look at verse 18b - The Lord was moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them.

Reminds us of the covenant character of our God that we read in the Scripture reading: The Lord—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. - Exodus 34:6-7

Notice as well his grace with our first two judges in chapter 3. Judges 3:9 The Israelites cried out to the Lord. So the Lord raised up Othniel son of Kenaz... Further in chapter 3:15 Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he raised up Ehud son of Gera... This is amazing grace! They don't deserve it!

I asked you at the beginning of this sermon how forgiving of a person are you? How many strikes will you allow? Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Is that you? Well what about here? IS God the fool? Why does he keep delivering them?! The Lord – The Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love.

He is faithful to those he loves. No matter what. He has bestowed his loving-kindness on a people that did not and do not deserve it. He keeps the covenant. He is filled with more mercy and compassion that you and I could ever comprehend. Notice this language here. V. 18, he was moved to pity when the Israelites groaned under captivity. V.

9 and 15, the Israelites cried out to the Lord. Some commentators see this as implying repentance but I do not. They groaned from their misery, they cried out to Yahweh because of their captivity, but they could still be serving the Baals and Ashteroths. No, I simply see this is a cry for help, a cry for divine aid. And God condescends towards his people once more, despite their lack of repentance, and gives it to them.

Why? Because he is the covenant keeping God! These words of groaning and crying out were used back in Exodus 2 when Israel was under bondage to Egypt and they groaned and cried out. **The astute Israelite would pick up on this.** The same God that delivered their ancestors a few hundred years before in the Exodus is the same covenant keeping God that keeps delivering them now.

To the unbeliever earlier, I left you hanging under the wrath and judgment of God. That you are in rebellion to him and deserve his rightful punishment. But this is the amazing grace that we who follow the Lord Jesus Christ have experienced. That we of all people, sinful and wicked and loving ourselves more than God have been lavished with this compassion, mercy, and grace. In Christ, the perfect sacrifice, his grace is boundless and infinite to you. That judgment that you and I deserved is swallowed up in Christ. You must be found “in Him” on that day.

This grace is held out to you my friend, and that is only through the deliverance provided in Jesus. Which brings us to our last point:

4. Divine Deliverance

In verse 16 we saw that the Lord raised up judges. In Chapter 3 we have our first two interactions with the judges. First is Othniel. Not a ton is said but there are clear implications. He is the first, he is the proto-type, he models what a faithful judge should look like. He is the nephew of Caleb, and we are introduced to him in chapter 1, verse 13 as a brave warrior who captures Kirath-sepher. Here in chapter 3, he is who the Lord raises up to deliver his people. The significant thing about Othniel is that he is of the tribe of Judah, and the first and last to be such. He foreshadows the coming of the king from Judah, both David and the greater King, Jesus. Nothing negative is presented about him. The Spirit of the Lord is upon and He does his work admirably.

And then there is Ehud. After reading about the plainness of Othniel this is a shock in a way. Ehud the left-handed Benjaminite. While I want to say that being left-handed is a grave sin, that's simply not true... There are different theories about the left hand but simply put, the Bible says he was left-handed, and this will be important.

Let me summarize this story (it could easily be a movie today).. Ehud goes with tribute to the king. Nations that are conquered have to do this. He goes with tribute all the while he has a plan. He has a sword about 18 inches long and its strapped secretly to his thigh. You see for almost all warriors were right handed. The king's guards would have been most likely checking where a right handed man would sword stowed away. So he goes and brings the tribute. Then he leaves and travels a little bit with his attendants and he sends them on. He's got to go back...

So he goes back and announces to the king of Moab I have a message for you O king! And not just any message, but a message from God for you! Now ANE kings always wanted to hear from the gods. They wanted information on what to do or who was going to attack them. So the King sends everyone out. This is for his ears only.

Now two things to note: 1) the king of moab's name is Eglon, it means Calf. And 2) he is described in the text as very fat. Those are the words. Typically some roundness in the ANE signified wealth but here it is *very* fat. It is sloth. Israel finds themselves ruled by a glutton. Sin begets sin and apostasy begets enslavement to a ruler who doesn't look the part of a king at all. So 1) calf and 2) fat... hint...the fattened calf is about to be sacrificed.

Ehud announces "I have a message from God for you!" To which the very fat king begins to stand to hear, and as Ehud is climbing the steps he pulls out the sword and into the belly of the fattened calf it goes. So much so that the sword is completely inside (probably no hilt) and Eglon's bowels empty themselves. The King of Moab is now the slaughtered calf of Israel.

Irony upon Irony here. The ancient Jew would be hearing this story and laughing. I highly recommend you read it in its entirety this afternoon.

As Jeff said last week, this book is brutal. It describes reality, not condoning everything, but describing it. So Ehud delivers the people. Eglon, the fattened calf, is slaughtered.

What in the world do we do with this? How do we think about this deliverance?

1. We must see that God is the hero. Yahweh raised up this savior. The emphasis is on God. Details aside for the moment, he brings deliverance to his people, and he uses these means to do so. His sovereignty knows no bounds. He uses the good things in life and the bad things alike. Israel would not have been ashamed of this story but would have seen the irony and enjoyed it. Further the large man (Eglon) had a large kingdom. The description of his fatness is probably implying that as well. Yet it is God who brings judgment in the most embarrassing of ways. God is the hero!

2. God uses humor and irony to awaken his people. If you have been a Christian for sometime you come to see this: God does have a sense of humor (and he reminds us of it throughout our lives). Israel has had sorrow. They have experienced judgment. Yet in the midst of that God brings a brief ray of light, a brief moment of laughter. There is deliverance and in an unlikely way. Those who were crying out to be saved receive deliverance and even some laughter at how it comes about.

3. Don't miss the lesson. The way that the inspired author points out the irony and satire in this account, should not dull Israel or us into the ridicule he is casting on them. The slob of Moab was ruling them. They exchanged God for that. Yes God brought deliverance, but why did he have to bring that deliverance in the first place? Don't miss the greater lesson. When you exchange God for something else, you worship something else, you will be ruled by it, and very often it will be disgusting.

So let me close with this. Judges shows us that God enters into the chaos of life, the chaos of sin, to bring about deliverance. He is not a God who is in the ivory tower, but he is a God who stoops into the muck and saves sinners. We see this even in the incarnation, that though he was in the form of God He did not count equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself (he took on a human nature) by taking the form of a servant. A servant that would eventually die for His people. He enters into the chaos.

So you might be dealing with a whole host of issues. Messed up family, emotional trauma, currently experiencing grief or sorrow, spouse or kid frustrations, or maybe you are battling temptation and feeling like you are being

overcome. Life seems like an absolute mess. Chaos. But the glory of this text and the whole of Scripture is that God does not leave us to ourselves. He does not hold back waiting for you to clean yourself up and come to him. Whether you feel comfortable or not, God delights in saving a people unto himself. He comes to you in your mess. To be sure, He allows weeping to endure for the night (there are immensely difficult things and seasons we go through) but joy comes in the morning. He brings about salvation through judgment.

Judges is a messy book that looks forward to and points forward to the true judge, the one who judges and saves completely, Jesus Christ. In a moment we will take communion together as a local church. This is a time when we remember the Lord Jesus Christ, both his life and sacrifice, that HE was sacrificed for us. We reflect on where we fall short and we repent for the sin that so easily entangles us. And we rejoice and praise God that his grace through Christ has forgiven us completely.

If you are not a disciple of Jesus, a believer in Him alone for your salvation, this practice, this time of remembrance, is not for you. We are glad that you are here and would love to explain the significance further after the service, but we respectfully ask that you let the bread and juice pass. But this is a time for you to reflect on where your eternal hope is. I have been telling you much about the wrath and judgment of God, but also his grace and mercy. God saves sinners. Think about those truths during this time.

Let's pray.