

Judges: Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons
Doing Life Our Way

I had a special request for the praise team this morning. We do our services thematically. That means that the music, any media, and the message all are planned us with the same theme in mind.

I've asked the praise team to pick something that will really get our hearts moving in the direction of worship this morning.

(Every instrument plays a different song.)

Whoops. I forgot something. I asked the whole team to play a song but I didn't tell them it had to be the same one!

Music shows us pretty quickly how important it is to have a standard. In fact, music is all about set guidelines.

When you look on the screen, you see the same words as everybody else. When the musicians play they see the same notes.

Every song has a key signature. Unless everyone's in the same key, it won't sound right. You've heard musicians tuning before they play. That's because there's a standard. When every instrument is tuned to a standard, they can sound like they go together, but if they're out of tune, it can sound horrible.

And it just keeps going. Unless everyone is playing the same speed, it won't be unified and it won't end together. It's all about standards, in the interest of making music. Take away any of these standards and you get chaos instead of harmony.

Imagine a world that denies benchmarks; a world where there are no absolutes; where everyone makes up their own rules and where no one accepts something to be true unless they decide it's true on their own.

Imagine a world where people believe there's actually no such thing as objective truth. Imagine a world where no one is really in charge – where everyone just does as he sees fit – what's right in his own eyes.

Listen to this: *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his*

*own eyes.*Judges 17:6

That's the culture we're reading about in the Old Testament book of Judges. That's the description of people who were supposed to be representing Almighty God to the world.

For a number of weeks now we've been on a journey through the book of Judges and we've been looking at the lives of people who would flip back and forth between living for God and living for themselves.

Now imagine a world where people think it's all about them, where the only actions that can be called wrong are the ones agreed upon by the majority, and where the concept of absolute truth is mocked as something out of the Dark Ages.

In fact, not only do people think truth is what ever you want it to be but people can hold two contradictory ideas as true at the same time and call them both true.. That's our culture today.

The question is, can we go back in history and actually learn principles that will give us our bearings in a confused and sinful world where nothing's held as shameful or wrong anymore?

Here's where we always have to begin. If the Bible really comes from the hand of God, if it's truly a divine document, then there is a place to go so that we'll all be on the same page. There is a place to go where we can see clear definitions of right and wrong. Then there will be harmony in our lives and not chaos.

Turn in Bible to Judges 17, page 234

I. Something Doesn't Become Godly Just Because You Put God's Name On It

Read 17:1-2

Here's what's going on. A guy named Micah, who's name ironically means "who is like Jehovah?" steals a considerably amount of silver from his own mother. Mom pronounces a curse on whoever stole her money.

Curses and blessings were big things to these ancient Israelites, especially when they were far from God. I'm assuming Micah was guilty and a bit fearful of what would happen to him so he confesses to mom.

Now she's the fearful one because she's pronounced a curse on her own son.

What's she going to do? Step one, she pronounces a blessing for her son. "*May you be blessed by the LORD, my son!*"

As we've mentioned any number of times as we're studying Old Testament passages, when you see the word LORD or GOD in all caps, it's a translation of the Hebrew name "Jehovah."

If it's God or god it's a translation of the Hebrew *elohim*. If it's Lord or lord it's a translation of the Hebrew *adoni*.

Elohim and *adoni* can refer to God the Creator, or they can refer to false gods, kings and rulers, or even husbands.

In the book of Judges LORD, or "Jehovah" is used 139 times. This whole ongoing cycle of defection and restoration takes place in the context of God's people using God's name.

Micah's mother used God's name but she either didn't really know who He was or was willfully ignorant.

Read 17:3-5

The very beginning of the Jewish people started with a repudiation of idolatry by God. God chose Abram out of pagan idolatry and blessed his descendants and revealed Himself to them as the true and living God. That was around 2000 BC.

The number of Jews grew until they eventually were enslaved in Egypt. Then God used Moses to deliver them and Joshua to lead them into the promised land of Palestine.

Judges is 620 years later and the Jews are still buying into idol worship. It was like they couldn't seem to get away from it.

Now remember, idolatry is putting anything else before God. We get caught up in idolatry too. We just don't carve images and make little statues. But in this ancient culture worshipping gods was a big thing.

Micah and his mother created a shrine in their house and Micah consecrated one of his sons as a priest.

This wasn't to worship Baal, Ashera, Moloch, Dagon. *His mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image."*

But now if this wasn't bad enough Micah takes things to the next level.

Read 17:7-13

God had appointed the descendants of Levi, one of the sons of Jacob, as the caretakers for the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the place of worship for Israel before they built the temple in Jerusalem.

This guy was a Levite who seemed to be wandering around and out of work. God had appointed certain cities for the Levites instead of giving them land as an inheritance. Bethlehem wasn't one of the cities given to the Levites, probably because the people no longer supported the Tabernacle or the priesthood. Not only did he abandon his calling as a priest of Jehovah, but he became nothing more than a priest for hire.

Micah is so deluded that he actually thought he was blessed of Jehovah by having a "real" Levite serving the idols he himself had created. We can't just put the stamp of God on something and think God will bless it.

Because we call something godly doesn't mean that it is. The number of Christians is growing exponentially in South America and the African continent. In some cases it's a healthy growth but in many it isn't.

Most of the churches are independent, Charismatic groups that say that they have apostles and prophets. We're not going to take time this morning to lay out the entire theology of apostles and prophets but as I read the Bible they were foundational to the church and have long since ceased to exist because their purpose was fulfilled.

The CEV translates Ephesians 2:19-22 this way, *You Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens with everyone else who belongs to the family of God. You are like a building with the apostles and prophets as the foundation and with Christ as the most important stone. Christ is the one who holds the building together and makes it grow into a holy temple for the Lord. And you are part of that building Christ has built as a place for God's own Spirit to live.*

The Bible says that we are the church. We are the living stones that make up a holy temple. God the Holy Spirit lives in us. When we trust Christ as Savior we're part of that holy temple. God doesn't inhabit the physical temple in Jerusalem. That was torn

down 2000 years ago. He lives in us.

And this building, made up of all believers, is on a foundation. That foundation is the apostles and prophets. When you build you don't continually build one foundation on another. You lay down one foundation and then you build the building on top.

The problem today with churches that say we still have apostles and prophets is that apostles were direct representatives of God. Prophets could speak the word of God.

These new and growing congregations in South America and Africa are entities unto themselves. Their leaders make up whatever rules they want. They make whatever demands on the people they want and say it all comes directly from God.

They become cult groups with no authority except what the leadership wants.

Now just because they quote a few Bible verses doesn't mean they are in line with scripture. . Something doesn't become godly just because you put God's name on it. And that's not only true theologically, that's true morally as well. Whether it's the Metropolitan Community Church trying to theologically justify homosexual behavior or it's us trying to theologically justify our sin, the standard is the Bible.

When the standard of right and wrong, truth and error becomes us, then there is no standard. Then everyone does what it right in his own eyes. Then it isn't a sweet sound. It's chaos.

I. Something Doesn't Become Godly Just Because You Put God's Name On It

II. Once We Refuse God's Will Sin Becomes Easier And Easier

God had given Israel the land and each tribe was to get an inheritance. The Danites were being pushed by the Amorites, and later the Philistines, eastward into the territory of Benjamin and Ephraim. Because of the pressure the people of Dan decide it was time to make a move.

Read 18:2-4

The five spies go out, find out that the land is worth taking, go back and tell the rest and 600 Danites show up at Micah's house on their way to war.

Read 18:17-20

These guys say, “Hey, we can not only steal these gods and objects of worship but we can get our own holy man too.”

They make him an offer he can't refuse and notice, *the priest's heart was glad*. There's no sense of ministry for this guy. It's just his job and he just got a big promotion.

I have to wonder what might have been going through this levite's mind when Micah had originally offered him food, clothing, and cash if he'd hang o t there and be the family priest.

This was all against the Levitical system that God had set up in the first place. But if there was any hesitation or second thoughts the first time, he seemed to jump right in on the second.

He was glad. He was comfortable being supported by a family, now he could be supported by a whole bunch of families.

Did you ever notice that the more times we step over God's line, the easier it gets?

One of the words that God uses in the Bible to describe sin is “trespass.” Our word “trespass” comes from Latin and it means “to step over,” or “to step beyond.”

When you see a “No Trespassing” sign you're being warned not to step over the property line. That's what God's rules are for us. They're boundaries to keep us going into areas that are hurtful to us or others.

We all have boundaries that we set in our life. We've all been there. We think to ourselves, “I'll do this (whatever it is) but that's as far as it goes.” But what happens? We move right up to that line and after a while we get comfortable. After a while we think, “This isn't so bad. After a while we're not getting what we think we want so we move the line.

God's boundary lines can't be moved. They can be trespassed, but they can't be moved. They don't change over time. They don't bend with the culture.

But once we step over them, the next time is a little bit easier. No one says “When I grow up I want to be a heroin addict, or a prostitute, or a porn star.” No one says, “Later on in life I'm planning to drink away every penny, or gamble away my life savings and leave my family destitute.”

Every act of rebellion against God starts with a first step. The Bible says, *Yes, if you cry*

out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 1:3-6) It says, Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.(Psalm 119:105)

It's sad but true that once we refuse to accept God's will for our lives in one area, it becomes more and more easy to reject His presence and His will in all areas. We end up looking for those who agree with us, instead of looking to God to guide us because that would mean we would have to admit we were wrong and we just don't like to do that. The results here in Judges are pretty tragic.

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III. We Cannot Create Our Own God

Read 18:27-31

This is such a tragic story. After the blood bath, Dan destroys the city of Laish and rebuilds it as Dan, setting up Micah's idol and worshipping it until they were taken away into captivity. It's probably not the Assyrian captivity in 722BC but it was some type of local invasion.

Joshua 18 explains that the tabernacle, the place of true worship, was set up in Shiloh which was north of Jerusalem. The Danites set up their own place of worship and acknowledged Micah's silver idol as divine.

The problem was, it had nothing to do with the living God of the Bible. We can create our own gods but we can't create our own God.

We're good at creating our own gods. We have no problem creating competing priorities of worship. And we usually make them out of things that aren't necessarily bad in and of themselves.

Family is good, unless we worship our kids. If we put our kids before God we lose discernment and make wrong decisions.

Money is good. It can be used for everything from providing necessities to sending the gospel out around the world. It's great unless we worship money. If we make money a god it controls us instead of us controlling it.

Having a job is good. Especially in this economy. Unless we make our job our god and show it all our allegiance.

See, we can manufacture idols and gods but we can't make God. Zora Neale Hurston wrote, "Gods always behave like the people who created them.:" Blaise Pascal wrote, "God created man in his own image...and man returned the favor."

It's so tempting for us to come up with our own idea of God as if what we think of God has anything to do with what God is really like.

There's only one way to know the Creator of the universe. It has to be by divine revelation.

The Bible says, *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.* (John 1:18)

We know God, because He's explained Himself to us through Jesus Christ. How do we know that God is holy and hates sin? We look to Jesus. How do we know that God is merciful to sinners? We look to Jesus. How do we know that God is all powerful and all wise? We look to Jesus.

Here's what the Bible tells us about God.

These are all from Deuteronomy...

4:24 *The LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

10:17 *The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome.*

4:31 *The LORD your God is a merciful God.*

Here's the Psalms...

God is: *a just judge, king of all the earth, my helper, my defense, a refuge for us, merciful, pure, very high, my salvation and my glory.*

Now think about the irony here in Judges. Here were these people who had the truth of God but they didn't like it. Here were the people that God had chosen to represent Him, but who bailed out on the privilege.

Here were people who could say "God is my salvation," but instead they said, "Some piece of silver and wood is my salvation."

What are you trading off this morning? What are you substituting for the true and living God? What's your standard? What sheet of music are you playing off of?

The people of Israel didn't want the true God. They wanted their own gods because their own gods let them do what they wanted to do.

Unfortunately, their gods couldn't do the most important thing. Here's false religion's greatest weakness. Their gods had no ability to forgive sin. Their gods might bring a temporary, feel-good, happiness, just like ours can do., but they couldn't bring remission of sin. They couldn't solve the problem of trespasses. Jehovah God had already shown His people the way.

In Genesis He promised a virgin born redeemer. *And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.* (Genesis 3:15)

Then He showed the means of salvation. *And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.* Genesis 15:6

In Exodus He explained about the death of the Passover lamb. *The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.* (Exodus 12:6,7,13)

In Leviticus God established the reason for a blood sacrifice. *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.* (Leviticus 17:11)

In Numbers the people were being bitten by poisonous snakes. God told Moses to make a snake out of brass and whoever looked would live. Jesus came in the likeness of sinners to be lifted up.

And then in Deuteronomy 6:5 we find out the greatest commandment. *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.* We have all broken the greatest commandment let alone all the others. This is why we need a redeemer.

No one could keep God's perfect standards. Not even the greatest commandment. So we need the virgin born one to crush the serpent's head. We need to have faith in the

one who was lifted up and slain like the passover lamb so we can be forgiven of our trespasses. We need to believe God so that He can account it to us as righteous.

Only Jehovah shows us the way. Only Jehovah actually is the way.