

Right in My Own Eyes
Judges 17-21

Notes

When Jesus is not your king, you become your own king and have the full rewards of your idolatrous kingdom.

I. INTRODUCTION

On April 10, 1912, the Titanic left Southampton Harbor on her maiden voyage to New York. At the time, the Titanic was the biggest, most luxurious, and expensive ship ever built. Yet, just four days later, on April 14 at 11:40pm she hit an iceberg and in just under three hours she would lay on the bottom of the Atlantic.

How did this happen? The Titanic Captain, Edward Smith had all the training; had over 40 years of experience; had the best money could buy; had the top of the line everything; had the best information; he had 5 reports of ice bergs in the area and knew there was low visibility; he even left the bridge to attend a dinner party at the most dangerous part of the trip. He had the best of everything, yet still laid all of that aside and decided to push ahead to try to get to New York earlier than scheduled. His doing what was right in his own eyes, led to the most famous and one of the deadliest shipwrecks in history on April 14, 1912.

When we do what is right in our own eyes, we can be assured of disaster.

We have seen throughout the Book of Judges the dangers of not recognizing the sovereignty and the rule of the Lord in your life.

We have observed the stupidity and the atrocities that have resulted in living life according to what we view as right.

Today, as we complete our journey through Judges, we are actually going to cover Chapters 17-21.

In these chapters we will see two stories, connected by one theme-doing right in my own eyes.

Let me ask you this morning. How has it worked out in your life when you have done right in your own eyes?

What has been the result of going against the word of God? Of giving into that impulse? Of responding to a loved one in anger? Of making a decision at the low or high of emotion?

When we fail to adhere to the Word of God in our lives, we can only do what is right in our own eyes and this leads to abandoning the blessings of God and inviting the judgement of God in our lives.

And as bad as we have seen the situation get throughout Judges, it only gets worse till the end of the book. The book of Judges does not end on a happy note, but on a note of rebellion and idolatry, pointing to the need of a Savior.

II. REVIEW STORY

Since we are reviewing two stories over five chapters I want to give us a synopsis and then provide us with three warnings from the text.

After the death of Samson, the story shifts and in Chapter 17 we are introduced to a man named Micah. Micah steals a bunch of money from his mom and goes and makes a carved image, an idol, a shrine to worship at, and an ephod. He also made one of his sons a priest.

The problem with this, while it may have been done with good intentions, is that none of this was permissible or instructed by the Lord.

Micah then meets a wandering Levite from the tribe of the Levites, the actual people who were to be priests of the Lord.

Micah hires him to come and be the family priest.

We see in Chapter 18 the tribe of Dan who had not previously, for generations, obeyed the Lord and conquered their land to look for territory. They come to Ephraim, where Micah lives. They scout out the land and come back later and take Micah's idols, shrine, and ephod, along with his hired priest.

Micah goes after the Danites to recover his property, but quickly realizes he is outnumbered.

The Danites settle in Laish after killing its inhabitants.

They set up the carved images and make priests for themselves.

In Chapter 19 we are introduced to a Levite, who we know as a priest is not supposed to marry. He takes a concubine as a wife, probably a slave against her will.

The concubine escapes and returns to her father.

The Levite goes to look for her and her father keeps him for 5 days.

Not wanting to stay another night, the Levite leaves with his concubine in the evening, not the safest time for travel.

They stop in the city of Gibeah and not having any relatives, they stay in the city square because they have nowhere to sleep.

A hospitable man in the city invites them into his house for the night.

During the night, men of the city tried to break in and take the Levite to rape him. Not wanting his guests to be harmed, the homeowner offers the towns people his own virgin daughter. They turn him down.

The Levite then pushes his concubine out of the door.

She is ravaged all night long and is then thrown to the ground at the door of the house.

When morning comes, the Levite goes to leave as he would. He sees the woman lying on the ground and tells her to "get up." When she doesn't move, he checks her and realizes she is dead.

He picks her up and puts her on the donkey, takes her home, cuts her up in 12 pieces and sends her pieces across Israel with a message about what happened.

In Chapter 20 all of Israel gathers at Mizpah with 400,000 soldiers. He tells the story, but conveniently leaves out his own cowardice.

The tribe of Benjamin did not want to give up the people of Gibeah.

This led to three battles in two days in which Benjamin killed 40,000 Israelites.

Then on the third day, God defeated all of Benjamin.

In Chapter 21 Israel takes an oath not to allow any of their daughters to marry any of the men of Benjamin.

They cried out in self-loathing in 21:3 because they have “lost” a tribe.

When they recognized there were no wives available for the men of Benjamin, effectively killing off one of the tribes of Israel they knew they had to do something.

They had a meeting to discuss the situation and at the meeting realized no one from Jabesh Gilead was there.

Their solution was then to send 12,000 men to commit genocide against Jabesh Gilead and kidnap 400 virgin women to give to the Benjamite men as wives.

But they were still short in the wife department. They sent another group to the city of Shiloh. At Shiloh they were having a celebration and during this celebration the women would dance.

The Benjamite bachelors went and when the women came by dancing, they would jump out from behind the bushes and just take them.

When their fathers and brothers came to the people of Benjamin to confront them, Benjamin’s response was, “it’s no big deal.”

And the Book of Judges ends in 21:25 with these words, *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*

When everyone does what is right in their own eyes, society falls, as we have seen in these 5 chapters.

In these 5 ridiculous chapters we see the danger of each of us doing what we think is right. We see the danger of not recognizing Jesus as king.

From these 5 chapters I want to share with us three warnings.

III. THREE WARNINGS

a. There is Danger in Self-Righteousness (17-18)

The first warning we see is the danger of self-righteousness.

In Chapter 17:5-6 we see,

“⁵ And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest. ⁶ In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.”

When God led the people out of Egypt he gave Moses, the people, and the Levites, who would be the priests of the nation, specific instructions on how they should worship him.

They were not supposed to make any images of him. They were not to set up shrines to worship him in their homes.

God appointed a specific tribe in Israel, the Levites, to conduct worship at the tabernacle.

He gave them detailed instructions and even gave instructions on the type of clothes to wear.

Part of the reason for the details of the worship of God was that he wanted the people to know he was not like the false gods of the pagan nations.

As such, he should not be worshipped according to the made-up practices of the pagan people.

God himself established the manner in which he would be worshipped.

As we have seen time and again in Judges, the people had no problem adopting the practices of the people in the land of Canaan.

They willingly forfeited God’s prescribed way of worship and substituted their own manner of worship.

You see, if they established the means of worship, they would control how God was worshipped.

Micah takes it upon himself to establish the means and manner of worship, not to actually worship God, but to try to placate God in order to get God to bless him.

We are guilty of this as well. When we fail to actually worship the Lord in the way he desires, we substitute the means of worship and wonder why God does not respond.

Instead of spending genuine time in prayer we try to placate God using one of these one-minute prayers.

Instead of actually studying, meditating, and praying the Bible, we substitute time in the actual word of God with a 5-minute devotion written by someone who is not God.

Instead of being a faithful steward with the resources God has given us and responsibly budgeting so we can include giving a tithe to the Lord, we simply throw in a 20 when the plate passes thinking this will satisfy the Lord and meet the needs of the mission.

Instead of actually serving at the church and being reliable we only show up on Sundays and never get plugged in, never develop real relationships, never get equipped, and never engage and then we get all bent out of shape when something in our lives happens and no one knows about it, so no one contacts us.

Instead of living in the righteous power of the Lord, we go through life making up our own standards of righteousness and get mad because the blessings of God are not showered upon us.

What about you this morning? Have you been guilty of allowing self-righteousness to cause you to engage in counterfeit worship?

When we, in our self-righteousness, substitute true worship with counterfeit worship, we will not have the blessings of God in our lives, but instead we will have the discipline of the Lord.

b. Cowardness Has Consequences (19)

The second warning we see is that cowardness has consequences.

In Chapter 19:27-30 we see the dire consequences of one man's cowardness.

27 When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold. 28 He said to her, "Get up and let us go," but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home. 29 When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel. 30 All who saw it said, "Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!"

This disgusting man, this Levite of God, who was supposed to be a man of the Lord, did nothing for the Lord and tried in no way to set himself apart for the Lord.

We might think his cowardness begins the night he gave his wife to the men, but it began much earlier.

When this Levite decided to marry against God's strict commands not to marry, he showed cowardness.

When this Levite chose to get drunk for 5 nights in a row instead of leaving when he intended to leave, he showed cowardness.

When this Levite chose not to stand up to the attackers, he showed cowardness.

When he was going to allow the man who let him stay in his house to give his own daughter to the attackers, he showed cowardness.

When he chose to sleep through the night while his wife was being treated brutally, he showed cowardness.

When, after her death, he cut her up and played the victim to the whole nation he showed cowardness.

When we fail to stand up for what is right, we often think we are avoiding consequences, but the opposite is true.

When we fail to stand up for truth and the gospel:

- We suffer in our own growth
- We rob others of discipleship opportunities

- We rob others of justice
- We keep the oppressed, oppressed.

Is standing up for the gospel, for what is right scary? Absolutely.

Right now, we have a Supreme Court deciding on the constitutionality of the life of the unborn and in response the conservatives on the court are having their home attacked and mobbed.

Can standing up and having courage be costly? Absolutely, but cowardice is much more costly than courage.

What about you? Is there an area in your life where God is calling you to stand up and say or do the right thing?

Maybe that looks like serving in a ministry; maybe it looks like gracefully calling out a wrong in a fellow disciple; maybe that looks like admitting and repenting of sin in your own life.

If we lose something because of godly courage we are rewarded treasures in heaven. If we lose something because of cowardice, we gain nothing.

c. We All Lose When We Do Right in Our Own Eyes (20-21)

The third warning we see is that we all lose when we do what is right in our own eyes.

In the middle of Chapter 21 in verse 15 we read,

“¹⁵ And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.”

After the Levite cuts up his wife and sends her body across the nation all sanity leaves the nation.

The nation rises up to fight against the town that did the atrocious deed and then fight the city that didn't give the town up.

In this battle, tens of thousands on both sides are killed.

Then they commit genocide against another city to steal their wives.

Then they go and straight up kidnap some other women and tell the families to “deal with it.”

When we do right in our own eyes, we all lose.

There has never, never been an episode in my life when I allowed anger, fear, grief, pride, lust, or greed to drive my decision and have been proud of the decision made.

Every single time I have allowed the flesh to dictate my decision I have been humiliated and ashamed; I have had to be under the discipline of the Lord.

When we choose our own righteousness; when we allow the lust of the flesh, or the pleasure of the moment dictate our life we all suffer.

And while we may suffer immediate negative effects, the true suffering is the loss of fellowship and intimacy with the Lord.

You may be here and are under the consequences of selfishness and sin.

Can I ask you to turn to Jesus this morning? Lay down your pride and experience the redemption of Jesus.

IV. THE REMEDY IS JESUS

At the end of the Book of Judges we are reminded in **21:25**,

“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

When we all do what is right in our own eyes, we turn into our own idols and seek to satisfy the fullness of our own desires.

The problem with Israel was not that they did not have a king, but that they did not recognize the king they had...the Lord.

The problem with many of our lives; the corruption, the mistakes, the selfishness, the anger, the sin, and the fear is not that we don't have a way out, it is that we don't recognize our only way forward is Jesus.

Jesus is the remedy to living right in our own eyes.

Jesus is the remedy for the consequences of sin.

Jesus is the remedy for your life.

In **John 10:10**, Jesus shows us the contrast between following this world and following him,

“¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

If you live according to the rules of this world; if you order your life according to the standards of this age, you will be destroyed. There is no way around it.

But, if you come to Jesus, you can not only have life, but an abundant life.

This abundant life means a life overflowing with salvation, joy, and glory.

For all those who come to Christ are promised an eternal life of joy and peace.

Jesus lets us know this truth in **John 11:25**, when he says,

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,”

When we come to Christ, we come to the one who has conquered this life and more importantly, the one who has conquered death.

By conquering death, we know Jesus has conquered our sin. As Jesus conquers your sin, the sin that once so easily entangled you, it no longer has control over your life.

In Christ, sin no longer has control and if it no longer controls your life, it no longer controls your destiny.

What is the remedy for your sin? What is the remedy for the consequences of your sin?

Jesus is the remedy.

Rom. 10:9, tells us,

“9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”

Can I ask you today to place your heart in the hands of Jesus?

In Christ, sin has no power. In Christ, temptation can be defeated. In Christ, hurt can be healed. In Christ, death is turned to life.

What is the remedy for self-idolatry and its consequences? Jesus.

V. CONCLUSION

We have spent several weeks going through the Book of Judges. In this book we have seen two things highlighted.

- Sin knows no bounds. Left to ourselves, by our rule, and by our standards we will continually run from God and chase sin and chaos.
- God’s grace is more powerful than our worst sin.

Maybe you are here this morning and are experiencing the effects of unrepentant sin in your life.

You recognize the harm sin is having in your life. You are ready to turn to the abundant life of Christ.

You may be turning to Christ for the first time, or you may be turning to him for the 10,000 time.

Jesus never tires from pouring out his grace for you.

Don’t allow the fact that you have once again fallen in sin to keep you from encountering the grace of God.

In just a moment I am going to pray and then we are going to sing.

If you simply want or need to fall into the arms of Jesus once more, please, don’t allow his grace to pass you by.