

The Lord Who Guides

Judges 3

Notes

BIG IDEA

The consequences of unrepentant sin are severe, but God is quick to rescue those who turn to him

Thompson Creek is a tributary of the Mississippi River that runs through West Feliciana and East Feliciana Parishes in Louisiana. The creek is actually much larger than a normal creek. You must swim across it on a normal day. When the River floods the creek rises and turns into a river itself.

One summer during my teenage years my brother and I and two friends went cat fishing on Thompson Creek while the river was flooded. There was a type of cove in this one spot by a bridge that made the high-water swirl and was a great spot to fish.

We fished for a while. I got bored so I decided to swim in this spot I deemed relatively safe. I swam for about 20 minutes or so and got tired from struggling against the current.

I got out of the water and about 20 minutes later our group decided to try to swim across the swollen creek to get to a better fishing spot.

I went first. I grabbed my brand-new Abu Garcia combo rod and reel and dove in the water. About half-way across the water, I realized my body was so worn out from the previous swim I was not going to make it across. I had gotten myself into a no-win situation. I didn't have enough strength to go forward or backward. I could let go of my rod and reel and swim as hard as I could and make it, but I just bought that rod and reel. I wasn't going to lose it.

As I went under the water, I was quickly taken down stream and was bouncing off the bottom. I knew I would drown but I would drown with my rod and reel. Then I thought of my momma. She would be really mad when she got to heaven and found out I drowned over a rod and reel.

So, I let go of the rod and reel and fought my way back to the top and with all my strength I made it to the opposite side of the river. My body was so tired I cramped up in a fetal position.

After I came to, my brother wanted to swim over to me. I knew how bad the current was and he was a chubby fellow, so I knew he couldn't make it. I knew what that water almost cost me, and I didn't want him to take the chance to get hurt.

From the other bank I yelled, screamed, and cussed at him to keep him on that side of the water. I would have swum back across that river to keep him from the water.

You see, there are several parts of this story that you go, "You idiot!"

There were several warning signs to not do what I did.

But by God's grace he saved me from drowning and then when I was able to make it to safety, I did everything in my power to keep my brother from suffering the same as I suffered.

As we continue our series in Judges, today we will see a Lord who guides his people even in their sin.

We will see a God who takes sin seriously, a God who allows his people to have the consequences of their sin, but we will also see a God who is gracious and merciful, who sends a rescuer, a redeemer for his people.

What about you? Is there unrepentant active sin in your life? Are you experiencing the consequences of sin right now?

You may be here this morning and you feel far from God this morning. You recognize your sin is more active in your life than you want to admit.

My prayer for us this morning, and for this series, is that we see the real horrors of sin and the danger sin possess to our lives.

I desire us to learn to continually, and with brutal honesty evaluate our lives against Scripture, so we daily go before the Lord and allow his grace to wash us and renew us with a fresh intimacy.

I. UNREPENTANT SIN LEADS TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES (1-6; 12)

Often, we willingly sin, violating the sovereign law of God, knowing full well our sin, but we do not intend the consequences of our sin.

Located in the vast expanse of almost an entirely empty ocean between Australia and Antarctica, Macquarie Island is so remote that nobody knew of its existence until 1810. Its most notable inhabitants at the time were several species of rare birds and a huge population of fur seals.

The island's wild beauty didn't have universal appeal, and one early visitor described it as being: "the most wretched place that can be conceived." Nonetheless, the presence of so many seals soon attracted hunters. The hunters' ships brought unwanted stowaways in the form of rats, so it seemed like a good idea to introduce cats to keep their numbers in check.

Rabbits were added to provide a readily available source of food for any shipwrecked sailors who might find themselves stranded on the island.

All three invaders were soon wreaking havoc on the island's delicate ecosystem, but it seemed to be the cats that were causing the most destruction. The feral felines ate their way through the island's birds with such remorseless efficiency that conservationists set out to eradicate them.

By the year 2000, Macquarie Island was judged to be entirely cat free, but its problems were not over. With their only predator gone, the island's rabbits were free to do what they do best: breed and eat. Within a matter of years, they'd consumed 40% of the island's vegetation. The impact has been described as an ecological meltdown, and the subsequent campaign to repair the damage and eradicate the island's rabbits, which is only now nearing completion, has already cost millions of dollars.

Often, good ideas at the time, end up costing us more than we wanted and have an impact that spreads farther than we desire.

You see, the people of Israel, who God had delivered from Egypt, who he had provided for 40 years in the wilderness, who had seen his initial faithfulness and power, once they got into the Promised Land, they began to leave the Lord.

But their leaving left them with unintended consequences. We see this in Judges 3:1-6 and verse 12.

¹Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; ²only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly). ³These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. ⁴They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. ⁵The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; ⁶and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

¹²Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord.

We see an interesting line in verse 1. God left nations in the land to test Israel and to teach them to fight.

How does this square with the fact that we say that Israel sinned and lacked faith by not eradicating the pagan nations as God instructed them to do?

What we see here is that God left the nations, meaning he did not use supernatural means to remove them, because of the lack of obedience by the Israelites.

God could have wiped them out and made the land theirs, but because of their lack of faith he did not.

We see this example in the New Testament as the people complained of the disciples' inability to remove a demon. Jesus tells them in Mt. 17:20 that it was due to their lack of faith, not the power in them.

Because of the Israelite's sin to remove the people they ended up with unintended consequences of greater sin.

Because they failed to remove the people look what happened.

They dwelt among them

They failed to drive them out and they then became comfortable with the culture of sin.

What once bothered them no longer bothered them. Sin went from being intolerable to tolerable, to enjoyable.

They married them

Sin became so tolerable they decided to marry the pagan people of the land.

Instead of driving them out and getting rid of the unbelieving people they went so far as to marry them.

And you know what happens when you marry someone.

They served their gods

When you marry someone, you begin to take on their culture, habits, and practices.

Well, Israel had no problem not obeying God by driving the people out, so it should not surprise us to hear they eventually forgot about God and ended up serving the pagan false God's of the people.

What about us this morning? Have we allowed what once was intolerable to become more than just comfortable? Have we taken on the false idols of this world?

The worship of an idol means we are worshipping something created and not the creator.

What are some of the false idols in our lives?

Money and Material Possessions

“Materialism with its pursuits of possessions and financial independence and security are probably the biggest obstacles to spiritual development” (K. Younger Jr., *The NIV Application Commentary, Judges*, 128).

We strive to be more comfortable, more secure, happier. When we live for our own pleasure we actually end up becoming our own deity.

Religious Pluralism

To not make anyone mad, we move away from proclaiming Jesus as the only way to the Father and we give each religion equal footing.

But in doing so, we actually void the claims of all religions, especially the exclusive claims of Christianity.

The attempt of the growing left wing of the Christian faith to shy away from talk of sin and absolute truth has robbed the gospel of its power and led a large group of people to worship self and think they are serving God.

The Idol of Self

Our narcissistic society constantly promotes self above all else. If you are not living “your truth” and being “true to yourself” then you are living in sin in today’s culture.

But idol worship, no matter the idol, is still idol worship. There has never been an idol that could actually provide what was desired.

We can never truly bring joy to ourselves.

We cannot rid ourselves of sin or the consequences of sin.

We see from the opening lines of Chapter 3 of Judges the very real danger of sin and of allowing ourselves to be even a little comfortable with sin in our lives.

What about you this morning? Are you more comfortable with sin than you should be? Are you tolerating sin just to avoid upsetting friends, family, or others? It won’t be long before what you tolerate you accept and celebrate?

Maybe you are here, and you recognize sin has taken you for a longer ride than you desired?

But, if we belong to God, he will do whatever it takes to bring us back to himself.

II. GOD WILL USE MANY MEANS TO BRING HIS PEOPLE BACK TO HIM (7-8, 12-14)

We will look at both episodes in this chapter in which God used unusual means to get his people’s attention.

⁷ The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. ⁸ Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

¹² Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. ¹³ And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees. ¹⁴ The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

We see in verses 7-8 that the sin of the people became so wicked, they were not turning to God and recognizing their sin God used a sinful King to take them captive for eight years.

Notice the words the author uses, “they forgot their God and served the Baals, and the Asheroth.” These false pagan gods were invented and offered no power, yet Israel willingly gave up the one true God for gods who could not offer anything.

Again, we see in verses 12-14, Israel did evil in the sight of God. This is not an act of evil, but a continual lifestyle of evil.

In response to their continual abandoning of him, God actually strengthened a pagan King to come defeat Israel and ruled them for 18 years.

Sadly, this cycle of Israel sinning and God using a pagan nation to discipline them is continual throughout the Old Testament.

God will use whatever means necessary to bring you to a point of repentance and back to himself.

We see this in the New Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 5 a man is willingly proudly sinning, so Paul makes this pronouncement to the church.

1 Cor. 5:5, *"⁵ I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."*

Again in 1 Timothy we see Paul saying he is handing over two, once faithful followers of Jesus to Satan.

1 Tim. 1:20, *²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme."*

Is Paul saying their salvation is not secure. Not necessarily. What Paul is hoping will happen to these professed believers is what happened to Israel.

They will have the full result and consequences of their sin and they will see how horrible sin is, and how unfulfilled they are with it, repent and return to God.

You may be here this morning and you know full well what I am talking about. You are experiencing the full weight of a sinful decision or a sinful lifestyle.

How long will you toil in sin before you repent and turn to God?

"Repentance is always difficult, and the difficulty grows greater with delay."

"Lack of repentance is the root cause of powerlessness in the church, in this materialistic, self-indulgent age. There can be no spiritual power in a non-repentant church." --Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Even as believers, we must constantly be aware of our own sin and our need for grace and mercy from the Lord.

Don't allow the temporary joy of sin to cause lasting and harmful unintended consequences.

Even in Israel's sin, God raised up deliverers for them.

III. GOD WILL RAISE UP A DELIVERER TO DECLARE HIS GLORY (9-11, 15,20-21,30)

Due to time I want to skip the first and most ideal judge in the book, Othniel and go to verse 15 and look at Ehud.

⁹ When the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. ¹⁰ The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the Lord gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. ¹¹ Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

Verse 15 follows the conquering of the Moabite King, Eglon.

15 But when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. 16 Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak. 17 He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. 18 It came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. 19 But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he said, "Keep silence." And all who attended him left him. 20 Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." And he arose from his seat. 21 Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly. 22 The handle 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 refuse came out. 23 Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them.

SKIP TO VERSE 26

26 Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. 27 It came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was in front of them. 28 He said to them, "Pursue them, for the Lord has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands." So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross. 29 They struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped.

When the people of God were so tired of their oppressive life because of sin what did they do? They cried out to God.

What was God's response? He raised up a rescuer from them.

There are two aspects of the rescue I want to highlight. One, a divine rescuer and the other a human rescuer.

First, the divine rescuer. We know, it was not Ehud who was the rescuer, but it was God who empowered and strengthened Ehud and sent him to the King to deliver his people.

Paul discusses this rescue in Gal. 5:1.

Gal. 5:1, *"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."*

God and God alone is our rescuer from sin.

The second aspect of the rescuer is the human aspect.

God used a man to act as his rescuer.

This man, Ehud was left-handed and in his society that was seen as a weakness.

Ehud did not allow his weakness to keep him from serving God.

Ehud also displayed bravery and courage in the face of danger.

In order to face the evil in this world, the people of God will have to rely on God, trust in his promises, and courageously stand up and proclaim the gospel.

Our mission is one of reconciliation. We are not the rescuer, but we are called to bring as many people as we can to the one who rescues-Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 5:18-20, ¹⁸ Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

You may think God cannot use you because you are young or old; because you work 80 hours a week; because you are a stay-at-home mom; because your past is shady; or because of a million other reasons we come up with to not be good enough to be used by God.

I promise you, if God can use someone as wicked and sinful as me, he can use anyone.

The reality is that none of us are good enough. We are all sinners before a holy God.

And that is why we cry out and run to our rescuer-Jesus.

Doug Tegner tells the story of attending a one-day leadership retreat called to deal with his church's current crisis. Redwood Chapel was founded in 1962 and has since hosted the Bay Area Sunday School convention (BASS), had strong music programs, planted vibrant churches in other communities, had dynamic youth ministries, a strong missions program, and an exemplary educational program for more than 50 years. They were the second church in the nation to have its own cable TV station and broadcast services. But after experiencing two difficult pastorates, the church was reeling from the loss of nearly half of their church family, losing more than 500 people between 2000 and 2006. Their ministry had been significantly diminished.

They spent the morning recounting the significant events in the church's history. But they also listed many downers and hurtful situations: occasional moral failures among church leadership, decades-old conflicts that continued to fester, messy tensions between elders and staff. What they saw were recurring negative patterns which had become obvious and systemic. And most importantly that day, they called them what they were: sin.

By the end of the leadership retreat, they named four sins that had ebbed and flowed through the church over the decades: (1) Arrogance, boastfulness, and pride, (2) Avoiding

difficult issues; (3) Gossip, and (4) Gracelessness. The report was brought to the congregation by the consultants and then given the next steps to be taken in healing and rebuilding the church, including a Solemn Assembly for congregational confession, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, and open conversation. At that service they named their sins. It was only then that the church could move forward.

And then he writes, "As a congregation, we are still repenting.... At times we have to confront such (sinful) behavior, much of which has persisted for years without being addressed honestly and directly..... We are learning to live humbly, truthfully, and graciously with each other. But repentance is not a one-time event; it needs continual attention."

Those who fail to regularly repent, fail to see their sin, and those who fail to see their sin continue not only in sin, but advance to a greater distance away from intimacy with Christ.

Today we have looked at some of the consequences of continual unrepentant sin.

We have discovered how unrepentant sin leads to unintended consequences.

We have also learned that God can and does use many means to bring us to repentance and back to himself.

Finally, we have seen Christ presented as our chief deliverer. And we as his disciples are to continually come to him and we are also given the privilege to bring others to him so they may be delivered from sin.

You may be here this morning and you know God is talking to you. You are living in unrepentant sin in your life right now. God is calling you to cast that aside and turn to Christ.

You may be here this morning and recognize that you have never had a relationship with Jesus. I want to invite you to place your trust in Christ this morning for the forgiveness of your sins and experience the blessed peace of knowing God.

Maybe you are here, and you are not living in unrepentant sin, but you recognize that you have not been doing a good job of bringing others to the Redeemer.

Whatever your status today, the message is clear: Come to Jesus, our Redeemer.