

Judges: Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons  
*God's Way vs Man's Way*

David Pawlison, writing in an article he calls "Two Ways Of Doing Life," contrasts Psalm 23 where the Psalmist starts off *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want* with what he calls the anti-psalm.

And here it is:

I'm on my own.  
No one looks out for me or protects me.  
I experience a continual sense of need. Nothing's quite right.  
I'm always restless. I'm easily frustrated and often disappointed.  
It's a jungle — I feel overwhelmed. It's a desert — I'm thirsty.  
My soul feels broken, twisted, and stuck. I can't fix myself.  
I stumble down some dark paths.  
Still, I insist: I want to do what I want, when I want, how I want.  
But life's confusing. Why don't things ever really work out?  
I'm haunted by emptiness and futility — shadows of death.  
I fear the big hurt and final loss.  
Death is waiting for me at the end of every road,  
but I'd rather not think about that.  
I spend my life protecting myself. Bad things can happen.  
I find no lasting comfort.  
I'm alone ... facing everything that could hurt me.  
Are my friends really friends?  
Other people use me for their own ends.  
I can't really trust anyone. No one has my back.  
No one is really for me — except me.  
And I'm so much all about ME, sometimes it's sickening.  
I belong to no one except myself.  
My cup is never quite full enough. I'm left empty.  
Disappointment follows me all the days of my life.  
Will I just be obliterated into nothingness?  
Will I be alone forever, homeless, free-falling into void?  
Sartre said, "Hell is other people."

I have to add, "Hell is also myself."  
It's a living death, and then I die.

The antipsalm tells what life ends up feeling like and looking like when God vanishes from sight.

And when you're caught up in the antipsalm, it doesn't help when you're labeled a "disorder," a "syndrome" or a "case." The problem is much more serious than that: The disorder is "my life." The syndrome is "I'm on my own." The case is "Who am I and what am I living for?" when too clearly I am the center of my story.

But the antipsalm doesn't need to tell the final story. Listen to the real Psalm.

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23)*

The reality is God's way is a way of strength and peace. Our way ultimately leads to despair and hopelessness.

We're in a study of the ultimate "God's way vs man's way" book, The Old Testament book of Judges.

Judges chronicals about 3 centuries in the history of Israel. These were God's chosen people. God had chosen them to be a blessing to the world and to be the people who He would use to bring Jesus into the world. They are the centerpiece in His redemption plan.

Unfortunately, Israel was a whole lot like we are. They were easily distracted from God's way of living. See, just like us, they were surrounded by a confused and often anti-God culture. Time after time over those 300 years, God's people allowed themselves to be diverted into sinful, destructive lifestyles.

Each time God would allow the people of the surrounding culture to gain the upper

hand and eventually dominate God's people. When they would finally get tired of living empty, rebellious lives they'd cry out to God and He'd send them a deliverer, called a judge.

The judge we looked at last week was a man named Gideon. Gideon was a nobody in Israel but he was willing to do things God's way and so God used him to drive out the Midianite invaders.

I'd like to begin this morning with the last part of Judges chapter 8.

### **Open to Judges 8, page 225**

Things start off sounding good. **Read verses 22 & 23**

Gideon's seen what happens when you let God take charge and he's not about to step in. If the chapter ended there everything would be fine, but it closes with two major mistakes.

First, Gideon asks for a gold earring from everybody plus the golds chains they collected from the Midianites. He collected well over 40 pounds and here's what he did with that gold: **Read verse 27**

An ephod was either a vest or a type of idol. Here it would seem to me to be an idol. Judges 18:14 says *Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do."*

Whatever it was, it tripped up the people and it even became a snare to Gideon and his family.

Just to show how strong the pull of the culture around us can be, Gideon seems to have returned, in part, to the syncretistic society God had called him out of.

It is so hard, when you're constantly being bombarded with false messages not to slip somewhere.

So Gideon made some sort of idol. But he did something else dangerous too. **Read verses 30 & 31**

Here's a judge in Israel, a man that God used in a dramatic way to deliver the nation from it's enemies, a man who said "the Lord shall rule over you," completely ignoring

Genesis 2 and God's proclamation that marriage was between one woman and one man.

Then the icing on the cake was he even had a concubine. She gave birth to a son named Abimelech. Abimelech is going to cause a whole lot of trouble for Israel.

The Bible says, *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.* (Proverbs 14:12) this is why we have to have God's truth to guide us.

Hold your place in Judges and turn to the New Testament book of James, chapter 3.  
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### **Read verses 14-17**

There's 2 types of wisdom here. One is from self and one is from God. One boasts against the truth. That's man's wisdom. We know best. We don't need to listen to what God says.

The other is bathed in truth. It's the truth that's the basis for it because it's God's wisdom.

Gideon operated in both realms. We try to do the same thing but Gideon's story should be a powerful lesson to us. We should learn from his successes and failures so we don't have to make the same mistakes.

### **Back to Judges**

Guy Caley writes, "As we look at the story of Abimelech it reads like a screenplay written to demonstrate the pitfalls of human wisdom. To fully appreciate the wisdom God means for us to glean from this passage the question we must ask ourselves is what's wrong with doing what seems right in our own eyes?"

In chapter 9 we want to look at Abimelech, the son of Gideon's concubine, and see four things we give up by doing what seems right in our own eyes, instead of doing life God's way.

#### *1. When We Do Life Our Way We Sacrifice Truth*

### **Read verses 1-6**

A concubine was kind of a "secondary" wife. She didn't even necessarily live in the man's home. In Gideon's case his concubine lived in Shechem. Because of that

Abimelech was probably snubbed by his brothers but he was accepted by his mother's family who lived in Shechem.

Abimelech had aspirations for himself. His father might not have wanted to rule but he sure did. Abimelech wasn't about to say, "the Lord shall rule over you."

So the men of Shechem gave Abimelech some money. And look where they got it. From the temple of Baal Berith. That's not Bini Birth, the Jewish organization. That means "The sons of the covenant," referring to God's covenant with Israel.

This is Baal-Berith, it means Baal of the covenant. This form of Baal was a popular god and was worshipped in Canaan, Philistia, and Shechem. He was the protector of the covenant between between Shechem and some neighboring Canaanite towns.

So, funded by money devoted to a pagan god, this son of Gideon, deliverer of Israel, hires some of the areas' finest and slaughters his brothers.

When we choose our way over God's way truth gets sacrificed on the altar of expediency. The truth was the 70 sons of Gideon had the same rights as Abimelech. They certainly didn't deserve to be brutally murdered. The truth was Abimelech was no one to look up to.

But what happens to truth when we put God on the shelf? It gets lost in the shuffle.

We say, "Oh it's alright that I'm cutting corners at work. Nobody else puts in a full 8 hours. It's OK for me to cheat a little on my income tax. Hey, everybody does it. Why not look at a little porn? What could it hurt?"

During the Monica Lewinsky scandal I couldn't believe some of the comments I heard on radio call in shows. People were saying, "What's the big deal for Bill Clinton. Everybody cheats on the wife some time or another."

No they don't. And even if they all did, it would still be a big deal because the marriage vows are sacred. Because God says, *You shall not commit adultery.* (Deuteronomy 5:18)

Stealing is wrong. Cheating is wrong. Lying is wrong. Adultery is wrong. That's the truth. And if we're committed to doing life God's way we're going to recognize the truth and understand wrong and right.

When Abimelech slaughtered the sons of Gideon he missed one. Jotham, the youngest son, hid.

But later Jotham has a chance to speak to the men of Shechem. Look what he says:  
**Read verses 16-20**

Here's Jotham putting out a challenge to the Schechemites' justification of all the bloodshed.

"If you've acted honorably according to truth, may you be blessed. But if you haven't, may the one your empowering turn on you and crush you."

The truth is, without a God-centered standard for right and wrong there can be no such thing as truth. In the absence of an absolute plumb line, the sole basis for deciding right and wrong becomes the desire of the individual. And because my desire and your desire will eventually come into conflict there is no overriding truth. Truth becomes a victim when we choose our way over God's way.

*I. When We Do Life Our Way We Sacrifice Truth*

*II. When We Do Life Our Way We Sacrifice Unity*

**Read verse 22-23**

The unholy alliance between Abimelech and the Shechemites has predictably begun to unravel.

Remember, with human wisdom there is no standard of right behavior, therefore my wisdom and yours will come into conflict at some point. Without God's standard of truth what binds men and women together in purpose is only a passing common goal--a desire to use another people for one's own goals.

When we rely upon human wisdom there is no unifying standard, no common goal based on common good because we can never agree upon what's good. What makes me happy eventually will make you unhappy.

God has been very gracious to this church. Not that everybody is always happy about everything, but overall we understand the priority of introducing people to Jesus Christ and equipping them to be His devoted followers.

There's unity in this body because we have a priority of following God. It's just like a marriage. When a husband and wife are serious about letting God's truth guide them then they might not always agree on everything but they work out their differences by God's grace.

When 2 people have an agenda of honoring God they work through the hard times. It's the same for a church.

But in the end, human wisdom can't unify because it prioritizes self. As long as I'm putting me first there's going to be friction with others.

*I. When We Do Life Our Way We Sacrifice Truth*

*II. When We Do Life Our Way We Sacrifice Unity*

*III. When We Do Life Our Way We Sacrifice Satisfaction*

### **Read verses 26-28**

The Shechemites got the king they thought they wanted, a ruler that was at least half their ethnicity. Abimelech was half Israelite and half Shechemite. But when we do life our way we're never satisfied. There's always something more we think we need to really make us feel happy and fulfilled.

So along comes this guy Gaal. Gaal was a full blooded Shechemite.

That's important because of the history of Shechem. Shechem took it's name from a man who centuries before had raped the daughter of Jacob. Jacob was one of the forefathers of Israel.

In response to the rape the sons of Jacob slaughtered Shechem, Hamor his father, and all the men of the town. Gaal comes along now and says, "Shouldn't Shechem be ruled by a full blooded Shechemite and not a half breed Jew? Shouldn't Shechem be led by a descendant of Hamor and not a descendant of Jacob?"

They got a half brother but after 3 years that wasn't enough. And if they had gotten Gaal that wouldn't have been enough either because ultimately what seems right in our own eyes always fails to satisfy.

When we talk about addictions we talk about the "law of diminishing returns." The same amount of the drug produces less and less effect so the addict has to take more and more to get high.

There's more than a physical reason why that happens. There's a spiritual cause. When we seek to please our sinful nature we are unsatisfied because God didn't create us for that. God created us to worship Him not ourselves. God created us to please Him, not ourselves.

When we live for ourselves we're always looking for that elusive sense of fulfillment. It's elusive because God created us to be filled with Him and not ourselves. When we're filled with ourselves we're settling for something which will never satisfy. We'll always have that empty place and we'll always be trying to fill it with something.

- I. When We Do Life Our Way, We Sacrifice Truth*
- II. When We Do Life Our Way, We Sacrifice Unity*
- III. When We Do Life Our Way, We Sacrifice Satisfaction*
- IV. When We Do Life Our Way, We Sacrifice Divine Security*

### **Read verses 46-49**

Wow. Abimelech was so self focused that he was willing to murder anybody that he thought stood in his way of getting what he wanted.

The Schechemites had had association with God's people for centuries. Now they were living in a land surrounded by Jews. Unfortunately the example they saw from Jacob's sons to to the Jews of Judges 9 was pretty bad.

God's people should have been blessing the world, instead they were blinding the world to the character of God and so the Schechemites did life their way. They rejected Jehovah God. They worshipped Baal. And in the end they suffered. They couldn't turn to God for security because they didn't know God.

If we are a believer and we elevate our priorities over God's priorities we're going to impact people for the worse.

Abimelech's like the ultimate in self absorption.

Most of us aren't quite so blatant in our self interest. We don't purposely want to hurt people and yet when it's our way instead of God's way someone inevitably gets hurt.

Back in the late 60's when our country was going through some of it's most tumultuous times the mantra was, "Do what you want, just don't hurt anybody."

A lot of people tried that. It sounded so freeing. I tried to live that way. I even convinced myself that I wasn't effecting anyone else. That worked for a while.

But eventually I came to the point where I had to take an honest look around and it was like I was traveling through the water and leaving a wake behind me and in that

wake was family, friend, and the people who loved me most. I hurt them all.

When we choose our way instead of God's way God calls that sin.

The human race is very creative. To quote from the Self-Confrontation book, "Man, in his own wisdom, has developed a vast number of philosophies and theories seeking to explain one's thoughts, words, and actions. In doing so, man has pridefully sought to deny his own sinfulness and has confused any clear definition of God's standards of right and wrong."

When Christianity started to spread in the first century, the Roman Empire was polytheistic. The Romans believed in many gods. It was also relativistic. The average Roman didn't believe in absolute truth.

Then Christianity exploded on the landscape and literally transformed society. Polytheism and relativism, which are eastern in origin, were replaced by monotheism and a belief in absolute truth.

All of western society (including the USA) was based on a biblical worldview. Our laws and our system of government was based on a basic biblical worldview.

But just like Israel became enamored by the culture around them and forgot God and His truth, we're headed down the same path. As a nation we're buying into eastern thought more and more.

Last August Newsweek had an article titled, "We're All Hindus Now." It said, "America is not a Christian nation. We are, it is true, a nation founded by Christians but recent poll data show that conceptually, at least, we are slowly becoming more like Hindus and less like traditional Christians in the ways we think about God, our selves, each other, and eternity."

"According to a 2008 poll 24 percent of Americans say they believe in reincarnation, 65 percent believe that 'many religions can lead to eternal life.' Thirty percent of Americans now call themselves 'spiritual, but not religious.' Stephen Prothero, religion professor at Boston University, has long framed the American propensity for "the divine-deli-cafeteria religion" as "very much in the spirit of Hinduism. You're not picking and choosing from different religions, because they're all the same," he says. "It isn't about orthodoxy. It's about whatever works. If going to yoga works, great—and if going to Catholic mass works, great. And if going to Catholic mass plus the yoga plus the Buddhist retreat works, that's great, too."

I'd add to that that few people believe in absolute truth. Most people would say things

like, “That’s true for you, but not for me. You have no right to force your morality on others. We can never say one culture’s values are right and another’s are wrong.”

I had someone that I care about very much listen to one of my sermons online. It was one that really focused on the Bible’s clear declaration that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. If there was another way then Christ suffered and died for nothing.

The person listened and wrote back. Here’s what they said, “I believe that Jesus was the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again but I can’t say that He’s the only way to heaven.”

That’s the hardest thing for us living in a culture that’s so immersed in eastern philosophy. We can’t bring ourselves to examine the evidence and then say there’s a right way and a wrong way.

Christianity pushed eastern ideas out of the west and today eastern philosophy is pushing Christianity out of the west.

It’s so appealing, even Christians buy into it. I’m finding more and more professing believers who say that if a person is sincere in their non-Christian faith they’ll go to heaven. I’m having them tell me why it’s OK to live with their boyfriend or girlfriend. Recently I had someone who’s living in an openly gay relationship tell me they’re looking for a church that teaches from the Bible where their lifestyle can be totally accepted and even appreciated.

God’s way is clearly laid out for us in the Bible. Man’s way stands in stark opposition to God’s unchanging, sufficient, complete, undeniable truth.

What’s happening to us today? As a country we’re forfeiting God’s protection and security. We’re just like the Jews in the time of Judges. We get pulled away from God and God allows the very things we’re attracted to to take over and dominate us.

How about Abimelech? He chose to walk his way instead of God’s way. How did he make out?

### **Read 50-53**

He was so hard headed God had to drop a rock on his head to stop him.

When we prioritize God’s truth and allow Him to guide us through His word several things happen. We become grounded in His truth and have confidence to know right

from wrong. We are drawn together with others rather than descending deeper and deeper into selfishness. We experience true satisfaction that doesn't fade out when we don't get what we think we want. And last, we are enveloped in a sense of security because God is our rock in this life and the life to come.

Who has the place of preeminence in your life today, God or self?

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