
Jehovah-Shalom; the Lord our peace

Judges 6:1-24

Dan Turner

Introduction

*O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now like a fetter bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it— Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above*

(3rd stanza of the hymn Come Thou Fount)

These words written by Robert Robinson back in 1813 came to mind Thursday morning as I hung up the phone with a longtime friend.

Bobby and I grew up together. We loved baseball. Together, we enjoyed bike riding. It was all innocent until we entered the teenage years. We were troubled boys; without fathers and without discipline. We began experimenting with alcohol. This led to more consumption and more experimentation. Our decent into depravity and destruction wasn't swift. Rather, it was day by day, month by month, year by year, we would say, "No, I really shouldn't". Then we would say, "Well, maybe just this once". This led us deeper into danger and slavery to sin.

Around twenty-three years ago, we decided to get our acts together and join the Navy. I enlisted. Bobby backed out. He went back to his cravings that held us both enslaved.

In the military God's amazing grace brought me to my senses. I repented of my sin. I trusted Jesus Christ for my forgiveness and righteousness. And by His grace He has been leading me out of slavery to sin and into adoring His Name and loving His people.

When I hung up the phone with Bobby on Thursday, I said, "there go I but by grace". I grieved deeply over him. He had just been released from the hospital. Alcohol is killing him. He talked about his divorce. He sadly discussed his children estranged from him. He lives in a one room apartment. He sounds lonely. As he listened to me share the gospel I sensed his nod with a bit of gratitude but he did not rejoice over it.

The sin that charmed him once has become a monster. He sees no hope. He has no joy. He knows nothing of Jehovah-Shalom; the Lord our peace.

As we continue in our studies of the Names of God we are brought to the book of Judges to look at God's name *Jehovah-Shalom; the Lord our peace*. We will see in this book something sad. We will see in this book also something familiar. Though we may not bow to the Baals of the Canaanites, we have our own potential taskmasters. Though we may not be in slavery to a desert tribe, we give our affections over to an activity or substance whose prom-

ises say that with them we will feel more alert, more calm, less shy, more powerful and so forth.

When we spend time with this book we will see people who have failed due to subtle yet steady compromise. We will come away from our text today, I hope, able to identify with the people in the Bible. The reckless nature of the human heart must be understood; both from an academic perspective as well as a personal one. We will look into the Bible and their struggles in hope of seeing our hearts and Jehovah-Shalom; the Lord our peace.

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Judges is an important link between the time of the entrance into the land (as seen in Joshua) and the days of Samuel. It shows the hopeless state of a people who try to get along without God and what happens when “everyone [does] what is right in his own eyes” (cf. 21:25).

The theme of Judges is taught at the outset of the book. In 1:1-2:10 we get the diagnosis of the problem. There was a failure to drive the idolaters out of the land. Rather, the Israelites dwelt among them and even inter-married among them. This made it easier for them to serve their gods and forget the One, True God. As a result, God gave them over to their enemies to experience oppression.

What was the prognosis? We find this in a five-fold cycle as we notice 2:11-3:6.

1. sin
2. punishment
3. repentance
4. deliverance
5. peace

Generally speaking, the book of Judges demonstrates *failure through subtle compromise*. The compromise starts out as a very little thing (1:2-3) but continues to increase more and more through the book in cycles.

The main body of the book is organized around seven of these 5-fold cycles of Israel’s history in the period of the judges. We see in:

1. 3:7-11 how Israel left the Lord and plunged into oppression for 8 yrs. and how God sent a judge named Othniel to deliver them.
2. 3:12-30 how Israel left the Lord and plunged into oppression for 18 yrs. and how God sent a judge named Ehud to deliver them.
3. 4-5 how Israel left the Lord and plunged into oppression for 20 yrs. and how God sent a judge named Deborah to deliver them.
4. 6:1-8:32 how Israel left the Lord and plunged into oppression for 7 yrs. and how God sent a judge named Gideon to deliver them.
5. 8:33-10:5 how Israel left the Lord and plunged into oppression for 3 yrs. and how God sent judges named Tola and Jair to deliver them.

6. 10:6-12:7 how Israel left the Lord and plunged into oppression for 18 yrs. and how God sent a judge named Jephthah to deliver them.
7. 13-16 how Israel left the Lord and plunged into oppression for 40 yrs. and how God sent a judge named Samson who delivered them but the deliverance was incomplete.

In the book we see the perpetual proneness of the human heart to wander away from God. And in the book we see our faithlessness met with God's faithfulness. Let's look at one of these scenes in order to meet and trust Jehovah-Shalom; the Lord our peace.

The cruelty of Midian

Vv. 1-10

In vv.1-10 we come to the cruelty of Midian. The victory over Sisera and the Canaanite army (cf. chapters 4-5), so clearly the work of the Lord, would undoubtedly lead to a strengthening of Israel's faith. Witnessing all the gracious and grand displays of God's power on their behalf would cause them never to stray again. Right? Wrong!

The passing of 40 yrs. and the lack passion for God blurred the memory of the great deliverance. The next generation reverted to an easy-going religion that relied upon man's perspective and threatened to obliterate Israel's distinctive identity. Follow along as I read vv.1-6.

Its Effects 1-6

Vv.1-6 describe the awful effects due to the Midian overthrow. After forty years of rest, Israel again had fallen away from God their deliverer. This time, He hands them over to a large band of invaders who saw harvest time as a time to steal their crops for themselves.

This invasion appears to have been an annual event during the seven years of the Midianite oppression (v.5). Israel, throughout these yearly raids, hid in caves as the "locusts" (as the Midianites and Amalekites were characterized as) came in and took their harvest and livestock. The use of the term "locusts" indicated the absolute devastation of the greedy hordes as they moved from one area to another. The cumulative effect of these raids would be considerable and dangerous. After seven years of unhindered looting, the people once again cry out for help.

Verse 6 tells us that Israel having been brought very low because of Midian, cried out for help to the LORD.

It's hard to tell what the Israelites wanted from the Lord. The text says, "they cried out for help". They want change! But the question is, "what do they want changed"? If it is simply to get out of suffering and resume the enjoyment of bumper crops, the Lord is not interested (cf. Eze.14:1-6). To get to the solution one needs to see the problem. And the problem is exposed through the prophetic voice of vv.7-10. <read vv.>

Its Cause 7-10

In vv.7-10 we see the Lord answering their cries. Before the Lord sends them a deliverer, God sends them a prophet. This prophet prepares the way for the deliverer to come. He is unnamed and his prophecy is not new. He simply declared what had been forgotten. Verses eight and nine indicate their poor memory of the implications of the cove-

nant relationship with the Lord. The God who had done great things for them by redeeming them from the oppression of Egypt required loyal obedience. Faith-produced fidelity is to be the effect of recalling the work of the LORD on their behalf. But as verse 10 makes clear, their hearts were far from the Lord. Verse 10 tells us that the main problem is not seven years of suffering. It is not how desert tribes have come in and stolen all their food and livelihood. The central problem the Lord confronts through the prophet is false worship. Idolatry; not the oppression of the Midianites, were destroying the nation.

Before we move to the second part of the message and look at the deliverance the Lord sends, a word on idolatry might be of help.

Idolatry is a devotion disorder. It has to do with the heart and what the heart loves. Idolatry is not something merely found in Ancient Middle East. We see, for example, in the last verse of 1John a word to the Christian church; “keep yourselves from idols”. Or to the church at Colossae the Apostle Paul said, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...[such as] covetousness which is idolatry” (cf. Col.3:5).

Using Colossians 3:5 as a guide we can say that idolatry is an activity of the soul that forsakes the living God and wants any substance, activity, place or person so badly that we are willing to sin to get it or willing to sin when we don't get it (see also 1 Thess.1:9).

The movement and momentum of idolatry is seen in the book of Judges. In 1:27-28 we come across a subtle, somewhat quiet disobedience (read vv.27-28). The failure of Manasseh to drive out the Canaanites was steps toward idolatry. These steps leading into full blown idolatry as we see in v.10 were small and seemingly harmless. But left unchecked this trajectory landed the Israelites in the lap of the Canaanite gods who stroked them until they were serving the Baals (cf. 2:1-12)

In his book Addictions; a banquet in the grave, Ed Welch writes with brilliant clarity on the steps of idolatry (see Figure 4.1. *The Descent of Idolatry* found on p.66).

- ▶ *Being unprepared or indifferent:* Welch states that the first step into idolatry begins without much fanfare. It is marked by small steps of spiritual casualness. Complacency is the doorway to idolatry.
- ▶ *Friendship:* Welch goes on as he charts the movement of a heart forsaking the Lord and attaching itself to something / someone else. He says that the next step is friendship with the object. There is an acquaintance with the idea or thing. This is the time when we feel like everything is fine and under control And yet we start to do things just because the idolatrous object tells us to (“I'm not asking for 10 more...just one more”.)
- ▶ *Infatuation:* Whether this is a person or an activity or a substance, this step feels more like an intimate relationship. It is a secret relationship but it has a cost. It might be affecting work or children or finances or the marriage. True, this level of idolatry has obvious consequences. But reason does not reign and bad consequences are not enough. Idolatry is irrational and insane...but it sure is satisfying (at least temporarily).

- ▶ *Love and Betrayal*: Welch, at this forth level, talks about how the object of desire (i.e. drugs, food, sex, sports, cars, cash, popularity, children, respect, love, control, ease and so forth) is no longer friendly. But the unpleasant consequences are soon forgotten and the idolater makes excuses for the idol's weaknesses or lies.
- ▶ *Worship*: Finally, we hit bottom. The idolater becomes a hopeless worshipper saying in effect, "You use the parts of my body in slavery to impurity and anything else. I'm yours. Do with me what you will but please give me a bit of what I want. It's a bit like Anakin to Darth Vader.

Do you know anyone like this? Have you heard this person say that he knows he should be rid of a particular desire? But each time he tries to leave the "cruel lover" calls his name and he thinks, "you are right...what's the harm...just one more".

Stuck, descending...hating it / loving it...the cycle continues. This is what we see in the book of Judges. This is what we see in our passage for this morning. This is what we see when we look in the mirror.

Is there any hope? Might there be a path to true change? Follow along as I continue reading our text for this morning; vv.11-24.

The call of Gideon

Vv. 11-24

God, having declared Israel's unfaithfulness meets them with His faithfulness. The Lord shows forth His own mercy in coming to be with His people.

The call

11-12

In vv.11-12 we come to the call of Gideon. The angel of the Lord comes and sits under the terebinth tree in Ophrah. The particular mentioning of the Terebinth tree might suggest the LORD's agenda to confront their idolatry (Hosea 4:13 and other texts point to a place the Israelites enjoyed sacrificing to the gods of the land). Or citing the tree may be more symbolic of the place God meets man as seen in 6:19. However one views it, we see God coming down to be with man.

How does the Lord find Gideon? Gideon is hiding in a winepress, trying to secretly thresh what little wheat his father has hid from the prowling mob. He was beating out the wheat with a rod in a confined place.

We are to view this as a pathetic sight. I read in a commentary that threshing wheat was normally carried out with a threshing-sledge drawn by oxen in an open area so that the wind could carry away the chaff. Gideon was making do in the winepress, away from the sight of the cruel Midians. Seven years of cowering and covering and cringing. The picture conveys smallness of faith and smallness of harvest. The imagery points to a lack of communion with God and the results of sin.

What does God do and say when man is hiding in the midst of the consequences of sin?

The last part of v.12 is staggering! “The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor”. The Lord comes to be with him (Immanuel; God with us)! This is not how one would expect to be treated having been found out; caught as it were, in lack of communion with the Lord. This verse is a surprise unless we remember the first incident of a man caught hiding in broken communion with the Lord. Do you recall how the Lord sought and found Adam and Eve, rescued them from their sin and gave them help and hope? In this passage we see the Lord doing something similar. He sees Gideon not only as he was – weak, rebellious and timorous, but He saw him as he will be – strong, obedient and courageous.

The complaint

13-16

Verses 13-16 give us the account of Gideon’s complaint. The angel declares that the Lord is with Gideon. And because God is with him, Gideon will be a valiant warrior. Gideon’s response is in a form of a complaint. But this complaint is a mixture of fear and faith.

With respect to fear, we can see in his complaint that he knows the Lord has forsaken them. His mighty exploits were a thing of the past but not of the present. His upbringing and himself point to the least likely person for such an assignment. And even when the Lord communicates assurance that all will be well (v.12), he wavers in doubt as noticed in v.14. Gideon’s complaint is laced with fear.

But that is not all this complaint demonstrates. It also manifests faith. Gideon’s remark that “the Lord has given us into the hand of the Midians” lets the reader know that Gideon believes that the oppression is from the hand of God. He believes the Lord is sovereign over hordes of cruel bandits. He believes the Lord can stop cruelty. He believes the Lord’s warnings (i.e. sin has consequences) are sure. And he believes the Lord’s promises (i.e. sinners can find forgiveness and salvation in Him) are sure too.

Gideon believes that the Lord is giving him hope. Gideon heard the promise of presence (vv.12-13). He heard the promise of strength (vv.14-15). He heard the promise of victory (v.16). Faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of God (cf. Rom.10:17). Gideon is ready now for change.

The change

17-24

In vv.17-24 we have the account of Gideon’s change. However, before we see him moving out in obedience to the commission God has for him, there is but one more nagging question that needs to be addressed. This question must be addressed in the hearts of all of us. Without surety in this area, it is my contention that the Bible says we will not have assurance and peace and strength and courage. We will experience awkward and muffled congregational worship at best. We will cower back from the Great Commission. We will not make much of Jesus in public. We will make subtle compromises with sin. And as a result, We will have little love Jesus and for each other and become hopelessly devoted to our idols.

What, then, is Gideon’s nagging question? Why does Gideon choose the sign we see in these verses? And what is this sign about?

The question is clear: IS GOD WITH US? Has Gideon been reconciled to this holy, holy, holy God? Only then will he have confidence that the Lord will deliver them.

So we see in v.17 the request. “If I have found favor in your eyes then show me a sign...” We read on and see how he prepares an offering (a modified peace offering; Lev.3:12ff) and the fire that consumes it leaves no room for doubt – Gideon has been with God.

Verses 22-24 talk about fear, grace and peace. Having witnessed a picture of atonement, one would expect Gideon to be filled with joy and peace. Instead, we find him scared to death. The Bible he had read made clear that no one sees Jehovah and lives. This sounds so strange to us; we have lost the sense of terror in the awesomeness of God. But if there is nothing terrifying about God’s holiness then there is nothing amazing about His grace. God, having received this substitutionary sacrifice declares peace with Gideon. He has passed through the judgment and lives.

Gideon builds an altar that memorialized this lesson for generations to come. Verse 24 makes clear that this lesson was to remind God’s people in the future of His judgment and His peace.

Conclusion As we move from the text to our lives a few lessons emerge.

LESSONS

- #1 Decent into sin is marked by small steps of spiritual casualness.
- #2 Sin begins trivially but ends deadly.
- #3 Sin is a problem of worship.
- #4 To be reconciled, our faithlessness is met by His faithfulness.
- #5 His faithfulness is demonstrated in both judgment and mercy.
- #6 Peace is declared in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- #7 This peace with God is enjoyed through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Lessons and their implications/applications were fleshed out in the delivery of this message. To reflect upon how this message may apply to the particulars please refer to the MP3 version of this message).